

# Wallowa dam project delayed

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

“We have to go,” Butterfield said. “We have to get started.”

## Fish passage

One of the issues that it took the stakeholders time to agree upon was the type of fish passage to be included in the dam. State law requires including such a passage and the two major types considered were a fish ladder and a “trap and haul” system.

The stakeholders were leaving it up to the engineering firm for the dam to decide on the type of fish passage to include. McMillen Jacobs and Associates of Boise, Idaho, with Wallowa County native Mort McMillen at the helm, determined a fish ladder would not work well at the dam.

Butterfield said the consensus among the stakeholders leaned toward the trap and haul system, but they’re “still working out the details that will work for everyone.”

He said that the constant rise and fall of the lake level and the freezing in the winter make a fish ladder impractical. That’s not to mention the cost.

“It would take more concrete to do fish ladder than it would to do the dam,” he said. “It’s not part of the conversation anymore.”

The trap and haul system involves creating a catch basin at the base of the dam that will attract the fish. From there, the fish are collected, placed in a water-filled truck and hauled to wherever in the lake it is determined they should be unloaded.

“It sounds simple but it’s kind of complicated,” Butterfield said. “We’re working out the details.”

## The dam

Refurbishing the century-old dam has been a desire of the stakeholders for nearly 25 years, Butterfield said. The plans include improving the spillways, the fish passage, adding more concrete for weight, replacing the five conduit gates with new ones and upgrading the electrical and instrumentation.

Right now, the dam keeps adequate water in the lake to irrigate the Wallowa Valley. Butterfield said Thursday the lake level was at 9½ feet, or about 45% of capacity. He said the dam can allow the lake to fill to about 20.8 feet.

Once the dam is refurbished, he said, it will allow for another 8 feet.

Indeed, there’s light at the end of the tunnel now.

“We feel pretty good about where we’re going and it’s good to have this project started finally,” Butterfield said. “Persistence is going to pay off.”

**WALLOWA LAKE** — Funding delays and rising costs are pushing back the construction start date for the refurbished Wallowa Lake Dam by a year, but design and funding progress are underway, according to Dan Butterfield, president of the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District.

Butterfield said Thursday, Oct. 27, that the groundbreaking on the dam is expected to take place in fall 2024, after irrigation season concludes.

The district, which owns the dam, is but one of the major stakeholders of the project. Others include the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Nez Perce Tribe’s Department of Fisheries Resources Management and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Minor stakeholders also are involved, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has jurisdiction over bull trout; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and others.

## Funding

Butterfield said funding is coming in. The stakeholders now have access to the \$14 million from the sale of state lottery bonds. They’ve also received \$750,000 from the ODFW for design and engineering work on the dam and another \$500,000 from ODFW for design of the consolidated diversion of the Wallowa River.

Butterfield said that diversion will take out four irrigation ditches from the river.

“They need to be rebuilt and screened so fish can’t get into ditch system anymore,” he said.

Butterfield said that portion of the project is expected to cost \$5-6 million.

In fact, the cost of the entire project has skyrocketed, what with inflation and the increased cost of construction materials. What was originally estimated to be a \$16 million project is now projected at a low estimate of \$21 million, he said.

He added that numerous grants have been written to help with the shortfall and word is expected in December on whether those grants come through and how much they will be.

“We’re confident on grants that’ve been written and they’ll help us cross the finish line,” he said. “We have to stay positive.”

But as inflation keeps driving up costs, the stakeholders are even more eager to begin construction.

# Winegrowers toast crop

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

**NEWBERG** — It has been a year of twists and turns for Oregon winemakers like Jessica Mozeico of Et Fille Wines.

Mozeico grows approximately 22 acres of winegrapes in the northern Willamette Valley. Her family’s winery in Newberg produces 2,500 cases of wine annually, including Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Gamay and Viognier.

The season got off to a slow start, Mozeico said, thanks to an unusually cool and wet spring. Then, just as some vines began emerging from dormancy in mid-April, the region experienced a hard frost that damaged buds and threatened to hamstring the 2022 vintage.

“At that time, I thought it would in particular affect the Viognier, Chardonnay and earlier-ripening Pinot noir sites,” Mozeico said. “My approach was to wait and see.”

