# SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Portland District

## Why is USACE writing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement?

In January 2025, the President signed into law the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024. Section 1326 of WRDA prevents us from completing our overall review of operations and maintenance of the system and consultation with federal agencies, until we prepare and formally analyze an alternative that ends federal hydropower operations at the Willamette Valley dams. To do this, we will supplement (add to) the final National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement.

In December 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a new Biological Opinion for the Continued Operation and Maintenance of the Willamette Valley System. The 2024 Biological Opinion requires us to implement a fall drawdown at Detroit Dam for fish passage, deeper than previous drawdowns. We will also analyze the effects of the drawdown in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

## What is the Water Resources Development Act?

The Water Resources Development Act is a legislative package that provides for the conservation and development of water and related resources. It authorizes the Secretary of the Army, through the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, to conduct studies, construct projects, and research activities that can lead to the improvement of rivers and harbors of the United States.

WRDA is strictly authorizing legislation; it does not include funding. The funding of WRDA-authorized studies and projects is provided separately through the annual Energy and Water Development appropriations process and, at times, through other supplemental appropriations.

## When will the Corps hold public meetings for the SEIS?

The Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement public scoping period was May 16 through June 6, 2025. The Corps held two virtual meetings on May 28 and May 29 and two in-person meetings on May 31 in Detroit, OR and June 3 in Salem, OR.

We considered public comments on the scope of the supplemental study including the proposed alternative to cease hydropower operations at Willamette Valley dams and on the deeper fall drawdown to improve fish passage at Detroit Dam.

The Corps will hold a public comment period for the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement November 14 through December 29, 2025. There will be two virtual information session on November 19 and one in-person open houses on December 6 in Detroit, OR and two on December 10 in Salem, Or.

We will consider all public comments including those on the proposed alternative to cease hydropower operations at Willamette Valley dams and on the deeper fall drawdown to improve fish passage at Detroit Dam.

## Is the Corps considering dam removal in the SEIS?

No. Dam removal is not part of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

The Water Resources Development Act of 2024 directed us to evaluate ending hydropower operations at the dams. Congress did not ask us to evaluate changes to the other purposes like flood risk management, recreation, irrigation, municipal & industrial water supply, fish & wildlife, water quality, or navigation. Dam removal would require us to eliminate all purposes.

## Can I give comments during the virtual or in person public meetings?

To ensure all comments are entered into the record, we ask for all comments in writing. For this reason, we will not accept comments during the virtual public scoping meetings on November 19. However, we will provide comment cards and accept written comments during the in-person meetings on December 6 and December 10 People may also submit comments at any time during the scoping period via mail to:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: CENWP-PME-E / Willamette EIS
PO Box 2946, Portland, OR 97208-2946
or to Willamette.EIS@usace.army.mil

We will accept comments from November 14 through December 29, 2025.

# ANALYZING ENDING HYDROPOWER

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Portland District

## Why is the Corps evaluating ending hydropower generation at Willamette Valley dams?

In January 2025, the President signed into law the Water Resources Development Act of 2024. Section 1326 prevents us from completing our overall environmental review of operations and maintenance of the system and consultation with federal agencies until we prepare and formally analyze an alternative that ends federal hydropower operations at the Willamette Valley dams. To do this, we will supplement (add to) the final Environmental Impact Statement required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

## Where is the Corps evaluating ending hydropower generation?

Congress authorized eight Willamette Valley dams for hydropower, and we are evaluating collectively removing hydropower at all of them: Detroit, Big Cliff, Green Peter, Foster, Cougar, Dexter, Lookout Point, and Hills Creek. Although there is a private hydropower facility at Dorena Dam, we will not evaluate removing hydropower there. Congress did not authorize Dorena Dam for federal hydropower; hydropower at Dorena is privately owned and operated.

## Can the Corps end hydropower operations without Congressional action?

No. Congress decides what purposes or functions we operate the dams for, so it is up to Congress to end hydropower operations at the Willamette Valley dams.

