

Press Release

\$5 million of Federal Stimulus Awarded to Remove Rogue River’s Gold Ray Dam

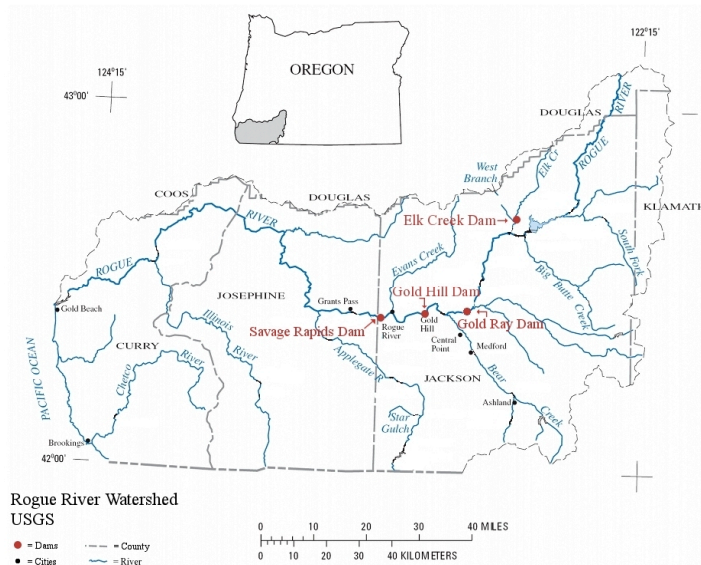
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Project will mark fourth significant dam removal on Rogue River in three years

Medford, OR – Continuing an unprecedented wave of dam removals on the internationally famous Rogue River, today federal officials announced that \$5 million from the federal stimulus package will fund removal of the 38-foot high, 360-foot long Gold Ray Dam. The grant, awarded from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s pool of \$170 million earmarked for coastal and marine habitat restoration projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, will finance scientific studies, public outreach, permitting, and dam demolition between now and the end of 2010.



Spanning the mainstem of Rogue at river mile 125.7, Gold Ray Dam is a defunct hydroelectric facility. Constructed in 1904, the dam closed permanently in 1972. Jackson County then took ownership of the dam and adjacent lands for the development of a recreational park. Until now, the county lacked the funding to resolve liability and public safety concerns associated with the dam. The structure also blocks boat traffic and is a maintenance

burden for Jackson County taxpayers.

Jackson County, the grant recipient, estimates the project will employ some 54 people at various times over the anticipated 18-month course of work. Improvements to the Rogue River fishery achieved through dam removal are expected to contribute to a healthier coastal and in-river fishing economy in southern Oregon and northern California.

The Gold Ray project will represent one of the largest dam removals in the country, and follows in the wake of three other significant dam removals on the Rogue in the last two years. The removal of Savage Rapids Dam – also one of the largest removals in the country – is currently underway at river mile 107. Calendar year 2008 saw the removal of the Rogue’s Gold Hill Dam and the notching of Elk Creek Dam. With the removal of Gold Ray, the Rogue River will flow freely from the Lost Creek Project to the Pacific Ocean for the first time in 106 years – a distance of 153 miles.

“NOAA’s grant program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offered a tremendous opportunity to Jackson County to address long standing liability issues at the dam, while helping restore one of the nation’s premier salmon rivers,” said John DeVoe, WaterWatch’s executive director. “River restoration projects of this magnitude are not only good for the economy over the short term because of the jobs they provide, but will also provide economic benefits into the future because of improvements to the fishery and recreational opportunities.”

For several years, WaterWatch has worked closely with Jackson County, relevant fisheries agencies, and other stakeholders to study the feasibility of removing or notching Gold Ray. In May 2008, WaterWatch helped Jackson County secure a \$100,000 Ecotrust grant through the NOAA Restoration Center to study sediment behind the dam – a precursor to any dam removal.

Overall, the four Rogue dam removals are intended to benefit the Rogue’s fish populations and enhance the river’s fishing and recreational opportunities. In particular, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife identified Gold Ray Dam as fifth in priority for removal or fish passage improvement on Oregon’s Statewide Fish Passage Priority List. The dam is a significant barrier to salmon, steelhead, and other migratory fishes. Removal of the dam will provide fish with better access to 333 miles of high quality salmon and steelhead spawning habitat upstream of the dam and reclaim approximately 1.5 miles of spawning habitat under the current dam reservoir. The dams’ removal will provide a boost to the Rogue’s coho salmon listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, and augment runs of spring and fall Chinook salmon, summer and winter steelhead, resident cutthroat trout, and Pacific lamprey.

Analysis has already begun on the sediment behind the dam. Contracting for the work on additional analysis, environmental review, and permitting, as well as final design, sediment management, reservoir restoration, and monitoring plans will commence immediately. Public input will be sought during the planning process. If the environmental review raises no red flags, dam removal could commence in June of 2010, and be completed by the fall of 2010. Work on reservoir restoration will continue after dam removal.

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