Oregon Water Coalition
Member Newsletter

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2015 OWC Annual Membership Meeting & Water Conference in review

Oregon Water Coalition's annual Membership Meeting & Water Conference for 2015 enjoyed another excellent year of turnout with more than 100 registered for the event and almost as many attending the day-long series of water- and ag-centric sessions. The event was held January 27 at the Hermiston Conference Center.

This year's guest speakers covered a wide scope of topics ranging from Northeast Oregon Water Association's Columbia River Supply Project to the latest water legislation and litigation issues; from water quality issues to updates from our new state water resources leadership.

OWC was proud to welcome District 58 representative, Greg Barreto from La Grande as our luncheon speaker, jointly attended by Hermiston Chamber of Commerce members. Representative Barreto gave a lighthearted and inspiring account of his life and experiences prior and since coming to Salem.

Featured speakers included Bill Dean of River Point Farms, J.R. Cook and Craig Reeder of Northeast Oregon Water Association, April Snell of Oregon Water Resources Congress, David Filippi of Stoel Rives in Portland, and Tom Byler, new director of the Oregon Water Resources Department.

In other coalition developments, members retained Luke Maynard of GreenWood Resources for another term as OWC President. Likewise, Gibb Evans of IRZ Consulting and Tammie Williams of Desert Springs Bottled Water were similarly retained in their respective roles as Vice President and Treasurer.

Dan Springer was named new OWC Executive Director. Springer will continue to handle web and media operations as he has since 2006. He succeeds his father, Harmon Springer, who retires after nearly 15 years of service to the organization.

The Oregon Water Coalition wishes to acknowledge and thank all of our distinguished speakers, each of our attendees, and everyone responsible for making the 2015 event a success. Great thanks to Debbie Pedro and her professional team at Hermiston Chamber of Commerce for all their great hosting and support.

Thanks also to OWC's Board of Directors for their introductions and media work. A special acknowledgement and great thanks to Luke Maynard for his exceptional work in hosting the event and for taking the lead in sparking conversation over the issues and topics important to the event. We are equally indebted to Tammie Williams for all her tireless logistics and management leading up to, and through, the event.

Oregon Water Coalition

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Harmon Springer retires as OWC Director
- 2015 Annual Meeting & Water Conference

Columbia Basin water supply forecast drops to 93 percent of average

The Cascade Mountains that stretch north and south through Oregon and Washington have been in relatively drier straits this winter through early February.

However, most of the rest of the Columbia River basin is at or near normal in terms of snow-water accumulations that fill streams for fish, irrigators, power producers and others during the spring and summer seasons.

"On the east side of the Cascades it's not looking too bad," said Kevin Berghoff of NOAA's Northwest River Forecast Center. Those inland snowpacks are, however, on a downward trend following relatively heavy precipitation (mostly rain) in early winter (October and November) that turned drier in December and drier yet in January.

The NWRFC's official water supply forecast released Feb. 4, predicts that 93 percent of the average runoff, as measured at the lower Columbia's The Dalles Dam, will rush down through the system from April through September. The 1981-2010 average is 92.7 million acre feet of water.

That forecast is down from one produced one month earlier that predicted runoff at 100 percent of average.

Most of the water that pours down through the Columbia and Snake river systems during the warm season meltdown comes from mountains in British Columbia, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming and eastern Oregon and Washington. The Willamette River, which feeds into the lower Columbia at Portland, and other lower basin tributaries are dependent on precipitation and snow melt from the Cascades.

The NWRFC forecast says that the Upper Columbia and the Upper Snake snowpacks are near or above normal, the Middle and Lower Snake are near or below normal, while Cascades forecasts are well below normal. Western Oregon's Willamette River basin, as an example, is at 14 percent of average.

April-September water volume forecasts from the upper Snake basin in southern Idaho are at 109 percent (Jackson Lake Dam) and 104 percent (near Shelley) of normal. The predicted runoff past the lower Snake's Lower Granite Dam is expected to be 96 percent of the 30-year average.

