

washingtonpost.com

U.S. Orders Modification of Klamath River Dams

Removal May Prove More Cost-Effective

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, January 31, 2007; A03

SEATTLE, Jan. 30 -- In a decision that could trigger the largest dam-removal project in world history, the federal government said today that four hydroelectric dams on the troubled Klamath River must undergo costly modifications to allow passage for salmon.

Since modifying the aging dams would cost an estimated \$300 million, removing them has suddenly become a much more plausible -- and considerably cheaper -- option for their owner, PacifiCorp, a company owned by Warren E. Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

Removing the dams would cost \$101 million less than modifying them as ordered by federal agencies, according to a recent report written for the California Energy Commission.

Although a number of dams across the United States and around the world have been removed or scheduled for removal in recent years, federal officials say they know of no other river in the world for which the removal of four hydroelectric dams is under review.

If the dams were removed, the Klamath, which straddles the Oregon-California border, has extraordinary potential to rebound as a major salmon resource, according to fish biologists and regional officials. They say a revival could dramatically improve commercial and sport fisheries along the coasts of Oregon and Northern California.

The Klamath once supported the third-largest runs of salmon on the West Coast. But in the more than eight decades since it was dammed, it has become one of the most fought-over rivers in the West -- with massive fish kills, blooms of algae, angry irrigators, litigious environmentalists and Indian tribes whose diet and culture have been substantially damaged by the disappearance of salmon. Biologists blame the dams as a contributing factor to the near shutdown last summer of commercial salmon fishing along 700 miles of the Oregon-California coastline.

The four dams produce electricity for about 70,000 customers. The power is worth about \$29 million a year, according to the California Energy Commission.

"The Klamath is a degraded system, but it is uniquely restorable," said David Diamond, an analyst with the Interior Department. "These dams are the only barriers to fish passage from the headwaters to the Pacific. The watershed is 80 percent under federal ownership and it doesn't have major cities or other development that prevents the return of healthy salmon runs."

For years, pressure to remove the four Klamath dams has come from Indian tribes, conservation groups and commercial fishermen. But in a move that surprised many environmentalists, the Bush

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/30/AR2007013001757_p... 1/31/2007

THE POWER TO
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

RED MOTORAZR™ V3m
\$29.99 after mail-in rebate.
Offer ends February 17th.

Show now >

Together with MICHELLE

administration -- through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service -- concluded last year that dam removal would be best for salmon.

The issue has been forced on PacifiCorp because federal licenses for the dams, the oldest of which was completed in 1918, are up for renewal. The Portland, Ore., power company had proposed that it be allowed to trap and haul salmon around its dams as a way to revive the river's salmon fishery.

But the joint announcement by the Interior Department and NOAA rejects that proposal. As a necessary condition for obtaining a new federal license, they said that PacifiCorp must build costly fish ladders and other fish-passage devices at each of the dams on the Klamath.

"We are disappointed," said Dave Kvamme, a spokesman for PacifiCorp. "We are looking for an outcome that best serves our customers. We are going to have to look at costs and risks."

In three other license-renewal cases, PacifiCorp has agreed to remove dams from Western rivers. The company, too, has participated for more than two years in confidential negotiations with other Klamath River stakeholders in what to do about reviving the health of the river.

"We have never ruled out dam removal as one potential outcome," Kvamme said, while adding that his company urgently needs to create more electricity generation and regards the dams as "an extremely valuable resource."

Buffett, whose holdings include PacifiCorp, is a major shareholder in The Washington Post.

In the six Western states where PacifiCorp sells electricity, the company would need to secure the approval of public utility commissions to raise electricity rates to recover the cost of demolishing or modifying the Klamath dams.

Because removing the dams would be cheaper than modifying them, there will be strong pressure on PacifiCorp from the commissions to get rid of them, said Steve Rothert, director of the California field office of American Rivers, an environmental group involved in negotiations over the dams.

"It is in their ratepayers' interest to remove the dams and replace the power," Rothert said.

Kvamme said PacifiCorp has not yet determined whether modifying the dams would be less expensive in the long run than taking them out.

© 2007 The Washington Post Company

Attract leads & protect yourself from fraud with Google Checkout

U.S. Orders Modification of Klamath River Dams

1. The focus of the story is on how best to raise salmon populations in the Klamath River. The dams that were built on the river have caused a massive decline in salmon populations since they were built, leading to many problems; economical, social, and ecological. The controversy is whether it would be more beneficial for the four hydroelectric dams to be removed or have each dam undergo modifications to allow salmon to pass through the dams. If neither of these options passes, a third proposal was to trap and haul salmon around the dams to revive the river's salmon fishery.
2. The story is related to fish ecology because it portrays one of the many impacts that humans have on the environment and the trade-offs that federal agencies and public companies make with the environment. The lack of salmon downstream from these dams has caused many ecological problems such as fish kills and algal blooms.
3. This issue affects many different groups. All organism found in the river are affected by these algal blooms and lack of predator/prey that the salmon bring. On the human level, this most directly affects Indian tribes who have culturally been affected by the loss of salmon as it is a key element of their diet. It also affects irrigators who are concerned with the quality of the water from the river. If the decision is passed that the dams will be removed, this will affect the residents of the area who receive power from the electricity that the dams produce.
4. The socioeconomic issue here is to see if it is worth keeping the dams and modifying them for salmon passage so that customers in the region still get power from the dams or remove the dams and find alternative sources of energy to replace it.
5. The story seems to be accurate and unbiased. Both arguments are presented equally with key issues outlined. The only bias shown is a statement that the owner of the company PacifiCorp that owns the dams is also a major shareholder in the Washington Post where the article was found.
6. A knowledge of the amount of salmon needed to revive the river would be necessary for all options except dam removal. If modifications were going to occur a knowledge of the capabilities that salmon have for using fish ladders or other passages over the dams.
7. A fish ecologist could help resolve this issue by making known the amount of modifications needed to be done to each dam to get the required amount of salmon over the dam. This would help to come to a decision that is most cost effective.