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## Flores hopes fish plan sticks

*Key decision due Sept. 15*

By Kathy Ursprung

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Terry Flores is hoping the third time will be the charm for the Northwest Salmon Plan.

The plan, which has been the subject of litigation in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge James Redden since 2000, has been through three plan iterations under three presidential administrations. Flores, the executive director of Northwest River Partners, hopes this time the plan will stick — both with the administration and the judge. She has a lot of Northwest people hoping along with her. Her organization's membership includes a wide swath of Northwest power utilities, Columbia River ports, farmers and river-based industry.

The plan, also known as the biological opinion, or bi-op, includes two parts: a scientific discussion of the problems salmon face in survival on the Columbia River system and the actions, or measures intended to improve their survival rates.

The outcome of the administration review and any subsequent decision by Redden can be expected to have a big impact on another interest group: utility customers.

At Northern Wasco County PUD in The Dalles, for example, about \$21 out of every \$100 billed goes toward fish and wildlife recovery efforts, according Dwight Langer, PUD executive director. That totals about \$5 million a year out of the pockets of local utility customers.

For all Northwest utility customers over the life of the salmon plan, the figure is between \$10 billion and \$12 billion.

Flores hopes Judge Redden will be thinking about those people when he makes his decision on the salmon plan.

"What he's putting in motion is driving up real people's power bills, dampening economic development and hurting communities," Flores said in a recent interview. "I think [that fact is] sometimes easy to get lost in that you have federal agencies in front of you defending the plan in the courtroom."

Flores advocate for multiple river uses on behalf of her membership, including fish and wildlife, renewable hydropower, agriculture, flood control, commerce and recreation.

"We believe that limited resources require salmon recovery efforts to be cost effective, based in the best science, and that responsible policies will lead to increased salmon runs and increased economic opportunity for the entire Northwest," their mission statement reads.

The organization supports the 2008 biological opinion.

"We think this plan is solid in its science approach and the investment is unprecedented," Flores said. That investment includes an additional \$100 million a year over what has been being contributed to

implement state and tribal agreements related to habitat and hatcheries.

Flores had praise for the process used in developing the plan, which was a “sovereigns’ process” involving states, federal agencies and the tribes.” Other organizations, including current opponents of the plan, also had an opportunity to participate, she said.

“It really irks me that we have some outliers who suggested there wasn’t collaboration,” Flores said. “They had ample opportunity to participate and they did participate in the process.”

Flores is hopeful regarding the participation of one Oregonian in the review process. Dr. Jane Lubchenco, late of Oregon State University, is now the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and will be reviewing the plan on behalf of the Obama Administration. She is a noted environmental scientist and marine ecologist.

“She is a noted fisheries person and I think she will be impressed with the science,” Flores said.

As results of that review loom, one of Flores’ biggest concerns is the subject of Snake River dam removal. She strongly questioned the need, considering measures already taken.

“All eight dams [on the Columbia-Snake system] now have improved fish passage and survival rates of 95 to 98 percent — and that’s come right from Northwest family and business pocketbooks,” Flores said.

She points to this year’s improved fish runs as evidence that the dams may not be the key factor.

“Scientists think a lot is driven by ocean conditions,” she said. The river system is seeing record runs of steelhead now, as well as sockeye. “Spring and summer Chinook didn’t come in as high as forecast, but are still about the 10-year averages,” she said. “We’re seeing an incredible year for fish returns.”

Flores said the regional economy and climate change would both be adversely affected by dam removal.

“Taking those dams out would, according to the Northwest Power Planning Council, add 4½ million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere annually,” Flores said, as natural gas was substituted for hydropower.

Removal of dams would also reduce the hydrosystem’s ability to stabilize wind power, a key factor in wind development.

The issue of Northwest dam removal is being pushed as part of a broader agenda by environmental interests to see dam removal nationwide.

“It’s a massive, nationwide campaign,” Flores said, while opposition to dam removal is largely based within the Pacific Northwest. “These are big dollars that are coming into their campaign. Frankly, the Snake River dams are a prime target, because they help advance the dam removal agenda nationwide.”

Harvest is another key issue for Northwest River Partners, Flores said.

“We’re not at all antiharvest, not a bit,” Flores said. But they are concerned about the harvests allowed on seriously endangered fish runs, such as the sockeye salmon.

“Gill nets don’t distinguish between wild and hatchery fish,” Flores said. River Partners advocates moving toward more selective fishing methods.