The runoff from west-central Idaho's North Fork of the Clearwater River is expected to be only 86 percent of average for the April-September period, according to the recent NWRFC forecast. The North Fork flows down through Dworshak Dam's reservoir and into the Clearwater, which in turn empties into the lower Snake just upstream of Lower Granite on the Idaho-Oregon border.

April-September runoff from the Columbia is expected, according to the NWRFC forecast, to total 95 percent of the 30-year average as measured at Grand Coulee Dam in central Washington. The Kootenai River is expected to contribute 91 percent of its average runoff, as measured at Libby Dam. The Kootenai flows south out of British Columbia, across northwest Montana and northern Idaho and then north into Canada to its confluence with the Columbia.

Those forecasts are based on calculations of soil moisture content, runoff volumes to-date, accumulated snowpack, a relatively wet 10-day forecast and other variables.

Precipitation totals during January were only 53 percent of average in the Snake River basin upstream of the lower river's Ice Harbor Dam and 64 percent of average in the lower Columbia mainstem upstream of Grand Coulee. In western Washington, January precipitation was 45 percent of average; in western Oregon, 37 percent of average.

According to the National Resource Conservation Service's Columbia River Basin SNOTEL Snow/Precipitation Update Report posted online Thursday, Feb. 5, the snow-water equivalent in the Kootenai River drainage was 70 percent of average for that date, despite precipitation so far at 96 percent of average.

The Flathead River drainage has 105 percent of its average SWE through Feb. 5, and 112 percent of its average precipitation for the water year (which begins Oct. 1).

In the Idaho Panhandle drainages monitored by the NRCS, SWE was 61 percent of average through Feb. 4; precipitation was 89 percent of average.

In the upper Snake River basin above Palisades SWE was 120 percent of average through Feb. 4.

The Grande Ronde, Powder, Burnt and Imnaha rivers had 77 percent of average precipitation, and 104 percent of average precipitation. The Clearwater/Salmon river basin had 93 percent of avaerage SWE, and 100 percent of average precipitation. All six of those rivers feed into the lower Snake River.

Central Oregon's Deschutes, Crooked and John Day rivers had only 39 percent of average SWE through Feb. 4, despite 97 percent precipitation. All eventually feed into the Columbia upstream of Bonneville Dam. The Willamette River basin, which joins the Columbia at Portland, had only 14 percent SWE through Wednesday, while precipitation totals were 97 percent of normal.

"The biggest story this year has to do with temperatures," said Berghoff. Temperatures across the Columbia and Snake river basins have been considerably above average for the months of October, December and January.

Overall, temperatures in the Columbia River basin upstream of The Dalles Dam in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington were 4.6 degrees above average in October, 4 degrees above average in December, 5.9 degrees above average in January and 4.8 degrees so far in February. The only cool month was November at 1.4 degrees below the long-term average.

Columbia Basin Bulletin

Read more at oregonwater.org/news

- Eastern Oregon water supply, farmer outlook bleak
- Climate: 2014 second warmest in Oregon since 1895
- New Columbia Basin Development League chairman sees urgency

Slow snowpack development expected throughout much of the west

An unusually warm, dry January slowed snowpack accumulation in much of the West, according to data from the second 2015 forecast by the United States Department of Agriculture's National Water and Climate Center (NWCC). California, Arizona and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado, Utah, Oregon and Nevada, remain in prolonged drought.

"January is usually a big month for snowpack accumulation," NWCC hydrologist Cara McCarthy said. "But most of the West didn't see significant gains this month. With isolated exceptions, only Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Montana received near average precipitation last month."

"This is as low a snowpack as I've seen across the Sierra Nevada and Cascades for many locations at this time of year," said NWCC Director Mike Strobel. Several Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL) sites in those ranges are snowless, which is very unusual for this time of year.

