**McKenzie Watershed Protective**

**P.O. Box 15**

**Vida, OR 97488**

**541-735-1630**

[www.McKenzieWatershedProtective.org](http://www.mckenziewatershedprotective.org)

**Removal of Leaburg Dam, Leaburg Canal and Walterville Canal**

Oregon is tied for first in the nation for the removal of dams. In the U.S. in 2021 ninety dams were removed, and 1,700 total dams have been removed nationally (American Rivers Impact Report, 2021[[1]](#footnote-1)). The impetus for so many dams being removed are consistent with contextual factors in Oregon specifically and across the U.S. There are a substantial number of conservation organizations in opposition to EWEB's efforts to keep Leaburg Dam.  These organizations will be presenting a unified case for removal of Leaburg Dam, Leaburg Canal and Walterville Canal.

**Update:** As of January 2022, EWEB has decided to remove Leaburg Dam and some portions of Leaburg Canal **after a ten-year period** to develop a decommissioning plan. It is the position of McKenzie Watershed Protective that the proposed plan and timeline are unacceptable. The status of migrating juvenile Salmon is extreme. Salmon returns are at historic lows and projected to continue to decline. EWEB must disclose all mortality testing at Leaburg Dam as public information immediately. Salmon in the McKenzie River don’t have ten years to survive EWEB’s development of a proposal or action plan.

*Leaburg Dam can be opened immediately. The three gates at Leaburg Dam can be easily opened immediately, at no cost, and allow the Dam to continue as a bridge.*

Reasons for removal include:

*Decreasing rate of return.* Leaburg Dam is a 100-year-old aging facility which has not generated electricity in four years. EWEB estimates rate increases of 10%-15% for resolving the Leaburg Dam issue. EWEB customers will also be looking at additional increases for a Walterville Canal resolution and could be an additional 10-15% rate increase. Revenue from power generation at Walterville Canal is marginal.

*Deadly impact of rising water temperatures.* On the McKenzie River EWEB currently retains water in two locations and diverts 75% of the river over a 17-mile distance which drives up water temperatures to levels that fish species barely or cannot survive.  Water in the river below the diversions is super-heated in the summer, and salmon, steelhead and native trout fail to thrive and cannot survive in water over 70 degrees.

*Disruption of the aquatic food chain due to algae blooms.* Warm water promotes the growth of filamentous and didymo algae, both harmful to fish habitat and spawning.  Aquatic insects are the primary food source for native fish, and high algae levels harm this food source. Algae has increasingly spread throughout the river and has far-reaching implications for the entire food chain of the local ecosystem, as well as drinking water for the area’s human inhabitants.

*Issues with federal licensing and “high hazard” ratings.* EWEB has presented removal plans for Leaburg Dam and Canal and is not presenting plans for Walterville Canal. Leaburg Dam and Canal and Walterville Canal are under one license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.  We are opposed to EWEB's tactic of separating the two power canals as different projects. Both canals are on the McKenzie River under the same federal license.  An inspection report in 2018 by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) listed Leaburg Dam with a "high hazard potential".  Leaburg Canal was subsequently closed.  Walterville Canal received two "high hazard potential" deficiencies.  Additionally, EWEB proposes to keep portions of the canals. *The current license states that upon cessation of power generation Leaburg Dam and Canal and Walterville Canal are to be removed in its entirety and the lands restored to pre-dam conditions.*

**Update:** Walterville Canal and Powerhouse are closed as of 3/2024 due to leaks in the canal near the Powerhouse. EWEB states “this is a temporary closure for repairs”.

In*creasingly stressful conditions for migrating fish.* Fishmigration upstream and downstream is negatively impacted by the dam and canals.  Leaburg Dam has fish ladders for upstream migration of salmon, and native trout.  With the dewatering of the river, fish are subject to increased migration stress and intense bank fishing as they school below the dam.  There is no safe and natural mechanism for downstream migration – salmon, trout, and other native fish must pass under the dam gates being subjected to "the meat grinder" or find the opening to the fish ladders. Millions of dollars have recently been spent on restoring upriver spawning areas, only to have those fish killed going under Leaburg Dam. It makes no sense.

*Gas Bubble Disease*. There is likely a high rate of mortality for fish migrating downstream, including the Bull Trout, a Federally Protected species. There is a high likelihood of Gas Bubble Disease occurring to fish passing under the dam. With the entire river being reduced to 1/3 its width to pass under one of the three dam gates, tremendous pressure and velocity are created (a fire hose effect) to which fish mortality occurs. Recent mass losses of migrating juvenile Salmon due to Gas Bubble Disease at dams have occurred on the Klamath River in Southern Oregon.

*Reduced economic and traditional opportunities.* Native trout, salmon and steelhead numbers are so low that future seasons are on the cusp of being placed under endangered species protection. These rapidly accelerating decreases in native trout, salmon and steelhead populations have repercussions for income generating activities related to tourism or traditions in the Willamette National Forest and McKenzie Recreation Area.

*Reduced safety for navigation and recreation.* River navigation with the current minimum flow of 1000 cfs (cubic feet per second) in the dewatered portions of the canals is, at times, difficult to impossible.  A reliable and verifiable measurement of stream flow is required. It is our recommendation that a minimum of 1900 cfs remain in the river in all dewatered sections of the river so that users of the river can safely navigate.

*Inaccessible design of bridge.* Leaburg Dam is used as a bridge.  Access to the south side of the river for the fish hatchery, recreation and residences requires safe access.  The dam’s bridge is one-way with no sidewalks for pedestrian access and no lighted signals. Additionally, the 100 year old age of Leaburg Dam makes using the dam as a bridge a public safety hazard.

*Walterville Canal and Powerhouse.* The Walterville Canal Hydro Project obstructs the main channel of the McKenzie River. Navigation of the river is halted at the entrance of Walterville Canal and there is no alternative passage at the entrance. The crude design of the river diversion is simply rock fill (like a jetty) and is dangerous to navigation. Fish migration is impeded (no fish ladders) adding additional stress both upstream and downstream to Salmon, Steelhead, Native Trout -including Bull Trout.

**The benefits of removing Leaburg Dam and Canal and Walterville Canal:**

1. Water quality will be improved. Eugene’s water supply will improve in quality during typically low water periods when 75% of the river was diverted into the canals.
2. Fish will migrate unimpeded with less stress and lower mortality rates. Salmon will have a chance to survive and spawn.
3. Water temperatures will be natural throughout the 90 miles of the river benefiting spawning.
4. Navigation will be unimpeded in the 90 miles of the river. The entire McKenzie River will be open to public water access.
5. The land exposed by lowering Leaburg Lake will open public access to the largest potential park expansion area on the entire McKenzie River.  Access to the river is currently extremely limited by private land and rough terrain.  We envision connecting the Leaburg Fish Hatchery, EWEB Park, and the Discovery Center into one continuous park with a **new covered bridge** connecting all three. Fishing from the banks, rafting, kayaking, paddleboarding will all benefit from additional access.
6. Long term safe access for pedestrians, homes, EWEB Park and the McKenzie Fish Hatchery will be achieved with a **new covered bridge**.
7. Closing of 17 miles of Leaburg Canal and Walterville Canal will allow EWEB in recovering an estimated $80 million with the sale of these lands for rural residential development.

Thank you for your interest in the future of the McKenzie River,

Robert Spencer

President

McKenzieWP@gmail.com

1. [American Rivers 2021 Impact Report is here! - American Rivers](https://www.americanrivers.org/2022/01/american-rivers-2021-impact-report-is-here/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)