



December 8, 2023

The Honorable Judge Marco A. Hernandez  
Mark O. Hatfield United States Courthouse # 1507  
1000 SW Third Ave  
Portland, Oregon 97204

Subject: Concerns Regarding Reservoir Drawdowns in Willamette System

Dear Judge Hernandez:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper (WR), I am writing you today to express concerns about the deep and rapid drawdown of Green Peter Reservoir. As one of the organizations that sued the US Army Corps in 2007 because of its lack of action to recover listed fish, and settled the suit in 2008 resulting in the Biological Opinion - recovery of Spring Chinook and Winter Steelhead has been very important to us for many years.

We have the following concerns about the recent drawdown:

- a) It would seem that the significant amount of turbidity in the S. Santiam River could have been predicted, especially based on other historic drawdowns in the Willamette Basin. While the US Army Corps has a big role in the drawdown, negative impacts could have also been considered by those crafting the actions stemming from the most recent lawsuit. This could have included additional consideration of every ecological variable related to such a drawdown.
- b) The impact on local communities in terms of time and effort to maintain clean and safe drinking water has been immense. It would seem that the Federal Government should have a role in aiding these communities for the increased effort to maintain useable drinking water. The Corps and others should likely have considered these impacts in the overall approach.

- c) Impacts to private landowners have also been significant, with multiple accounts of wells being affected by the drawdown. These too, if validated, should have been considered in the overall drawdown plan.
- d) WR also believes that such a fast and massive drawdown could have negative impacts on other native species in the S. Santiam, such as freshwater mussels, and other invertebrates. Consideration of the range of species that call the S. Santiam and whole river system home should be paramount, and it seems possible that such consideration of the potential impacts of a large and fast drawdown may not have occurred.
- e) We also believe that pre and post drawdown monitoring of ecological conditions in the river below the dam is important. Did either of these occur?

We have witnessed prior drawdowns over the years and do believe that they have their place in a river system that has been highly manipulated, in order to help recover native fish. In addition to significant habitat restoration and other measures throughout the basin, such drawdowns may indeed help recover native fish.

More than any organization, Willamette Riverkeeper believes we must do more for native fish and all such wildlife in the Willamette River system. At the same time, we must be cognizant of potential unintended consequences that, over time, have the potential to make the overall job of salmon recovery harder for all of us.

This includes impacts on local communities. People in such communities should be pulling for the health of the river system, instead of being subject to actions that only make working together for the common good more difficult over time.

With these points in mind, it may be worth reconsidering how the US Army Corps approaches any future drawdowns, with additional opportunity for organizations and the local community to weigh in on the path forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Travis Williams, Riverkeeper & Executive Director