



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

Phillips Reservoir southwest of Baker City was holding about 12% of its capacity on May 15, 2022. The reservoir's capacity was at 11% on Aug. 8, 2022.

Do we have enough water in Oregon? Depends who you ask

BY MICHAEL KOHN

Oregon Capital Bureau

Ask a few Oregonians if their state has enough water to meet its needs and you may get some varying answers. The differing views on the question may be tilted based on where people live, or even their gender.

Roughly half of all Oregonians (48%) agree there is enough water in Oregon to meet current needs while 37% disagree with this and 15% are unsure, according to a survey conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a Portland-based non-profit organization.

This number has shifted over the past 12 months — a year ago 56% of Oregonians said their state had enough water to meet current needs.

The survey reveals there is a gender divide when it comes to who thinks there is enough water — 56% of female Oregonians believe we have enough water while just 42% of their male counterparts agreed with them.

Younger people tended to agree with the statement more than older people — 54% of those 18 to 29 agreed that Oregon has enough water for its needs, while just 39% of those in the 45 to 54 age category agreed.

There was also a split of opinion down party lines — just 40% of Democrats agree that there is enough water to meet the needs of the state while 62% of Republicans agreed with the statement.

Attitudes were based on where people live, too — 54% of Willamette Valley resi-

dents agree that there is sufficient water while the number was 47% in the Portland area and 46% in the rest of the state.

The online survey consisted of 1,572 Oregon residents ages 18 or over. The independent and non-partisan organization said this is a sufficient sample size to assess Oregonians' opinions, generally, and to review findings by multiple subgroups. The survey was taken July 8-16. The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 2.5%.

Survey participants were also asked their opinions about water conservation.

"I think it's time to reframe the norm, given where our water levels are and are likely to be in coming years," said Sienna Fitzpatrick, a Deschutes County resident. "We can't continue with business as usual, or our rivers won't be able to recover."

Survey results show that Oregonians are almost evenly split between those who are willing to pay more in order to support drought-related infrastructure improvements and those who are not (49% to 40%).

About two-thirds of Democrats say they'd be willing to pay more (65%) compared to about one-third of Republicans (35%). Independents fell somewhere in between at 42%.

Across Oregon, there isn't a strong feeling that the agricultural community is doing enough to conserve water. Just 37% of Oregonians agree that decisive action is being taken while 34% said they don't know.

But some of those sur-

veyed, especially those from Central Oregon, complained that housing and infrastructure growth are causing water shortages and farming communities are paying the price.

"They keep building homes and approving mega resorts and golf courses when farmers can't grow food. It is ridiculous," said Deschutes County resident Susan Matney.

Elizabeth Kirby, another Deschutes County resident, agreed. "Small farmers are really hurting in my area of Oregon to maintain needed water supplies while a huge amount of water goes to unnecessary places, for example golf courses and resorts," Kirby said.

Thirty-six percent of Oregonians think there is enough water to meet future needs while 46% disagree. A year ago, Oregonians were more evenly split on this question, with 42% saying Oregon has enough water while 45% said there's not enough water. This question also revealed a gender split — this year 45% of men said there is enough water to meet future needs while just 28% agreed with the statement.

The survey also revealed a political divide over whether or not the general public is doing enough to conserve water during droughts. The research showed that 41% of Republicans said the public is doing enough to conserve water while just 21% of Democrats agreed with the statement. In total (men and women), only 28% agree that the general public is doing enough while 56% disagreed.

Oregon congressional races tighten, according to forecaster

BY GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

Three open congressional seats in Oregon are less firmly in Democratic control, according to a report on Friday, Aug. 5. The day also saw a GOP legislative candidate find an innovative ad strategy and the biggest little political party in the state issue its candidate list.

Top forecaster says Oregon U.S. House races tightening

The Cook Political Report, a top national election forecaster, on Friday reported that it was now rating three open congressional seats in Oregon as less of a lock for Democrats in November. The races are key to which party will control the U.S. House of Representatives after the Nov. 8 election. Democrats currently hold a 220-210 majority, with five vacancies. The party of a new president has lost seats in the first midterm after their election in the past 100 years, with the exception of 1934 (amid the Great Depression) and 2002 (after the 9/11 terrorist attacks).

