



# Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

## Water Resources Department

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Water Resources Commission

**FROM:** Tom Paul, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item C, November 18, 2010  
Water Resources Commission Meeting

### **Willamette Basin Supply Briefing**

#### **I. Issue Statement**

The Willamette Basin contains the majority of the State's population, leads the state in agricultural production, and is important for recreation and power production. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) plays a major role in water management in the Basin. The COE operates 13 storage reservoirs holding more than 6.2 million acre-feet of water, including 1.64 million acre-feet of conservation storage (see Attachment 1). Water right certificates were issued to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) for the water stored behind the COE reservoirs within the conservation storage pool. The authorized use, of the stored water is for irrigation as stated on the water rights certificates. There are major water supply challenges facing the Basin. Stored water is being viewed as a key water source to satisfy the various needs.

#### **II. Background**

The COE, Bonneville Power Administration, and the (BOR) are the Federal Action Agencies involved in the operation of the 13 dams and reservoirs. The reservoirs were authorized for a variety of purposes, including flood control, generation of electricity, recreation, and municipal and industrial (M & I) water supply. Recreational use at many of the reservoirs is significant and releases provide instream benefits for fish, wildlife, navigation and water quality. The two water right certificates for the entire conservation pool are held by the BOR for irrigation, although only a small percentage is under contract.

In 1996, state and federal agencies initiated the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study. The study analyzed a variety of water uses in the basin, and identified potential ways to allocate the stored water. The Reservoir Study was suspended in 2000 following the listing of Willamette River fish species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The partners in the Reservoir Study agreed that long-term decisions regarding allocation of the reservoir storage could not be completed until requirements for listed species were clarified.

In July 2008 the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) completed consultation with the Federal Action Agencies on the impact of the Willamette River Basin Project on species listed for protection under the ESA through issuance of a Biological Opinion (BiOp). One of the Reasonable and Prudent Actions under the Willamette Valley Project BiOp involves actions dealing with flow management, including protecting minimum stream flows with instream water rights in tributaries and the mainstem.

### **III. Discussion:**

COE operation and planning activities in the Willamette Basin are ongoing. Funding for major activities of the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study is limited. The COE, in response to a request from municipal interests, is in the process of writing a white paper that will outline allocation of 499 ac ft of stored water to municipal use and how to access stored water for M&I purposes.

Concurrently, the COE is actively working on the Reasonable and Prudent Actions required by the BiOp. One action involves a change of character of use transfer for the water rights certificates for the project from irrigation to multi-purpose storage. The possibility of a water right transfer application being filed for instream use has raised concerns on the part of municipal and agricultural communities.

Under the BiOp, the flows required for species restoration are yet to be determined under one of the Reasonable and Prudent Actions. Although the BiOp identifies minimum flows at Albany and Salem, uncertainty of the flows to be determined under the BiOp has raised concerns about the future availability of stored water for other uses.

The Department convened discussions with the COE and stakeholders about water needs and how the stored water could meet those needs. At the most recent meeting hosted by the COE's Portland District office, the COE committed to defer filing the water right transfer application until a later date when more information is available.

### **IV. Summary**

No action is required, this item is for information only. A panel will discuss how they see the water needs in the Willamette Basin, and possible next steps to addressing those needs. Panel participants consist of Todd Heidgerken, Manager, Community and Intergovernmental Relations, Tualatin Valley Water District – representing the Oregon Water Utilities Council; Joe Hobson, Attorney – representing the Oregon Farm Bureau; and Laura Hicks, Planning and Project Management Chief – representing the Portland District of the Corps of Engineers.

Attachment 1: Use of Willamette Storage

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