Even the precipitation in the Southwest wasn't enough to take these regions out of drought conditions. In Western states where snowmelt accounts for the majority of seasonal water supply, information about snowpack serves as an indicator of future water availability.

Streamflow in the West consists largely of accumulated mountain snow that melts and flows into streams as temperatures warm in spring and summer. NWCC scientists analyze the snowpack, air temperature, soil moisture and other measurements taken from remote sites to develop the water supply forecasts.

The Cascades of Oregon and Washington have received normal levels of precipitation this water year, but it's mostly fallen as rain instead of snow. California's Sierra Nevada has seen little rain or snow. The extreme drought in California may be further aggravated by reduced streamflow in other parts of the West.

"This month the inflow forecast for Lake Powell fell from 90 to 70 percent of normal," said McCarthy. "Because southern California draws water from the Colorado River, this may impact their water supply. This is only the second forecast of the season, and there's still time for conditions to change. We'll keep watching conditions and updating our forecasts as the year continues."

The NWCC, part of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, monitors conditions year-round and will continue to issue monthly forecasts until June. The water supply forecast is part of several USDA efforts to improve public awareness and mitigate the impacts of climate change, including drought and other extreme weather events.

Through the creation of the National Drought Resilience Partnership, launched as part of the President's Climate Action Plan, federal agencies are working closely with states, tribes and local governments to develop a coordinated response to drought.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Dry January drops water forecast, snowpack
- Lack of snowpack suggests dry Washington summer
- Oregon snowpack may mean dry summer for irrigators, wildlife

Portmania: Pileup at the West Coast ports continues

by Kari Barbic

U.S.-grown apples and pears rot on the docks never again to see the light of day. Bins normally piled high with U.S. produce at markets across Asia are looking scant. Storage facilities across the country are packed with tons of meat that should be on dinner plates around the world. Why?

Loading docks at West Coast ports from Seattle to San Diego—once bustling with activity—are now moving with all the speed of a DMV line thanks to prolonged contract negotiations between the Pacific Maritime Association and the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union.

The dock workers' contract expired in July, and although workers continue to show up, not much is getting done. Last weekend the ports were brought to a halt as shippers and port operators suspended operations for two days.

The financial losses are stacking up along with the unmoved cargo. From $40 million per week in meat sales to $70 million in wasted fruit in Washington, these numbers are a mere fraction of sales and long-term market share losses that farms, ranches, lumber yards and factories are suffering. While the two parties slog out salary and benefit terms, American businesses are paying the price

as they lose skilled workers, valuable sales and good standing with our largest overseas customers.

Fresh produce and meat exports to Asia are largely on hold until the docks are running at a normal pace again. Pork producers are among those being hit especially hard with no way to reach six of their top 10 world customers, all Asia/Pacific countries. While our supply is landlocked, the demand has not dwindled, and our overseas customers are now left to find other, more reliable, suppliers in the meantime.

Delays, added costs and failed shipments are putting our trade relationships on shaky ground. Agreements to open up more trade in Asia will do us little good if we can't meet our end of the bargain. "This is turning into a disaster," one potato exporter noted. "If we cannot supply to the Pacific Rim as we have assured over recent months, we will lose volume and confidence of these newly established customers."

An estimated 60 percent of shippers have redirected their products to avoid the clogged ports. Although non-perishable products can be re-routed to Eastern U.S. ports through the Panama Canal, this still adds time and significantly ups the price tag. As a last resort, some retailers have taken to the skies to bypass the traffic jam. The U.S. military even resorted to air shipments to get yogurt and cottage cheese to troops in Japan and South Korea. How did it get to this point? Last May, the PMA and ILWU began negotiating terms for a new contract. Weeks passed. The contract expired in July and work at the ports slowed. By the time holiday shipments were picking up in the fall, retailers could feel the sting. Two- to three-week delays in just getting goods off ships became standard operating procedure. In some cases, truck drivers would sit at the docks all day waiting for a shipment to be offloaded, only to be turned away empty-handed.

