

The Oregonian

Report says federal salmon recovery strategy needs 'immediate change.'

By Matthew Preusch, The Oregonian
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Next month, U.S. District Judge James Redden will hear oral arguments in the ongoing lawsuit over the operation of federal dams in the Columbia and Snake rivers and their impact on protected salmon.

Redden's ruling will have broad implications for a national salmon recovery plan that recently came under harsh criticism from a group of retired wildlife managers and salmon experts calling themselves the Council of Elders.

This month, the Elders weighed in on the federal government's salmon recovery strategy. In a word, it's a mess, they say.

"How can a federal agency that's supposed to be following the law here come up with something that's so bad?" asked Jim Martin, salmon adviser to former Gov. John Kitzhaber and one of the report's authors.

The report alleges corruption of the political process, mismanagement and subversion of the Endangered Species Act in the government's salmon recovery effort, which costs hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

"We think the scientists are basically being muzzled," Martin said.

The group recommends a study of the four lower Snake River dams; an audit of the Bonneville Power Administration, which markets power from federal dams and pays for salmon recovery; and incorporating concerns about climate change into salmon recovery.

"Members of the council have been first-hand witnesses to special interests manipulating natural resource science and policies," said Huey D. Johnson, who served as California secretary of resources from 1976-1982 and is founder and president of Resource Renewal Institute, which published the report. "We're now out of government and in positions where we can't be silenced. With a new administration committed to addressing corruption and inefficiency, we believe we can effectively offer our collective knowledge to solve intractable environmental problems, such as the decline of salmon."

The reports ultimate conclusion: only the new Obama administration has the clout to change the course of salmon recovery.

"But the White House will need to act fast or it will be too late for the salmon," Johnson said.

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