



STATEMENT SUPPORTING THE REMOVAL OF GOLD RAY DAM

Summary. Gold Ray Dam is a 38-foot high, 360 foot long dam that spans the mainstem of Oregon's internationally famous Rogue River at river mile 125.7. Gold Ray Dam was constructed in 1904 to generate power. The original dam was a wood crib dam of about 33 feet in height. In 1941 it was replaced by a concrete dam that was constructed immediately downstream. Gold Ray Dam was operated as a hydroelectric facility until 1972 when it was closed permanently, and transferred to Jackson County. The dam does not serve any function for Jackson County, is a significant barrier to salmon, steelhead, and other migratory fishes, is a maintenance burden, is a liability risk, and poses public safety concerns for Jackson County. The dam also blocks boat traffic, thereby limiting access to the Rogue River and run-of-the-river recreational opportunities on the river. Dam removal will permanently solve Jackson County's liability and public safety concerns; will benefit salmon, steelhead, resident cutthroat trout and Pacific lamprey; will open up run of the river recreational opportunities from Lost Creek Dam to the Pacific Ocean; and will bring short and long term economic benefits to the region.

Reasons for Removal.

1. Fishery Reasons.

- Gold Ray Dam has been identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as fifth in priority for removal and/or fish passage improvement on Oregon's Statewide Fish Passage Priority List.
- The Rogue Basin Fish Access Technical Team (RBFATT) has identified approximately 1,200 fish passage barriers in the Rogue Basin and ranked them based on adverse impacts to fish passage. On completion of Savage Rapids Dam removal this fall, Gold Ray Dam will be the highest priority fish passage barrier in the Rogue River Basin and will be the only remaining barrier in a 157 mile reach of the mainstem of the Rogue River from Lost Creek Dam to the Pacific Ocean.
- The single ladder at the dam does not meet current standards, has poor attraction flows, and is impassable during certain high flow situations. Fish passage at the ladder is also vulnerable to trees and debris. Damage to the ladder or the dam could jeopardize fish passage for extended periods of time. Delays and injuries to returning adults reduce spawning success.
- Gold Ray Dam impedes fish passage to 333 miles of high quality salmon and steelhead-spawning habitat upstream of Gold Ray Dam, including 30 miles on the mainstem of the Rogue River.
- Significant portions of all five runs of salmon and steelhead in the Rogue Basin must navigate Gold Ray Dam as adults and juveniles. This includes Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast(SONCC) Coho salmon Evolutionary Significant Unit, listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act on June 28, 2005 (70 FR 37160[previously listed on May 6, 1997, 62 FR 24588]) as well



as spring and fall Chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead. The dam also adversely affects Pacific lamprey, resident cutthroat trout, and smallscale Klamath suckers.

- All spring Chinook salmon spawn upstream of the dam and they are in decline.
- The majority of the Upper Rogue River population of SONCC coho salmon must pass the Gold Ray Dam. The Southwest Oregon Habitat Conservation Division Branch of the NMFS considers the removal of Gold Ray Dam an important next step in restoring safe fish passage for the Upper Rogue River SONCC coho salmon population.
- Two of the most important spawning tributaries for the listed SONCC coho salmon in the Rogue basin are Elk Creek and Little Butte Creek , both of which located upstream of Gold Ray Dam. Elk Creek Dam located on Elk Creek was breached this year, thus removing it as a major impediment to fish passage in this tributary. However, all fish destined for Elk Creek must still navigate Gold Ray Dam.
- The dam inundates 1.5 miles of mainstem spawning habitat for Chinook salmon upstream of the dam.
- The dam hinders gravel recruitment downstream that may adversely affect fall Chinook spawning habitat downstream of the dam.
- There is also increased predation of juvenile salmon and steelhead in the reservoir created by the dam, including predation by non-native warmwater species (e.g. largemouth bass and bullfrogs). Dam removal would permanently eliminate these problems.
- Dams concentrate fish and make them more susceptible to predation and poaching. Last year during a particularly poor run of spring Chinook salmon, poaching was documented at the dam site.
- Safe passage for anadromous fish is an important habitat component to ensure thriving and sustainable populations survive for future generations. Removal of Gold Ray Dam will permanently solve the fish passage problems at the dam, and eliminate the other adverse impacts it causes to salmon and steelhead.