The softening of the outlook for Democratic wins in Congress is part of a nationwide trend that The Cook Political Report, as well as other top political forecasters such as FiveThirtyEight and the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, say reflects voter dissatisfaction with President Joe Biden and Congress for their handling of a record increase in inflation. Oregon Democrats say the forecasts do not take into account the deeply conservative GOP candidates who won the primaries, particularly following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade abortion rights. The GOP candidates, Democrats say, will not appeal to swing voters in a traditionally Democratic-tilting state.

The Cook Report on Friday moved:

- The 4th Congressional District rating from "likely Democratic" to "leans Democratic." The retirement of longtime U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield created an open seat in the district, which includes Eugene, Corvallis and Roseburg. Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle dropped her re-election campaign to run for Congress instead. She was endorsed by DeFazio and won the Democratic primary. She now faces

Alek Skarlatos of Roseburg, who has been the recipient of national GOP financial aid after giving DeFazio the closest race of his career in 2020. Though the new political maps were drawn to make the district easier for a Democrat to win, national GOP groups have continued to heavily finance Skarlatos' second bid.

- The 6th Congressional District moved from "likely Democratic" to "leans Democratic." Oregon was awarded a sixth congressional district for 2022 due to its population growth. The district, with no incumbent, was placed in the Salem area. Rep. Andrea Salinas of Lake Oswego won the Democratic primary and faces Republican Mike Erickson. In order to create the 6th district, the 5th district was pushed east and realigned to run from Portland, over the Cascades, to Bend.

- The 5th Congressional District had already been moved from "leans Democratic" to "toss-up" following the May 17 primary defeat of incumbent U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, by Terrebonne attorney Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

During redistricting, majority Democrats in the Legislature drew political maps that were opposed by Republicans. Kyle Kondik of the University of Virginia Center for Politics was among independent analysts who said the maps were drawn in a way to ensure that Democrats would likely win five of the six seats, including the new 6th district around Salem. Two districts — the 1st Congressional District in northwestern Oregon held by U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Beaverton, and the 3rd Congressional District centered on Portland held by U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Portland — are considered overwhelmingly Democratic seats. The 2nd Congressional District seat of U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, is prohibitively Republican. It takes in nearly all of Eastern, Central and Southwestern Oregon.

Legislative candidate spends big for fair sponsorship

Bend Republican Michael Sipe took an unusual campaign advertising step in his bid for House District 53. Along with the usual digital ads on Facebook and television commercial buys, Sipe paid \$25,000 to be one of the "title sponsors" of the De-

schutes County Fair and Rodeo last weekend.

Sipe is seeking to win the seat currently held by Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond. Major population growth and an influx of Democratic voters have shrunk and changed the demographics of the district. It has gone from favoring Republicans to a slight Democratic tilt, according to maps filed with the Oregon Legislature last fall. Zika opted not to run for re-election. Sipe will face Bend attorney Emerson Levy, the Democratic nominee, in November. Levy ran a strong race against Zika in 2020 before the district was shorn of Republican enclaves such as Sunriver.

Candidates crossing over

The Secretary of State has reported that 10 candidates for the Legislature have qualified as write-ins for the November general election. The largest number are officeholders or candidates of one party who received enough write-in votes to also be listed with another party. Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, can also be listed as a Democrat on the ballot. Same for Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, and Rep. Christine Goodwin, R-Canyonville. Flipping the political cross-pollination the other way is Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, who qualified to also receive the Republican line under his name.

IPO election line-up is in place

Oregon's largest minor party has rolled out its list of 51 nominees for the 2022 election. The Independent Party of Oregon, which counts 137,790 registered voters, mostly cross-nominated Democrats, including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon.

Republican Sen. Bill Kenner and a few other exceptions made the list.

"We cross-nominated two other Republicans, Mark Owens in House District 60, who is unopposed in any case, and John Velez in Senate District 13," said Andrew Kaza, an IPO board member from Sisters.