## What did the Corps evaluate in the new alternative that ceases hydropower operations in the Supplemental EIS?

We evaluated removing or decommissioning all hydropower infrastructure and reconfiguring the powerhouse systems, replacing the power required to operate the dam and auxiliary facilities, and reconfiguring penstock outlets. Penstocks are the outlets with electricity generating turbines. We propose to continue reservoir refill and drawdown operations for other purposes, such as flood risk management and water supply, and improve water quality and fish passage conditions. In addition, this alternative includes all the operations and structures described in the 2024 National Marine Fisheries Willamette Valley System Biological Opinion to improve fish passage and water quality, such as minimum flow requirements and a downstream fish passage structure at Detroit Dam. We are seeking public input on this proposed alternative as part of the public review of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

## How did the Corps develop the new alternative that ceases hydropower operations proposed for the Supplemental EIS?

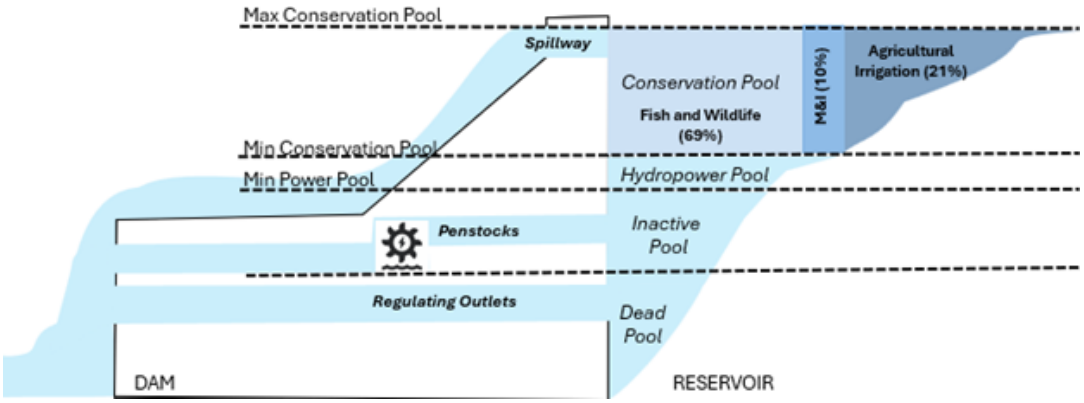
We carefully considered the language in the Water Resources Development Act 2024 directing us to formally analyze an alternative that "ceases hydropower operations" at the Willamette Valley dams. Congress did not direct us to analyze ending other operations, such as for flood risk management and water supply, or dam removal. We also considered dam safety requirements to maintain safe operations and we reviewed the 2024 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Biological Opinion's requirements to comply with the Endangered Species Act by meeting NMFS fish passage criteria. We are seeking the public's comments on this proposed alternative as part of the National Environmental Policy Act public process.

## Could the Corps lower reservoir levels to run-of-river if Congress ends hydropower?

No, we couldn't operate the dams as run of river/down to the streambed. Here's why: Congress would need to direct us to change or cease operating the dams for their other purposes, such as ending operations for water supply or irrigation to hold reservoirs at run of river/streambed elevations. While the Corps has been allowed to drawdown some Willamette Reservoirs for a few weeks each year for downstream fish passage improvement, these operations are carried out in late fall/early winter when impacts to overall storage (and other authorized purposes) are minimal.

Every year, the dams capture water from large water events to reduce the risk of flooding downstream during the winter. Then the reservoirs refill from rain and snowmelt in spring and summer. The Willamette Valley dams can store a lot of water, about 1.6 million acre-feet! The stored water supports fish and wildlife habitat in the reservoir and downstream by maintaining minimum stream flows and water quality; irrigation for farms; drinking water for cities; and boating, fishing, and tourism on the reservoir.

As the dams release water downstream to support many of these needs, that's when they generate hydropower. If hydropower ends, we still need to operate the dams and refill the reservoirs each year to support the other uses. The space reserved for hydropower is just a small part of the total reservoirs' volume.




