

Committed to the
environmental and
economic well being
of our community

Lake
Roosevelt
Forum

SUMMER 2004

NEWS *letter*

Columbia River Initiative May Mean Summer Drawdown for Lake Roosevelt

The Columbia River Initiative is an ambitious proposal put forth by the State of Washington. The goal is to balance the complex equation of meeting water supply demands for the economy and growing communities of the Columbia Basin with the needs of fish and a healthy watershed.

The proposed Initiative seeks to make additional water available to these users by aggressively pursuing water conservation and acquisition of water rights. Even with these efforts, however, farmers and growing municipalities would lack the certainty of water being available whenever needed. In the jargon of water law, this is called uninterruptible water rights. To achieve uninterruptible water rights, this Initiative also uses the Columbia River as a resource.

Acquisition of water to support new out-of-stream uses will include actions that modify operations of existing storage facilities, and a significant effort intended to begin to explore new storage capacity in the basin. One possibility includes drawing Lake Roosevelt down by one foot in July and August.

LOOKING UPSTREAM TO LAKE ROOSEVELT

The need to look upstream to Lake Roosevelt results from the State attempting to balance the environmental and economic studies they requested to support development of this Initiative.

The National Research Council provided the State an analysis of environmental effects. Specifically, the Council's study focused "...on the implications of potential additional water withdrawals (which would be primarily for irrigated agriculture) from the mainstem Columbia River on salmon survival."

The National Research Council found the Columbia River salmon populations to be at 10 percent of historical levels and facing increasing risks resulting from temperature and water development in the future. The report concluded that there is substantial additional risk associated with new water withdrawals, particularly in the summer months. Specifically, "The conversion of water rights to uninterruptible status will decrease flexibility of the system during critical periods of low flows and comparatively high water temperatures. Conversions to uninterruptible rights, during these critical periods, are not recommended."

The University of Washington provided the State a study "...to review the economic effects of increased water use from the Columbia River in the context of Washington State's Columbia River Initiative (CRI)."

This study concluded that "...that agricultural production will increase with the new water allocations to generate between \$349.6 and \$779 million in gross revenue and between \$11.5 and \$43.7 in net revenue to farms." Further, "... we estimate that the loss of hydropower



**November 15 - 17
2004**

**The Davenport Hotel
Spokane, Washington**

www.lrf.org/conf

**PROGRAM AND
REGISTRATION ENCLOSED**

associated with an increased water withdrawal of 1 MAF will amount to \$18.4 million for typical water years.”

To alleviate present and future environmental risks identified by the National Research Council, the State framed the new water management program for the mainstem in a manner that would require the State to find 3 buckets of new water for every 2 buckets allocated to new water rights. One potential source of new water is a drawdown of Lake Roosevelt by up to an additional foot by September 1st.

In addition to Lake Roosevelt, other options for increasing water supply while maintaining the 3-in/2-out ratio include increasing water releases from Canadian storage projects, developing new storage projects, and studying operations at Potholes reservoir. In total, the State is seeking to produce an additional 750,000 acre-feet of water over the next 20 years to support its water management goals.

EFFECTS ON LAKE ROOSEVELT

The state has been consulting with the Spokane Tribe of Indians, the Colville Confederated Tribes, the Bureau of Reclamation and others regarding environmental and economic effects to Lake Roosevelt.

Historically, the Bureau of Reclamation has maintained a lake elevation of 1280 or above from no later than the fourth of July through the summer. The only exception occurs when late August releases of water are needed to support downstream salmon migration. For the six to eight hundred thousand visitors that enjoy Lake Roosevelt during the summer, this commitment is critical. The University of Washington did not review economic impacts to surrounding communities if this commitment changed. Implementation of this Initiative could endanger this commitment.

Both the Spokane and Colville tribes are deeply engaged in developing a robust fishery and assuring water quality for Lake Roosevelt. The Spokane Tribe has worked with EPA to develop Lake Roosevelt TMDL standards for temperature and total dissolved gas (visit <http://www.lrf.org/Environment.html> for details). Currently, water quality and fishery managers from each tribe are closely reviewing the proposed Initiative. Support of this Initiative by one or



both tribes would require tribal council approval. Neither the Colville or Spokane tribal councils have provided this approval.

At a more general level, calls for additional water from Lake Roosevelt are not new. Its reservoir and refill capacity, combined with its upstream location,

make it one of the few places where flexibility in river operations can still be sought. For past proposals, the members of the Lake Roosevelt community have always asked the following question, “If it’s six inches or a foot for this proposal, are we then asked for another six inches or a foot for the next proposal.” As each proposal stands on its own and is driven by different needs and agencies, this question can not be answered. As a result, the community has historically been very leery of supporting additional drawdowns.

NEXT STEPS

Governor Locke has recently decided that the importance of the Columbia River management program requires the active involvement of the Legislature. As a result, he will be presenting a package, including policy legislation, a draft rule, a significant budget, and water agreements for consideration by the Legislature in January of 2005. He has further directed staff to actively pursue water agreements in support of the management program.

Adoption of this legislation and rule would give the state authority to implement the policies developed as a part of the Columbia River Initiative. Actual reductions of Lake Roosevelt water levels to support the Initiative would still require the state to reach agreements with the Bureau of Reclamation, the Colville Confederated Tribes and Spokane Indian Tribe. In addition, applicable federal and tribal environmental regulations must be met.

Prior to adopting a final rule in 2005, the Department of Ecology is required to conduct formal public hearings. The Forum strongly encourages people to attend these meetings and voice their opinion regarding this Initiative. To learn more about this Initiative and when/where these meetings will be held, go to Ecology’s Columbia River Initiative web site www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cri/crihome.html. You can also call (360) 407-6640. *

FORUM SPONSORS

Bonneville Power Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation
Lincoln County
National Park Service
Spokane Tribe of Indians
Stevens County
Washington Department of Ecology