

ODFW seeks comment on proposals to waive fish passage on Malheur and Powder rivers

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SALEM, Ore. -- The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is seeking public comment on two fish passage waiver requests at the Warm Springs and Mason dams in eastern Oregon. In both cases, proposed hydroelectric projects have triggered Oregon's fish passage laws.

At the Warm Springs Dam on the Middle Fork Malheur River near Juntura, the Warm Springs Irrigation District (WID) has applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct a hydroelectric project at the existing dam.

In lieu of providing fish passage at Warm Springs Dam, WID proposes fish passage improvements at the Dryer Diversion, located on the Malheur River 39 miles upstream of Warm Springs Dam.

ODFW has made an initial determination that the mitigation proposed by WID would provide a net benefit to migratory fish compared to providing passage at Warm Springs Dam. Species that would benefit include bull trout, a federally threatened species, redband trout, a state sensitive species, and other native migratory species that are currently distributed upstream and downstream of Warm Springs Dam including northern pikeminnow, largescale and bridgelip suckers, and mountain whitefish.

At the Mason Dam on the Powder River near Baker City, the Baker County has applied to FERC to construct a hydroelectric project at the existing Mason Dam.

In lieu of providing fish passage at Mason Dam, Baker County proposes to replace a culvert on Silver Creek and improve fish passage conditions at a culvert on McCully Fork, both located upstream of Phillips Reservoir.

ODFW has made an initial determination that the mitigation proposed by Baker County would provide a net benefit to native migratory fish compared to providing passage at Mason Dam for bull trout, redband trout, northern pikeminnow, and largescale, mountain and bridgelip suckers.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission can waive the fish passage requirements if proposed mitigation would provide a net benefit to migratory fish. The Commission will be asked to approve waivers for these projects at its Jan. 10, 2014 meeting in Salem.

In the meantime, members of the public will have until Dec. 9, 2013 to submit written comments on the proposed plans.

Members of the public can send written comments to or request additional information from Elizabeth Moats, ODFW Hydropower Coordinator, 107 20th Street, La Grande, Oregon 97850, or e-mail Elizabeth.A.OsierMoats@state.or.us, or by calling (541)-962-1832. Written comments must be received by Dec. 9, 2013.

There also will be an opportunity for public comment at the Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting on Jan. 10, 2014 at ODFW headquarters in Salem.

The waiver applications, ODFW's benefit analyses, and the draft waiver agreements can be found on the ODFW Fish Division Web site at <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/passage/>.

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