



The Enterprise

220 Jewett Blvd, PO Box 218, White Salmon, WA 98672, Phone: 509.493.2112

PacifiCorp seeks final permits for dam removal *To start in October 2009*

Jesse Burkhardt

PacifiCorp, which owns and operates Condit Dam, is in the final stages of obtaining the permits needed to allow removal of the hydropower facility. Tom Gauntt, a spokesman for PacifiCorp, said the Portland-based utility is targeting October 2009 as the date to formally decommission the dam, which is on the White Salmon River about three miles upstream from the Columbia River. Gauntt said several permits are still necessary before PacifiCorp can move forward with taking out the dam, which was built in 1913. "Other things have to come first, and until you have them, you don't have them," Gauntt said. In a Sept. 9 letter to Secretary Kimberly Bose of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, PacifiCorp stated that it would need nine months after obtaining the needed permits before decommissioning activities can begin. "PacifiCorp is hopeful that it can obtain final permits and a Commission Surrender Order in time to allow dam removal to commence in October 2009," wrote Todd Olson, program manager for PacifiCorp. PacifiCorp documents show that the following permits are still needed before the dam could be removed: a 401 Water Quality Certificate from the Washington Department of Ecology; a 404 Dredge & Fill Permit for In-Water Work from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; biological opinions from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries; and assorted county permits. "For something this big, there are not too many loose ends left. We just need them lined up in the right order," explained Gauntt. "We're on track; it's just which order the train cars are." To remove the dam, PacifiCorp plans to blow a hole about 15 feet across at the base of the dam. Once that is done, engineers believe Northwestern Lake -- the reservoir behind the dam -- will drain in a matter of several hours. PacifiCorp's experts believe there are about 2.3 million cubic yards of debris and silt backed up behind the dam, and that material would flow down the White Salmon River and into the Columbia River once the dam is breached. Once the mud and silt clears from the river system -- a process that could take months and perhaps years -- the river is expected to offer more than two miles of reopened spawning habitat for salmon. In preparation for the anticipated removal of the dam, U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFW) officials recently released a total of 418 tule fall Chinook salmon above Condit Dam. "It's really an effort to test capture methods and work out issues prior to when the dam is removed. We're

going through the entire process," explained Rod Engle, fisheries biologist for USFW in Vancouver. Officially, the study is a pilot project designed to evaluate capture methods, transport pre-spawning tule fall Chinook salmon, and to gain an understanding of their spawning habits in the White Salmon River above Northwestern Lake before removal of the dam. Engle said the agency expects Condit Dam to come out in early October of 2009, and is moving the fish as part of efforts to preserve salmon runs on the White Salmon River. Because sediment released from the lake behind dam would bury eggs in the river below Condit Dam, the collection of adults prior to its removal is required by the NOAA Fisheries Biological Opinion. "Most of our efforts will be focused in September (2009)," Engle said. "We'll grab those fish and move them above Condit." Thirty-six of the salmon released over the last three weeks carried radio tags so they could be tracked. "Most were spawning above Northwestern Lake and up to Husum," Engle said. According to Engle, the young salmon spawned in 2009 would migrate out in 2010. "The fish, which by then would be about three inches long, would go out in April and May. The passage should be pretty good by then and sediment wouldn't block them. They should be fine," he said. Engle said flushing out of the lake wouldn't impact the salmon. "If they are spawning upriver, there shouldn't be any effects," Engle explained. White Salmon Mayor David Poucher said he has one overriding concern when it comes to the issue of whether Condit Dam is removed. "PacifiCorp has to guarantee our water pipeline," Poucher said. "The city has a 14-inch line that feeds our water customers on both sides of the White Salmon River. PacifiCorp has to get us a pipeline under, around, or through, however they want to do it." Poucher pointed out that the pipeline rests on the bottom of Northwestern Lake, covered by mud and silt, and if the dam is removed, the scouring effect would almost certainly tear out that water pipeline. "Whatever they do they have to make sure we have our water. They can't cut us off," Poucher said. Gauntt confirmed that discussions are ongoing regarding the relocation of the city of White Salmon's water supply line, as well as protecting an agricultural water intake for Mount Adams Orchard. Gauntt said PacifiCorp representatives also met with county officials on Sept. 19. "The main topics were the bridge over the White Salmon and how its stability can be assured after the reservoir is removed, and the status of the various county permits that we have filed," Gauntt explained. "County officials reiterated that their priority is that no taxpayer money is spent on the decommissioning project. We understand that." Dam removal has become a campaign issue in local races, and in particular for the two Klickitat County Commission seats that will be up for grabs in the fall. Incumbent County Commissioner Rex Johnston, a Republican, said he strongly disagreed with efforts to remove a viable power generating facility. However, he pointed out that whether the dam is removed is not a decision the county gets to make. "What happens to that dam is up to the federal government, it's not up to us," Johnston said in a

recent campaign event. But Johnston made clear that PacifiCorp must be responsible for any and all costs of cleanup if the dam comes out.