Meanwhile, threats of strike and full shutdown continued to loom. In January, both parties brought in a federal mediator. By month's end a deal seemed nearly in sight. Under the new five-year contract the PMA presented, dock workers would see a 3 percent pay raise each year and full coverage for healthcare. PMA estimates the average dock worker's salary to be $147,000 per year under the expired contract. Yet, negotiations continue.

Once a deal is finally struck and the ports return to operating at their normal speed, it's still expected to take another eight weeks to clear the backlog. Some losses will never be recovered, but America's farmers and ranchers are eager to get back to business and restore the trade relationships we've worked so hard to build.

Kari Barbic is a media specialist for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

American Farm Bureau Federation

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Potato leaders address port slowdown impacts

NOAA Fisheries launches 5-year status review of 13 Columbia ESA stocks

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has announced planned 5-year status reviews of 32 species listed under the Endangered Species Act including 17 "evolutionarily significant units" of Pacific salmon and 11 "distinct population segments" of steelhead.

The reviews include assessments of current status of 13 listed Columbia River basin salmon and steelhead stocks, as well as eulachon. Also reviewed will be the Puget Sound/Georgia Basin DPSs of yelloweye rockfish, canary rockfish and bocaccio rockfish, and the southern DPS of eulachon (smelt).

The purpose of the reviews is to ensure the accuracy of the listing classifications of these threatened and endangered species. The 5-year reviews will be based on the best scientific and commercial data available at the time of the reviews. The agency requests the submission of any such information on these ESUs and DPSs that has become available since the original listing determinations, or since the species' status was last updated.

Based on the results of the reviews, NFS will make the requisite determinations under the ESA. To allow adequate time to conduct the reviews, the agency must receive information no later than May 7, 2015.

The ESA requires that the agency conduct a review of listed species at least once every five years. On the basis of such reviews, it will determine whether a species should be delisted, or reclassified from endangered to threatened or from threatened to endangered.

The listed salmon species under review include: Sacramento River winter-run chinook, Upper Columbia River spring-run chinook, Snake River spring/summer-run chinook; Central Valley spring-run chinook samon; California Coastal chinook; Puget Sound chinook; Lower Co-

lumbia River chinook; Upper Willamette River chinook; Snake River fall-run chinook; Hood Canal summer-run chum; Columbia River chum; Central California Coast coho; Southern Oregon/ Northern California Coast coho; Lower Columbia River coho; Oregon Coast coho; Snake River sockeye; and Ozette Lake sockeye.

NMFS will also undertake reviews for the following 11 steelhead DPSs: Southern California; Upper Columbia River; Middle Columbia River; Snake River Basin; Lower Columbia River; Upper Willamette; South-Central California Coast; Central California Coast; Northern California; California Central Valley; and Puget Sound.

Four non-salmonid DPSs are also up for review: the three Puget Sound/Georgia Basin rockfish DPSs of yelloweye rockfish, canary rockfish, and bocaccio rockfish; and the southern DPS of eulachon. Information about these 32 ESUs and DPSs can be found at NOAA Fisheries' West Coast regional website at **westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov**.

Section 4(a)(1) of the ESA requires that the federal agency determine whether a species is endangered or threatened based on one or more of the five following factors:

- The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range.
- Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes.
- Disease or predation.
- The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.
- Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

The ESA also requires that NMFS' determination be made on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available after taking into account those efforts, if any, being made to protect such species.

Columbia Basin Bulletin

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Alaska group petitions to de-list Snake fall chinook
- Legislation would expedite process to lethally remove sea lions

Controversial Clean Water Act rule withdrawn by federal agencies

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (Corp) has withdrawn a controversial rule intended to clarify the definition of Waters of the United States (WOTUS) in the Clean Water Act. Ag groups -- including Western Growers – have argued the interpretive rule, which became effective in March of 2014, limited their available exemptions under the Clean Water Act.

