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... time for dinner. Laura Bush usu-

... in Savannah, Ga., where Republicans hope to steal

... the White House agenda was shelved and the president's most important gains, be-

... Sen. Max Cleland, a veteran who lost his legs and an arm during the Vietnam War.

Report Backs Using River for Fishing

Wall Street Journal, November 2002, page A4

By JIM CARLTON

A U.S. Geological Survey report has found there would be more economic benefits from returning water to the Klamath River for fish and recreation than from continuing to use it to irrigate farms, but the finding hasn't been released.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton drew criticism from environmentalists and leaders of local Indian tribes over her decision seven months ago to divert water from the river system to about 1,400 farmers, despite warnings from federal biologists that to do so would imperil the river's fish. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation had earlier shut off the spigots over protests from farmers, saying the water was needed to protect the river's sucker fish and downstream salmon.

As many as 30,000 salmon died in the Klamath River, which originates in southern Oregon and extends into northern California, from as-yet unknown causes in September. Geological Survey officials in the agency's Denver regional office say they held up the report temporarily, despite an initial peer review being complete, after the fish kill because of the report's sensitivity. A USGS spokeswoman in the agency's Reston, Va., headquarters said the report was undergoing normal reviews.

The 32-page report, viewed by The Wall Street Journal, estimates it would

cost about \$5 billion to remove the farms from the pipeline and take other restoration actions. It says about \$36 billion in economic benefits would come over a number of years from more visitors using the Klamath River system for recreational activities such as fishing and boating.

The farms generate about \$100 million in revenue a year, compared with almost \$800 million generated by recreational activities along the Klamath and its tributaries, the report says. A resurgence in river levels would increase the recreational revenue to about \$3 billion annually by prompting more people to visit more often, the report estimates.

The report's lead author, USGS economist Aaron Douglas, was scheduled to present the findings at a conference in California in the summer. But agency officials said it wasn't ready for public release.

In an e-mail on Oct. 7, Larry Ludke, the USGS regional biologist in Denver, wrote a colleague about the delay, which he attributed to USGS regional director Tom Casadevall.

"He wants to slow it down because of high sensitivity in the Dept. right now resulting from the recent fish kill in the Klamath," Mr. Ludke's e-mail says. "... Suffice it to say that this is not a good time to be handing out this document and it will likely be a little while before we get clearance from HQ."

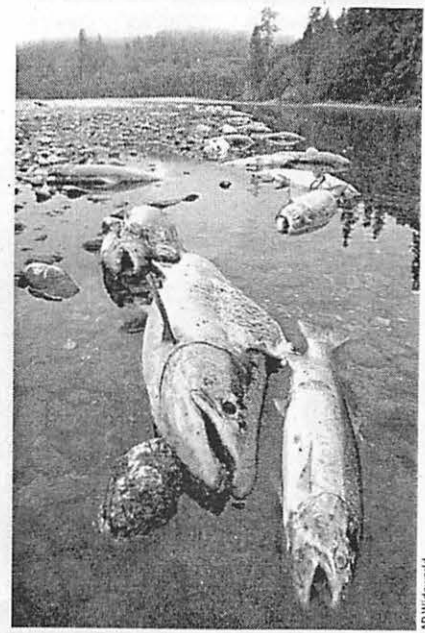
In an interview, Mr. Ludke, who was

among the officials in charge of signing off on the report at the regional level, says Mr. Casadevall asked him to delay his review for a week "because of all the sensitivity around the issue." Mr. Ludke says he had to send the report for final review to the USGS's headquarters in Reston, Va., by agency director Charles Groat among others.

Mr. Casadevall was traveling and not available for comment, his office said. A USGS spokeswoman in Reston said the Klamath report's release wasn't expected until after another agency official is scheduled to return from an overseas trip Nov. 12 to check the report for policy implications. "It is not being held up for any reason other than to complete the review process," said the spokeswoman, Carolyn Bell.

Critics questioned the agency's motives. "Given the position the administration took when they tried to help these farmers out, and then with the massive fish kill that followed, of course having a report like this released makes them look bad," said Thomas Power, chairman of the economics department at the University of Montana in Missoula.

Administration officials have said it remains unknown what caused the fish kill and whether the irrigation diversions had any impact. Many environmentalists say they believe the fish died because when water was taken out for irrigation, river levels dropped so much



As many as 30,000 salmon died in the Klamath River from as yet unknown causes in September, after water was diverted to farms.

that the water became too warm for the fish. Ms. Norton had originally ordered the farm-water releases earlier this year after a national panel of scientists said there wasn't proof fish would be harmed by the diversions. However, Ms. Norton recently directed that more water be put back in the river temporarily to assist the fish.

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