Owens' district is the largest by area in the state, taking up most of the southeastern quarter of Oregon and stretching from the Idaho border to southeastern Deschutes County. Alistair Firmin, a Republican running in House District 38, was also added to the IPO nominee list.

Not so fast: California's last nuke plant might run longer

BY MICHAEL R. BLOOD

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — An aggressive push toward renewable energy has run headlong into anxiety over keeping the lights on in California, where the largest utility is considering whether to try to extend the lifespan of the state's last operating nuclear power plant.

California is the birthplace of the modern environmental movement that for decades has had a fraught relationship with nuclear power, which doesn't produce carbon pollution like fossil fuels but leaves behind waste that can remain dangerously radioactive for centuries.

Now environmentalists find themselves at odds with someone they usually see as an ally: Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, a green energy advocate who supported the 2016 agreement calling for the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant to close by 2025 but now is a leading voice to consider a longer operating run.

Newsom often is mentioned as a possible presidential candidate and an attorney for a consumer advocacy group that routinely challenges plant operator Pacific Gas & Electric in rate cases believes "national political ambitions" are at play.

The push to keep Diablo Canyon running "is clearly coming from the governor's office," said Matthew Freedman of The Utility Reform Network. Newsom "is mindful that problems with electric system reliability can become a political liability and he is determined to take all possible actions to avoid any possibility that the lights go out in California."

Newsom certainly wants to avoid a repeat of August 2020, when a record heat wave caused a surge in power use for air conditioning that overtaxed the electrical grid. There were two consecutive nights of rolling blackouts affecting hundreds of thousands of residential and business customers.

In a statement, Newsom communications director Erin Mellon didn't address the question of politics but said the governor is focused on maintaining reliable energy for households and businesses while accelerating state efforts to meet his aggressive goals for reducing carbon pollution. He continues to support shuttering Diablo Canyon "in the long term."

The debate over the plant comes as the long-struggling nuclear industry sees climate change as a reason for optimism. President Joe Biden has embraced nuclear power generation as part of his strategy to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels.

Nuclear power provides roughly one-fifth of the electricity in the country, though generation produced by the industry has dropped since 2010. Saving a plant in green energy-friendly California would carry symbolic weight but the window to make an abrupt turnaround appears narrow.

PG&E CEO Patricia "Patti" Poppe told investors in a call last month that state legislation would have to be enacted by September to open the way for PG&E to reverse course. She said the utility faced "a real sense of urgency" because other steps would be required to keep the plant running, including ordering more reactor fuel and storage casks for housing spent fuel that remains highly radioactive.

Extending the plant's operating life "is not an easy option," Poppe said. "The permitting and relicensing of the facility is complex and so there's a lot of hurdles to be overcome."

The plant on the coast midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco produces 9% of the electricity for California's nearly 40 million residents. The state earlier set aside up to \$75 million to extend operation of older power plants scheduled to close, but it's not yet clear whether taxpayers might be covering part of the bill — and, if so, how

much — to keep Diablo running.

The Newsom administration has been pushing to expand clean energy, as the state aims to cut emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. California installed more clean energy capacity in 2021 than in any other year in state history, administration officials say, but they warn reliability remains in question as temperatures rise amid climate change.

For Diablo Canyon, the issue is whether the Newsom administration, in concert with investor-owned PG&E, can find a way to unspool the 2016 closure agreement agreed to by environmentalists, plant worker unions and the utility. The decision to close the plant also was endorsed by California utility regulators, the Legislature and then-Democratic

Gov. Jerry Brown.

Plant workers now support keeping the reactors open for an extended run while anti-nuclear activists and environmentalists have rejoined a battle they thought was settled six years ago.

"It only makes sense keeping Diablo open," said Marc D. Joseph, an attorney for the Coalition of California Utility Employees, which represents plant workers. "There is no one involved who wants to see carbon emissions in California go up."

Critics question if it's feasible — or even legal — for the utility to break the agreement.

"I don't know how to unwind it, and I don't think it should be unwound," said Ralph Cavanagh of the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of the groups that negotiated and signed the pact.

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