*Reservoir Storage and Water Allocated for Authorized Purposes*

Unless Congress directs us to stop supporting other purposes, we will operate the dams to meet regional needs—with or without hydropower. This means filling the reservoirs during the conservation season, May 15 through October 30. In the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, we are not proposing to analyze an alternative that ends other non-hydropower purposes because Congress did not direct us to.

## How can I give the Corps feedback about the proposed alternative ceasing hydropower?

The public may provide feedback on the alternative to end hydropower in the Willamette by attending public meetings or by sending written comments to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Attn: CENWP-PME-E / Willamette EIS, PO Box 2946, Portland, OR 97208-2946 or via email at Willamette.EIS@usace.army.mil. We will accept comments from November 14 through December 29, 2025.

# DETROIT DEEP DRAWDOWN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Portland District

## What is a deep drawdown?

When a reservoir is drawn down, the operator releases water downstream, lowering the reservoir upstream of the dam. Most often, the Corps draws down the Willamette Valley reservoirs to manage flood risk in the fall and winter by making room for incoming storm flows and reducing water flows downstream. Typically, the Corps draws down a reservoir to the designated minimum conservation level, the reservoir elevation designated to maintain a minimum amount of space to store water for water supply, irrigation, and fish and wildlife. However, at some reservoirs, the Corp performs a deep drawdown where the reservoir is lowered below the minimum level. Deep drawdown is the catch-all phrase for several drawdown types.

There are several types of drawdowns:

- **Rule curve drawdowns -** Reservoir drawdowns to minimum conservation pool elevation ahead of flood season. This is how the Corps operates Hills Creek Dam.
- **Deep drawdowns -** Reservoir drawdowns below minimum conservation pool elevation, but above streambed. This is how the Corps operates the fall drawdown at Green Peter for fish passage.
- **Streambed drawdowns -** Reservoir drawdowns that lower the water level to the streambed. The Corps has been doing this at Fall Creek Dam for several years to help fish pass downstream in the fall.

## Why is the Corps considering a deep drawdown at Detroit Reservoir?

In 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a Biological Opinion analyzing the effects of our operation and maintenance of the Willamette Valley dams on Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species and their designated critical habitat. The 2024 Biological Opinion outlines steps we can take to minimize potential harms to ESA-listed species and their critical habitat. It includes a **deep drawdown** below the minimum conservation pool elevation. A deep drawdown of Detroit Reservoir would be a interim measure to improve downstream passage for ESA-listed spring Chinook salmon until a downstream passage facility is constructed to addresses passage long term. Similar drawdowns at other reservoirs during the fall/winter help juvenile salmon and steelhead migrate by lowering water levels, helping the fish find their way out of the reservoirs and downstream through safer outlets at the dam.

As part of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement public comment period, November 14 through December 29, 2025, we are seeking public input on the proposed drawdown and the effects analysis provided in the draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

## Why is this deep drawdown at Detroit Reservoir just coming up? Why haven't we heard about it before?

A deep reservoir drawdown hasn't been part of the previous operations at Detroit Dam. In 2024, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a Biological Opinion that requires us to draw down the reservoir to 1395 feet. We are assessing the impacts of the drawdown and seeking input from the public as part of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, before we implement the drawdown.

# DETROIT DEEP DRAWDOWN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Portland District

## Would the proposed drawdown at Detroit Reservoir have similar effects to previous drawdowns like the one at Green Peter Reservoir?

The draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement analyzes the impacts of drawing Detroit Reservoir down deeper than before. The public can comment on the proposed operation before we implement the drawdown. Our analysis includes impacts to water quality like turbidity, refill, water supply, recreation, sport fisheries, and many other resources. The drawdown at Detroit Reservoir will not be as deep as at Green Peter Reservoir. The 2024 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion requires us to draw down Detroit Reservoir to 1395 feet, which is 55 feet below the winter reservoir level (minimum conservation pool elevation), or about 30 feet lower than the reservoir has ever been drawn down to. In comparison, the drawdown at Green Peter is 142 feet.

