

**Lowell City Council
Special Meeting
Thursday, December 7, 2023 at 6:00 pm**

**Lowell City Hall
70 N. Pioneer St.
Lowell, OR 97452**

Special Meeting Agenda

Call to Order/Roll Call/Pledge of Allegiance

Councilors: Mayor Bennett ___ Harris ___ Stratis ___ Weathers ___ Murray ___

Approval of Agenda

New Business

1. Review "Urgent concerns regarding dam drawdowns in Willamette Basin" letter to U.S. District Judge Hernandez prepared by Representative Jami Cate's office. – Discussion/
Possible action

At this time, City Council may vote to approve the letter by signing it and providing the city logo for use on the letter.

Adjourn the Special Meeting.

The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or other accommodations for persons with disabilities must be made at least 48 hours before the meeting to City Clerk Sam Dragt at 541-937-2157.

8 December 2023

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

Subject: Urgent Concerns Regarding Dam Drawdowns in Willamette Basin

Dear U.S. District Judge Hernandez,

We are writing to express the growing concerns within our communities regarding the management of our dams, especially after witnessing the negative impacts of the deep drawdowns at Green Peter Dam and Lookout Point Dam. While we know the full impacts of these drawdowns are still unfolding and may well reveal additional concerns as sediment continues to be carried downstream, what we've witnessed is enough to urge your reconsideration of your management order and to implore you to allow local communities to have a voice in the management decisions of our natural resources.

Over the past few years, the dams in the Willamette Valley have experienced various drawdowns to study the impacts of eliminating hydropower and promoting fish passage, which has raised troubling questions of the long-term goals of these management strategies while causing disruptions that have far-reaching consequences for our communities in the way of water quality, recreation, and economic stability for our region.

Our state prides itself on our concern and regard for the environment, and we are no different. We also understand that your decision was made based on the available knowledge you had at the time. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the eventual outcomes of the drawdowns were more severe than what advocates had led you to believe. The deep drawdowns in particular have left a path of destruction that has outweighed any benefits that they sought to bring.

Though all drawdowns have raised valid concerns, the recent deep drawdowns at Green Peter Dam and Lookout Point Dam have had profound effects on localities such as Lowell, Lebanon, and Sweet Home—impacts so drastic they have garnered wide-spread news coverage as community members share experiences of rivers choked with dead fish, muddy waterways, dried-up wells, tainted water, and loss of economic opportunities. Citizens are rightly outraged as they navigate losses and detriments to their communities when they had no say in these management decisions.

Sweet Home has seen some of the worst consequences, with local businesses reporting a sharp decline in profit since the deep drawdowns occurred due to a loss of tourism. Additionally, the City's three water plant employees worked many 24-hour days in November just to keep up with the drastic turbidity levels threatening Sweet Home's water needs. Even with drastic measures

and extra chemicals to treat the water, citizens are still experiencing tannin-tainted water, which many question the safety of drinking—a far cry from their typical, award-winning, community water supply.

Lebanon is also running its water plant as hard as they can to meet demand, and are having to use roughly four times the normal amount of chemicals to treat the water. There has been over 2.5 feet of silt built up in the membranes' sediment ponds, which speaks volumes to the drastic reduction in longevity the membranes will have before incurring a \$3,000,000 to \$5,000,000 replacement cost for the City. While the Lebanon has still been able to provide water for its inhabitants—albeit barely, it's worth noting that if this level of treatment was required prior to 2018 when the city's new treatment plant came online, Lebanon would not have been able to supply clean water to the community.

Lowell similarly is registering unprecedented levels of sediment in their incoming water supply due to the deep drawdown at Lookout Point Dam. While the City has also been successful in ramping up their treatment processes to supply the water needs of city residents, numerous residents just beyond the city limits depend on wells for water—many of which have run dry due to the drastically lower water levels in the reservoir, forcing residents to spend tens of thousands of dollars each to drill deeper wells. Similar to the drawdown at Green Peter Dam, residents in Lowell have observed a significant increase in the number of deceased fish in the nearby Dexter Reservoir.

Another prime example of negative impacts to tourism comes from Detroit, where reservoir management changes and lowered pool levels have added extra strain as the community's struggles to recover from the devastating destruction of the Labor Day fires of 2020. The need to maintain—if not grow—tourism levels to promote sustained recovery is vital, and shortening the recreation season will only delay meaningful recovery and compromise the effectiveness of the millions of dollars invested for that effort. Marion County is actively pursuing excavation plans to lower marinas as a desperate attempt to mitigate some of the impacts caused by lower pool levels and a shortened recreation season, but even those efforts raise the ire of environmental advocates.

Citizens are being left at the mercy of decisions made by people far removed from our communities; decisions that unilaterally prioritize select needs while ignoring others completely. These decisions are compromising populations of some fish, in the name of trying to save others. To protect some spawning grounds, while disrupting other fish habitat. Reducing a clean and reliable form of energy and water management, while claiming to be for the benefit of the environment. Causing such drastic, and costly impacts for our communities, to perhaps result in a negligible positive impact on a single species of fish. Approaching management decisions like this effectively leaves communities feeling helpless to manage the future of their own resources, and thus our communities themselves.

Exacerbating this frustration is the historic fact that many of our communities have already endured the economic challenge once before from the decline of the dominant industry we've relied on—the loss of timber due to the protection of the spotted owl. Our communities had to reinvent themselves while navigating decimated tax bases, and now face the loss of our new

industry of recreational activities that have become vital for our economies. The tourism sector is threatened not only by these drawdowns, but by the uncertainty of what the future holds for these community resources, jeopardizing the economic outlook for our communities while also sustaining the costs associated with these drawdowns.

All things considered, it is understandable for our communities to feel a growing sense of frustration and disenfranchisement as we face a lack of representation in decisions that directly affect our resources. It is crucial that our voices and the needs of our communities play a role in discussions about the future management of these dams and any associated drawdowns. We believe that community input is essential in crafting effective and sustainable management strategies that balance the needs of both the environment and the people who depend on it.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully request you modify your 2021 order that led to the deep drawdowns of our dams, and prevent these negative effects happening to even more communities around our state. Our communities deserve a seat at the table in the decision-making processes regarding dam management. We believe that collaborative efforts between communities and relevant agencies can lead to more informed and equitable decisions that consider both the wildlife and the people who inhabit the surrounding area.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue to find solutions that benefit our communities and the region as a whole. Thank you for your time and consideration.