2. Recreational Reasons.

- The dam blocks boat passage. After the removal of Savage Rapids Dam, the only remaining dam on the mainstem of the Rogue River for 157 miles from the Lost Creek Dam to the Pacific Ocean will be Gold Ray Dam. The removal of Gold Ray Dam will provide 157 miles of free-flowing Rogue River, creating additional angling and recreational opportunities.
- With dam removal the public will be able to float from Touvelle Park and take-out downstream of the current dam site, increasing public river access to this 5 mile stretch of river.
- The location of the dam makes it difficult for the public to access approximately 500 acres of publicly owned land adjacent to and upstream of the dam. It would open up bank access to approximately 1.5 mile of the Rogue River.
- An improved fishery resulting from dam removal should increase angling success.

3. Economic Reasons.

- The dam is a non-operating facility that provides no hydro, no water storage and no flood control.
- The dam serves no function for the County, but is a liability and public safety concern for the County. The County has annual maintenance costs at the dam. The County is responsible for removing tress and debris from the fish ladder and the dam.
- The dam is old and the County faces potential costs for addressing future safety concerns that might arise at the dam. Boating accidents have occurred at the dam in the past and lives have been lost.
- The fish ladders do not meet current federal or state criteria for fish passage, and the dam undoubtedly harms ESA listed SONCC coho salmon. As a result the County has a huge potential liability for resolving these problems.
- Dam removal permanently eliminates the liability and public safety concerns for the County and the recent ARRA funding opportunity makes it possible for the County to remove the dam at no cost to the County.
- Unemployment is high in Jackson County and if dam removal proceeds it is estimated to employ 54 people and provide 37,747 labor hours and 18.35 FTE's over the 18 month project period.
- Long-term a healthier Rogue River fishery should improve sport and commercial fishing, increasing its economic value to the region. In addition, increased recreational opportunities on the Rogue River should also have positive economic impacts.

Dam Removal Issues.

1. Sediment.

- The sediment behind the dam is currently being studied. Recent results indicate that there is not a contamination problem and that most of the sediment is sand, gravel and cobble.
- Studies at Savage Rapids Dam and results from other dam removals show that sediment can be allowed to naturally move through the system with minimal adverse impacts. A sediment transport study will be done prior to removal to confirm that this is the case here as well.

2. Fish Counting Station.

- ODFW operates a fish counting station at the dam that will be lost with dam removal. ODFW has made it clear that the loss of the fish counting station is not a reason not to proceed with dam removal. Information is most needed on spring Chinook that all spawn upstream of the dam. ODFW is working on other means to track spring Chinook populations, including some telemetry work combined with carcass counts.
- The County has applied for a \$750,000 grant to monitor the impacts of Rogue Dam removals. A monitoring plan will be developed that will in part attempt to address the loss of data from the fish counting station.

- It is more important to have more fish to count, than it is to have an accurate count.

3. Upstream Wetlands/Impoundment.

- There are important wetlands and riparian habitat created by the reservoir above the dam that will be diminished with dam removal, but will not be eliminated. A restoration plan will be developed for the reservoir pool to preserve as many of the natural amenities as possible. The habitat upstream will return to that associated with a free-flowing riverine system as it once was, allowing the river to move around in the flood plain creating a diversity of habitat.
- Most flat water recreation and warm water fishing will be eliminated, however some of the slough area may be upstream of the impacts of dam removal. In addition overall public access to the area should improve.

Conclusion. The Rogue River located in Southwestern Oregon is one of the nation's most beloved rivers. It is known for its scenic beauty, world-class whitewater, and internationally renowned salmon and steelhead fishery. It was designated as one of the original "Wild and Scenic Rivers" in 1968. It is one of the few remaining salmon strongholds in the Pacific Northwest. A great deal of work is underway to improve the Rogue River's salmon and steelhead fishery. Most would not even consider building a dam on the Rogue River today for the purpose of constructing a fish counting station or for the purpose of creating wetlands, and likewise one should not keep a dam in place for those purposes. The benefits of removal far outweigh the costs of removal.

The removal of Gold Ray Dam will enhance and compliment the benefits achieved from other Rogue Basin dam removal and habitat restoration projects. Let's not lose this important opportunity to restore and protect the Rogue River and its fishery for today and future generations.

Sincerely,

Bob Hunter
Staff Attorney