

Klamath Settlement Group

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Klamath River Settlement Takes Shape

A diverse group of Klamath River basin stakeholders, including Indian tribes, farmers, and conservation groups, and state and federal agencies have announced that they are committed to developing a detailed Klamath Settlement Agreement by November 2007. For the past two years this group has persevered towards the development of a proposal to restore the Klamath River fisheries, meet agricultural needs, protect water quality and sustain the ecology and economies of the Klamath Basin. Development of the framework of a Settlement has been demanding, but the group remains determined to prepare and present a balanced agreement.

The Klamath region straddles 16,400 square miles of south-central Oregon, northern-central and north-west California, with the Klamath River flowing 254 miles from its Oregon headwaters into the Pacific Ocean. The people of this region are bound together by the Klamath River's economic, ecologic and cultural importance to their communities.

The Klamath River has been and continues to be important to the economies and social fabric of an entire region. The Klamath Basin was renowned for its salmon fisheries in the Pacific Northwest as the Klamath River was once the third largest producer of salmon in the America. The Bureau of Reclamation's Klamath Project as well as private systems supply irrigation water for a wide variety of agricultural crops throughout the upper basin and six national wildlife refuges operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Between 1908 and 1962, four hydroelectric dams were constructed; however construction designs lacked fish passage and the ability to regulate temperature of discharge waters. Without passage, these dams cut off 300 miles of historic salmon spawning habitat. For decades, heated disputes over irrigation water supplies and river health have divided the Klamath Basin, leaving its inhabitants and government agencies at odds with one another. Two developments brought these divergent peoples to one table.

In 2004, PacifiCorp filed an application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for a renewed license to continue operating its hydroelectric dams in Northern California and Southern Oregon. The company simultaneously offered the various regional representatives an opportunity to settle the dispute over the four dams.

Representatives accepted this offer and formed a “Settlement Process” group. This group is comprised of representatives from throughout the basin and within two states, and includes the four Klamath Basin Tribes, state and federal agencies, counties, fishermen’s groups, and agricultural and conservation organizations who are, in good faith, meeting to craft a settlement. Since 2005, this group has been evaluating ideas and proposals that can restore the fisheries, meet irrigators’ and local government needs, and protect water quality and agriculture.

While many of the details of the Settlement remain to be finalized, the document includes a set of guiding principles. The Settlement Group is addressing: The future of the lower four Klamath River dams; water for agriculture, fish and wildlife; programs to rebuild salmon, steelhead and lamprey populations; power costs for irrigation and National Wildlife Refuge pumping needs; tribal participation in fisheries efforts and economic development; and mitigation for counties that may be affected by the settlement.

“We know that the key to solving our problems is to work with our neighbors instead of continuing to fight with each other” said, Greg Addington of the Klamath Water Users Association, a party to the settlement.

“If we do this thing right one day we’ll have a salmon and potato festival in Klamath Falls” added Troy Fletcher of the Yurok Tribe.

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