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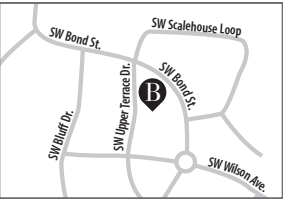
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LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Environmental groups requesting updates to the Columbia River Treaty

BY CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Pacific Northwest groups representing conservation, clean energy, wildlife, fish and other interests are urging U.S. officials to modernize the Columbia River Treaty to avoid what they describe as an ecosystem collapse.

The 32 organizations sent a letter to the U.S. State Department, Bonneville Power Administration and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers urging them to provide information to the region on efforts to overhaul the treaty and involve citizens and tribes in decisions.

“Chronic hot water is killing salmon and degrading Columbia and Snake River health today, with worse coming. A modern treaty must give Northwest people greater standing and more tools to withstand this rising damage,” the groups said.

Signed in 1961 and ratified in 1964, the treaty coordinates flood control and power generation through a system of dams and reservoirs in Canada and the U.S.

The groups are asking U.S. negotiators to partner with Canada to add the health of the river as a third, co-equal treaty purpose. They are also urging the administration to include Columbia Basin tribes in treaty governance, matching Canada's recognition of the role of indigenous nations.

The groups' final request concerns flood control.

The U.S. currently benefits from a collaborative flood-risk management plan that depends on assured Canadian water storage to minimize flood risk in the U.S. That critical collaboration ends on Sept. 16, 2024, if negotiations fail to extend it, the groups said.



The Columbia River at Crescent Bar, Washington. Groups representing conservation, clean energy, wildlife and other interests want U.S. officials to update the Columbia River Treaty with Canada.

The treaty's Permanent Engineering Board warns the general lack of planning leaves “...no guidance on the operation of the Canadian storage system with significant consequences in both Canada and the U.S. for power generation, flood risk management and social and environmental objectives,” they said.

If a new agreement isn't reached, the terms of the current treaty will shift responsibility for flood control from Canada to the U.S., potentially forcing

operational changes at eight dams and reservoirs in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, Brian Brooks, executive director of the Idaho Wildlife Federation, said in a press release.

Given the lack of transparency to date, the groups “are increasingly worried about how the federal government will deal with uncertainties and operational changes while protecting fish and wildlife, honoring tribal obligations and supporting river communities,” he said.

The U.S. lacks comprehensive plans for the shift of responsibility, said John DeVoe, executive director for Water-Watch of Oregon.

“And we have grave concerns that federal agencies will further deprioritize the health of fish and wildlife to manage flood risk. Upsetting operations for fish and wildlife, agriculture, hydropower and other river uses due to inadequate planning and minimal consultation is an unnecessary and unacceptable outcome,” he said.

Oregon's tuition-free preschool program hitting major delays

Associated Press

Thousands of Oregon families who expected their children to start tuition-free state-provided preschool this month remain in limbo because of staffing shortages that caused delays getting contracts to nearly 250 involved preschools.

The Early Learning Division, which has overseen the Preschool Promise program since its 2016 inception, took over contracting duties from the Oregon Department of Education this year and has struggled to get contracts inked. It has yet to send paperwork to most of the 248 preschools in the program that serves families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty line, The Oregonian reported Tuesday.

Many facilities new to the program or those expanding services are hesitant to accept children enrolled in Preschool Promise until they have a signed contract and payment for the care is assured, the newspaper reported.

The agency now says the preschools chosen to serve an estimated 6,381 children must open no later than Oct. 30. It could not say when all contracts would be signed. The total number of children marks an expected increase of more than 2,000 slots from last year.

“It's super hard on families,” said Molly Day, director of Early Learning Multnomah,

one of 16 regional hubs that helps coordinate Preschool Promise enrollment. “If you're counting on your child to be in school while you're working, that's very disruptive.”

Day said her team has received hundreds of calls and emails in recent weeks from anxious parents seeking an update.

While the burden falls on regional hubs to field parents' questions and complaints, hub coordinators hardly have a better idea than parents do of when the Early Learning Division will complete the contracting process.

The state has directed preschools new to the program not to begin serving children until their contracts are firmly in place. It also has told programs that are continuing or expanding in the program that they don't have to serve children without the contractual guarantee of funding.

“We need a way to figure out how to communicate these delays to families,” Day said.

Marion Sutor-Barnes, director of communications and outreach for the Early Learning Division, wrote in an email that the agency has employed an “all hands on deck approach” to processing the contracts. The agency has only hired two of nine planned employees for its new procurement office, she said.

“We recognize this delay is affecting families, and we sincerely apologize. We are committed to ensuring families have access to the early learning and child care supports they need,” Sutor-Barnes wrote.

Day said her team is still waiting to hear back from returning providers whether they will serve children ahead of getting a contract extension. While larger schools may choose to take children before receiving funding, home-based providers with less resources may not be able to take the risk, she said.

“Every provider is going to have to make that choice if they want to be matched with families without a guarantee to be paid,” Day said.

Preschools that don't start until late October will likely have to extend the school year or school year to meet the requirement that children receive the 900 hours of instruction that Preschool Promise guarantees, Sutor-Barnes said.

Man pleads guilty to vandalizing Planned Parenthood clinic

Defendant said he broke 5 security cameras, a window and sign at Grants Pass clinic

Associated Press

A man who broke windows and security cameras at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Grants Pass because he opposed abortion has pleaded guilty to two counts of violating the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

Devin Kruse, 27, of Grants Pass pleaded guilty Monday, The Oregonian reported.

Kruse admitted he broke five security cameras, a window and a sign at the Grants Pass clinic on Nov. 23, according to his plea agreement. He also said he returned several days later

and threw a concrete block through a window, tore down an intercom system and broke lightbulbs, documents said.

He told officers who arrested him that all Planned Parenthood facilities needed to be shut down, according to the agreement.

“The First Amendment does not allow individuals to violate the civil rights of others. In this case, Mr. Kruse's destructive and intimidating acts prevented women from accessing vital reproductive and pregnancy health services,” Natalie Wight, Oregon's U.S. attorney, said in a statement.

At a sentencing set for early next year, prosecutors will recommend that he face two years of probation, one for each count. He has also agreed to pay restitution to Planned Parenthood in an amount to be determined.

LOCAL BRIEFING

COVID-19 community levels for Central Oregon

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention monitors levels of COVID-19 to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data.

Levels can be low, medium or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area.

Data released Thursday by

the CDC showed three Oregon counties — Wallowa, Union and Baker — at high levels of community spread, five at medium and 28 at low. The agency listed the following levels for Central Oregon:

Deschutes County: Low
Crook County: Low
Jefferson County: Low

For communities at low levels, the CDC recommends staying up to date on vaccines and getting tested if experiencing symptoms.

— Bulletin staff report



Partners In Care

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