To reduce sediment mobilization, the Detroit drawdown will be reduced over several years before hitting the BiOp target elevation of 1395 feet The Detroit drawdown will expose less than one square mile of new sediment unlike the Green Peter drawdowns, which exposed 4.5 square miles of sediment. Less exposed sediment is likely to result in lower overall turbidity during the Detroit Reservoir drawdown. The draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement includes more analysis of the anticipated effects.

## What is turbidity and is it a bad thing?

Turbidity is a measure of how clear or cloudy water is. When particles like dirt, tiny organisms, or algae scatter light as they pass through the water they create turbidity. Turbidity is not a health concern, however very high turbidity can clog water treatment plants, making it harder for communities to keep up with water supply demands. Very high turbidity may also harm aquatic life by blocking oxygen from reaching fish eggs, which can suffocate them or reduce hatching success. It can also affect how fish and invertebrates breathe and feed. We describe these types of water quality effects in the draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for people to comment on.

## How do drawdowns increase turbidity in the rivers?

When a river is dammed to create a reservoir, the water slows down, causing sediment like dirt and small rocks that were previously carried along by the river, to settle at the bottom of the reservoir. If the water level in the reservoir drops, these sediments can get stirred up and mixed back into the water. When the dams release water from the reservoir, it can carry these sediments downstream, making the water murkier, or more turbid, further along the river.

## How do drawdowns increase turbidity in the rivers?

When a river is dammed to create a reservoir, the water slows down, causing sediment like dirt and small rocks that were previously carried along by the river, to settle at the bottom of the reservoir. If the water level in the reservoir drops, these sediments can get stirred up and mixed back into the water. When the dams release water from the reservoir, it can carry these sediments downstream, making the water murkier, or more turbid, further along the river.

# DETROIT DEEP DRAWDOWN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILLAMETTE VALLEY SYSTEM

US Army Corps of Engineers®
Portland District

### How will the drawdown impact reservoir refill?

We analyze how the drawdown would impact refill across numerous dry or wet year scenarios in the draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. To date, drawdowns at other reservoirs within the Willamette Basin have not impacted refill. This is primarily because the other deep drawdowns end before the rainy season is over. The reservoirs capture water, bringing them back to typical winter levels each year before conservation season refill, which starts February 1st. If designed in a similar way, it is likely the Detroit Reservoir drawdown would experience similar effects.

### Did the Corps analyze impacts to recreation from the Detroit drawdown, like access to the reservoir?

Yes. We analyze impacts to recreation in the draft Supplement Environmental Impact Statement, such as when boat ramps may be inaccessible. We also evaluate the potential economic impacts to recreation.

### Did the Corps analyze impacts to fish from the drawdown in Detroit Reservoir?

Yes. We analyze how the drawdown may impact kokanee and other resident fish in the reservoir and downstream. Based on previous drawdowns, impacts could include fewer kokanee in Detroit Lake and downstream. However, the later in the year the drawdown occurs, impacts on kokanee could be reduced.

### When will the Corps move forward with the deep drawdown at Detroit Reservoir?

First, we must evaluate the effects in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. We follow the National Environmental Policy Act process by issuing a draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for public comment and then follow with a final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. After the final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, we will issue a Record of Decision. We anticipate a Record of Decision in early 2026. If the operation is part of the selected action, we will coordinate with water purveyors, state and local agencies, and notify the public before drawing down the reservoir.

### How can I give the Corps feedback about the proposed Detroit drawdown?

The public can provide feedback on the proposed Detroit deep drawdown by attending public meetings or by sending written comments to

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: CENWP-PME-E / Willamette EIS
PO Box 2946, Portland, OR 97208-2946
or to Willamette.EIS@usace.army.mil

We will accept comments from November 14 through December 29, 2025.