According to a Capitol Press story, ag organizations said the rule "would lead to cost-prohibitive requirements, leave producers open to litigation and discourage participation in conservation programs." The agencies rescinded the rule "effective immediately" in a memo January 29, 2015.

Western Growers and other ag organizations are still pushing for the agencies to withdraw its overall proposal that defines which waters are protected under WOTUS. In comments submitted to the agencies, the Western Growers Association detailed the flaws in the proposed regulations and outlined the changes needed to make the regulations palatable.

Western Growers Association

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Agencies withdraw controversial Clean Water Act rule
- House-Senate hearing scrutinizes impacts of 'Waters of the U.S.' rule (WOTUS).

Oregon Board of Agriculture publishes 'state of industry' report

The Oregon Board of Agriculture has completed one of its primary biennial tasks. The 2015 Oregon State of the Agriculture Industry Report is now published and ready to share with the governor and legislature, complete with a snapshot of Oregon agriculture's competitiveness, challenges, and opportunities.

The 55-page document– also available online– provides lawmakers with priority policy recommendations as determined by the 10-member board. "This report is designed to educate our legislators on what is important to the agriculture industry," says Board of Agriculture Chair Steve Van Mouwerik.

"The legislative season is extremely busy. So it's really important that we respect all of the other responsibilities our legislators have. We feel we can do this by providing them with a useful and clearly written tool that helps

them understand what are agriculture's challenges and how they can make the best decisions that support continued investment in Oregon agriculture."

This marks the fourth industry report issued by the Board of Agriculture. The latest version provides sections featuring key agricultural issues in Oregon's various geographic regions as well as issues common throughout the state. A portion of the report's executive summary captures the primary recommendations of the board:

The Board believes that investments in Oregon agriculture, whether at the regional or state level, will yield both natural resource and economic returns to our state. Key areas for investment are: market access, transportation, entry into agriculture/farming, labor, food safety, and water. Investments and policy recommendations in the key areas include:

- Increased support for water supply developments that benefit farmers and fish.
- Support for Oregon agriculture and food producers to access local, regional, and international markets.
- Efforts to resolve labor disputes at Port of Portland.
- A higher estate transfer tax exemption limit to make it easier for young people to inherit the family farm.
- Pressure on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform, including an agricultural guestworker program.
- Continue to prioritize food safety in the state budget.
- Support for the agricultural water quality program, including strategic implementation and monitoring.

Oregon's seven agricultural regions have unique and diverse needs and priorities. Regional and local policy and investment recommendations include:

- Strategies to help diverse agricultural operations coexist with one another.
- Identification of and support for irrigation water delivery infrastructure needs in the Willamette Basin.
- Support for lower and upper Klamath restoration.
- Resources for sage grouse conservation efforts; restoration dollars for juniper and nonnative weed control.
- Support for development and expansion of an aquaculture industry in Oregon.
- Technical assistance for small livestock producers in Central Oregon.
- Support for studies and forecasts of water supplies in the Deschutes Basin.
- Continued support for the Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program to prevent wolf-livestock conflicts and compensate those with documented livestock kills and injuries.
- Rules discouraging energy facility siting on high-value farmland in Oregon.

Each board member will take with them a copy of the report to the State Capitol in mid-February, the date of the next quarterly meeting of the Board of Agriculture. Individual meetings will be scheduled between board members and key legislators. The report will be given to each legislator as something that will hopefully be more than just a keepsake.

"Throughout the legislative session, agricultural issues will come up on the roster and this provides a quick reference guide," says Van Mouwerik. "This provides legislative staff a quick go-to resource and it keeps them just a fingertip's effort away from what they need to know."

The document gives an overview of many topics and issues related to, impacting, and affected by agriculture. The board's report is an honest, unvarnished look that avoids sugar coating the outlook for Oregon agriculture. Nonetheless, there is an undercurrent of optimism as it identifies numerous opportunities for those involved in the various aspects of agriculture.

Board members are confident it can foster a better understanding and appreciation of Oregon agriculture, and a chance for all Oregonians to address key issues.