Summer brought a turn for the better, she said, with warm and dry weather extending into October allowing the fruit to ripen and develop sugars after falling behind early.

Though the badly timed frost did kill some buds, Mozeico said her plants

compensated by growing larger, heavier grape clusters. She wrapped up harvest on Oct. 21, with yields “exactly on target” compared to a normal year.

“What I learned this harvest is that a vine has a maximum potential it wants to achieve,” she said. “If there are fewer buds at play, the clusters themselves (grow) extremely large.”

Other winegrowers from across the state are reporting a similar trend.

Harry Peterson-Nedry, of Ridgecrest Vineyards in Yamhill County, said he initially anticipated a 40-60% decline in yield due to frost damage. Instead, harvest came in closer to 90% of normal.

“I’m personally very pleased at this point,” he said. “What could have been a disastrous year because of the freeze is not much different from a normal year.”

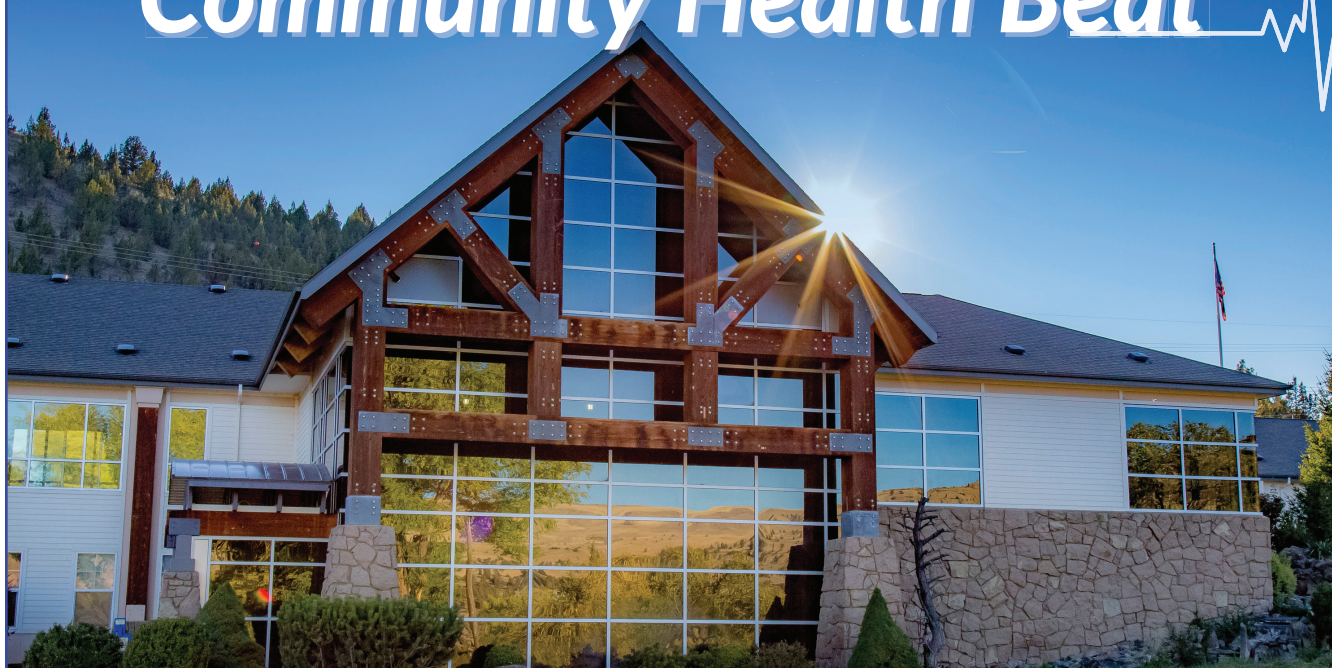
Like Mozeico, Peterson-Nedry said having an extended growing season that lasted into October was helpful after the soggy spring.

“We also started with a lot of water reserves in the soil,” he said. “That, I think, was a big thing. It definitely encouraged robust canopy growth, and the timing of bloom seemed appropriate to what we had on the vines.”



**Blue Mountain Hospital District**

## Community Health Beat



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November 22nd  
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