



Work Session Summary Minutes

OREGON

2024 Reservoir Pre-Drawdown Discussion

October 17, 2024. 1:30 PM

Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Salem
5th Floor, Suite 5232, Commissioners Board Room

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, Colm Willis, and Danielle Bethell.

Board's Office: Matt Lawyer, Jan Fritz, Chris Eppley, Alvin Klausen, and Trevor Lane.

U.S Army Corps of Engineers: Greg Taylor, and Erik Peterson.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga.

Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.

Summary

The Marion County Board of Commissioners discussed the 2024 reservoir pre-drawdown with the Army Corps of Engineers. Key points included the impact of last year's deep drawdowns on water quality, particularly turbidity, affecting the Middle Fork, Willamette, and South Santiam rivers. The Corps detailed the history and benefits of the Willamette Valley system, including \$4 billion in infrastructure and \$2 billion in annual flood prevention. The 2021 drawdowns led to significant turbidity and fish mortality, prompting changes in 2024 to keep reservoir levels higher. The discussion also covered the Endangered Species Act compliance and the trade-offs between fish and other authorized purposes.

Action Items

- Provide the presentation slides to the commissioners.
- Follow up with Jamie Kate regarding the communities that have intervened in the lawsuit.

Outline

Introduction and Meeting Purpose

- Kevin Cameron introduces the meeting, noting it is a work session for the Marion County Board of Commissioners regarding the 2024 reservoir pre-drawdown discussion with the Army Corps of Engineers.
- The meeting is held in the commissioner's board room at Courthouse Square, with various attendees including Kevin Cameron, Danielle Bethell, Matt Lawyer, Greg Taylor, Jan Fritz, Chris Eppley, Steve Elzinga, Eric Peterson, Alvin Clausen, and Trevor Lane.
- Eric Peterson from the Army Corps of Engineers outlines the meeting's purpose, focusing on the impact of last year's deep drawdowns on water quality and the need for changes in operations this year.

- The meeting aims to discuss the Army Corps' mission, the benefits of the project, compliance with the Endangered Species Act, and the litigation from 2019 that resulted in an injunctive order.

Overview of the Willamette Valley System

- Eric Peterson provides a historical overview of the Willamette Valley system, starting from the 1930s when Congress addressed flooding issues by building dams and revetments.
- The system includes 13 dams and 100 miles of revetments, designed to prevent water from breaking through into agricultural fields and ensure food security.
- The infrastructure in the valley has a significant economic impact, preventing \$2 billion in damages annually and producing hydroelectric power at eight facilities.
- The system also provides recreational opportunities, with Detroit reservoir being a major recreation spot, and supports municipal and industrial water supplies.

Compliance with the Endangered Species Act

- Eric Peterson discusses the Army Corps' compliance with the Endangered Species Act, including the biological opinions (BioOps) for listed species such as Oregon chub, bull trout, spring chinook, and winter steelhead.
- The Corps implemented 85-87 of the 90+ reasonable and prudent actions (RPAs) required by the BioOp but faced financial and compliance challenges.
- In 2019, the Corps was sued by the Northwest Environmental Defense Council, resulting in an injunctive order that required deep drawdowns of reservoirs to protect juvenile salmon.
- The injunctive order included specific reservoirs: Fall Creek, Lookout Point, Cougar, and South Santiam, with the intent to reduce the risk of juvenile salmon suffering from barrel trauma.

Impact of Deep Drawdowns on Fish and Water Quality

- Eric Peterson explains the rationale behind the deep drawdowns, aiming to get juvenile salmon close to the surface for safe passage through regulating outlets.
- The 2021 drawdowns resulted in significant turbidity and barrel trauma for coho salmon in Green Peter reservoir, leading to their mortality.
- The Corps conducted studies to understand the impact of the drawdowns on juvenile fish, finding that the operations were beneficial for the target species but had negative effects on coho salmon.
- The Corps adjusted operations for the 2024 drawdowns, keeping the pool up longer to reduce downstream water temperatures and minimize turbidity.

Community and Legal Reactions

- The community and local governments reacted to the drawdowns, with some intervening in the lawsuit to protect their interests.
- The Corps provided detailed declarations outlining the pros and cons of various actions from a fish perspective, but the final decisions were made by the judge.
- The Corps faced criticism for the negative impact on coho salmon, with some questioning the trade-offs made to protect juvenile salmon.
- The Corps emphasized the need to comply with the Endangered Species Act and the judge's orders, despite the challenges and public reactions.

Future Operations and Public Engagement

- The Corps plans to continue the modified drawdown operations for the 2024 season, aiming to balance the needs of fish and other authorized purposes.
- The Corps is working to improve public understanding and engagement, conducting public information sessions and providing detailed data on reservoir levels and turbidity.
- The Corps is also exploring long-term solutions to mitigate the impact of drawdowns, including the development of temperature control towers and floating screen structures.
- The meeting concluded with a commitment to continue working with the community and stakeholders to address the challenges and find effective solutions.

Adjourned –2:36 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary White

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