



# Oregon

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Water Resources Commission

**FROM:** Tom Paul, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item B, January 26, 2012  
Water Resources Commission Work Session

### **Update on Willamette Basin Reservoir Study**

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

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Water Resources Department (Department) are partners in a general investigation of the reservoirs operated by USACE in Willamette Basin. The Willamette Reservoir Study began in 1996 and is a cooperative cost-shared study with the USACE. Funding for the study has been provided by the federal government, the State of Oregon, and more than 60 cities, special districts, organizations and commercial and industrial firms. The study has been on hold since 2000 due to federal consultation related to several fish species that have been listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

#### **II. Background**

The thirteen federal reservoirs in the middle and upper Willamette Basin were authorized for construction beginning in the late 1930s. The dams were built from 1941 to 1969 (Fern Ridge Dam was rebuilt in 2005). The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) filed water right applications in 1954 and 1968 for the storage of more than 1.6 million acre-feet for irrigation. The projects provide important benefits of flood control, electricity generation and water storage. Recreational use at many of the reservoirs is significant and releases provide instream benefits for fish, wildlife, navigation and water quality. Only a small percentage of the total storage is currently under contract for irrigation.

Adoption of the Instream Water Rights Act in 1987 established a process to convert minimum perennial streamflows (MPSF). Total MPSF greatly exceed the quantity of water stored behind the USACE's Dams. The Water Resources Commission in June of 1992 directed staff to determine if the MPSF accurately represent the flows needed. In 2001, the Instream Water Rights Statute (ORS 537.346) was modified to require showing the methodology used to determine the flows being requested for protection. The Willamette Reservoir Study that began in 1996 was the process to develop this information.

### **III. Discussion**

The Department and USACE continue to maintain a strong relationship. The Department is the lead state agency for coordination of annual reservoir management and submits comments to the USACE on the annual Willamette Operation plan.

The Willamette Reservoir Study was suspended in 2000 pending the issuance of the Willamette Basin Biological Opinion (BiOp). Although limited budgets have slowed progress since 2000, ongoing efforts have been occurring resulting in several work products:

- 2000 Willamette Reservoir Study Interim Report  
[http://www.wrd.state.or.us/OWRD/docs/Interim\\_Report.pdf](http://www.wrd.state.or.us/OWRD/docs/Interim_Report.pdf)
- 2001 Willamette Reservoir Update  
[http://www.wrd.state.or.us/OWRD/docs/Res\\_Study\\_Update\\_2001.pdf](http://www.wrd.state.or.us/OWRD/docs/Res_Study_Update_2001.pdf)
- 2008 Southern Willamette Municipal Water Providers report  
<http://www.wrd.state.or.us/OWRD/LAW/owsci2008grantee.shtml>
- 2008 – to present, Department staff participate in key recovery plan committees
- 2011 Small Scale Water Supply Allocation Process white paper  
[http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/docs/d\\_willamette/Willamette\\_Water\\_Allocation\\_Jan2011.pdf](http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/docs/d_willamette/Willamette_Water_Allocation_Jan2011.pdf)

The BiOp has implications for water supply and reservoir management in that more water required to meet fish needs may result in less water available to meet other needs such as municipal, industrial and recreation. Collaborative efforts to manage the system are necessary to reach a multiple purpose goal with species recovery at its core. The Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Team led by the USACE has completed a scientific assessment of flow needs for fish in the Santiam River system. This data will be valuable in the eventual conversion of the MPSF with stored water components.

Many of the participants involved in the Willamette Reservoir Study continue to be engaged, meeting both with the USACE and Department. They are seeking funding to enable the USACE and Department to resume the study. They view this activity as a way to meet water needs for all purposes without costly adversarial legal proceedings.

The Department and the USACE are working together to understand the relationship between the actions under the BiOp and products that would apply to the Willamette Reservoir Study and other actions of the Department. An example of this work is the analysis of municipal demand and the Small Scale Water Supply Allocation Process white paper. For reallocations up to 499 acre-feet, the local District has delegated approval authority.

### **IV. Summary**

The major challenge of the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study will be to identify ways to balance competing demands and help meet future water needs in the valley, while retaining those aspects of current operations. Although the delay has been much longer than originally anticipated, the study remains the main vehicle for identifying long-term demands for water stored. Department and ACOE are working with stakeholders and others to re-start the Reservoir Study discussions despite limitations of

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funding.

**V. Recommendation**

This is an informational item, no action is needed.

Attachments: 1) Key Willamette Basin Dates  
2) Small Scale Water Supply Allocation Process white paper

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