"We kept it light enough and small enough that it can't serve as a door jamb or a way to sit a little higher in your chair," says Van Mouwerik. "What we've accomplished is a simple and to-the-point tool."

Oregon Department of Agriculture

Read more at oregonwater.org/news
- Ag board seeks action on issues hampering producers
- View or save full 'State of Agriculture' report (PDF)

Pacific lamprey on rise in Umatilla River, tribes plan artificial propagation

A record return of Pacific lamprey to the Umatilla River has tribal fish managers optimistic that their restoration efforts are working, but it isn't stopping them from embarking on an artificial propagation program that would be the first of its kind in the United States.

Last year, the Umatilla River estimated return was 404 adult lampreys, a high point in recent history. It surpassed the previous high mark of 319 in 2013. In 2012, a total of 104 adults returned to the river. Prior to those years, the returns weren't more than a handful.

In addition to repairing habitat throughout the Umatilla River system, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have used, are using, and will continue to use adult translocation to promote and protect growing populations in the Umatilla River. Furthermore, this spring they intend to release about 400 adult lampreys to jump-start remnant populations in the Grande Ronde River near Starkey in Union County.

About 875 adult lampreys are splashing around in seven large plastic totes at the Minthorn Springs holding facility along the Umatilla River on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. After the 400 are used for the Grand Ronde, the remainder will be released to the Umatilla River to supplement the lampreys expected to return this spring.

Now, however, following models used by the Finns and Japanese, tribal biologists want to incorporate artificial propagation into their mix of tools to invigorate the enigmatic species, which often is called an eel even though it is a fish. The artificial propagation element is planned for implementation in the Walla Walla and Tucannon rivers in the next few years.

What's more, researchers intend to use a variety of high-tech instruments to learn more about the passage characteristics, routes, timing and interactions between lampreys - as juveniles downstream from the river to the ocean and as adults returning from the Pacific back to upstream spawning grounds – with large-scale projects.

Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission member tribes (Umatilla, Yakama, Nez Perce and Warm Springs), together with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Department of Energy are developing a juvenile lamprey acoustic tag.

"It's been used in the salmon world for years to see how salmon interact with hydro projects. Now we need to make a miniature of an already-miniature tag for lamprey," said Aaron Jackson, Lamprey Project leader in the tribes. Fisheries Program of the Department of Natural Resources for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (formerly Battelle) is developing the tag at a cost of approximately $3.5 million, with partial funding provided by the federal obligation of $50 million over 10 years for lamprey projects.

"It's a sweet deal" because the tribes didn't have the money for development, much less to mass produce the tag. But the Department of Energy will foot much of the bill to develop the prototype tag, Jackson said, because it wants to use the same technology to study East Coast American eels, no relation to the Pacific lamprey.

Jackson figures it has taken 50 years or so to understand artificial propagation techniques for salmon culture – the spawning, incubation, hatching, optimal diet, and space required for rearing prior to release – and learning about lamprey isn't going to happen overnight.

The research in artificial propagation is two-fold. First, artificial propagation will create more than juveniles for release, and second, it will provide "test animals."

"Tribes aren't comfortable with experiments on existing, remnant wild populations, and we need these animals to learn critical juvenile passage issues in tributaries and the mainstem Columbia River to insure safe passage for fish going out," he said.

Currently, lamprey artificial propagation research is being conducted at the William Grant Water and Environmental Center Aquatics Lab at Walla Walla Community College. Some of the artificially propagated lamprey would be available for testing there to learn more about spawning, incubation, food, space requirements, etc.

"When it comes to recovering lamprey we think we have three methods available to use: fix the habitat and hope lamprey naturally recolonize on their own, which is not likely; use adult translocation that's now in effect; and artificial propagation. We're exploring all three," he said.

Read full story at oregonwater.org/news. Also:

- Snake River fall chinook redds highest-ever surveyed
- Spring chinook season set, strong return expected
- Invasive European ear snail found in John Day River

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