



Savage Rapids Dam Removal History

In 1921, the Grants Pass Irrigation District (GPID) completed Savage Rapids Dam, a 39-foot high, 500-foot long irrigation diversion dam across Oregon's Rogue River. The dam provides no flood control or electricity. At river mile 107, the dam is the first human obstruction salmon and steelhead encounter on their upstream migration. The dam has long been considered the biggest fish killer on the Rogue.

In 1988, through its work watch-dogging the state water permitting process, WaterWatch discovered and challenged GPID's excessive and inefficient use of water from the dam and also highlighted the serious fish passage problems caused by the dam.

A 1990 settlement between WaterWatch, GPID and Oregon allowed GPID to continue, temporarily, its existing water use, if GPID studied water conservation and fish passage alternatives, including dam removal. The Bureau of Reclamation studied the fish passage alternatives and recommended removing the dam, replacing it with pumps and creating a water conservation plan. Based on these studies and citizen pressure, in 1994 Oregon approved a temporary water right for GPID contingent on GPID reducing its water use, installing pumps and removing the dam.

Unfortunately, from 1995 to 2000, the GPID board twice reneged on the dam removal commitment and instead waged a political and legal battle to keep the dam, resulting in litigation in the state and federal courts and skirmishes in the Oregon Legislature.

Through litigation, WaterWatch and Oregon canceled GPID's temporary water right. This led to direct negotiations between WaterWatch and GPID and a global settlement of all litigation in a 2001 Consent Decree. This Decree sets a timeline for dam removal, required GPID to work with WaterWatch and others to pass federal legislation to remove the dam, and, importantly, requires GPID to transfer 800 cubic feet per second of water rights to an instream water right to protect streamflows in the Rogue.

After 2001, WaterWatch and GPID joined forces to pass federal legislation authorizing dam removal and locate project funding. In 2002, joint efforts resulted in Oregon's Watershed Enhancement Board pledging \$3,000,000 toward dam removal, the Board's largest single grant ever. This grant helped secure 2003 federal legislation authorizing dam removal as well as subsequent appropriations of over \$36,000,000 for the project.

On October 11, 2006 construction commenced. The pumping plants are almost complete and the dam will be removed in 2009, allowing salmon and boats to travel unimpeded through Savage Rapids for the first time since 1921.

Benefits of dam removal include an estimated 114,000 additional salmon and steelhead in the Rogue Basin, access to 500 miles of spawning and rearing habitat, removal of a barrier to fish passage and river recreation, protection of Rogue streamflows and an estimated \$5,000,000 injected annually into the local economy. This project is arguably the most significant dam removal project in the nation.