

NEWS RELEASE

MARCH 5, 2014

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Historic Agreement Reached on Upper Klamath Basin Water

The Klamath Tribes, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Governor Kitzhaber, Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley, and Upper Klamath Basin irrigators announce proposed agreement on water and natural resource management issues

(Klamath Falls, OR) — The Klamath Tribes, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley, and Upper Klamath Basin irrigators announced today that they have completed negotiations on the Upper Klamath Basin Comprehensive Agreement. The proposed Agreement will now go to the Klamath Tribes' General Council for approval and to irrigators for their endorsement.

For more than eight months, negotiators have been working daily to develop solutions to water and natural resource management issues in the Upper Klamath Basin.

“This agreement is nothing short of historic,” said Governor Kitzhaber. “On one of the more complex issues facing the state, people committed their time, energy, and expertise to come up with solutions that support a stable agricultural economy and healthy fisheries and riparian areas. Creating this kind of success through patient and deliberate collaboration shows us that when we work together, we can find a win in every conflict, and I send my thanks to the many people who created a way forward for the Basin.”

Senator Wyden praised the collaborative effort. “I am pleased that the parties have been able to reach a proposed final agreement by working through the Klamath Basin task force process that was established following the Senate hearing last summer,” said Senator Wyden. “The charge of the task force was to build on the good work of the KBRA and KHSA to resolve water rights in the Upper Klamath Basin. That's exactly what happened. I look forward to final ratification by the parties and to working with the Governor, Senator Merkley, and my colleagues in Congress to pass legislation that makes this agreement a reality.”

“People have been fighting over water in the Klamath Basin for decades, but this historic agreement is a vision for sharing water in a manner that benefits everyone,” said Senator Merkley.

“Congratulations and thank you to the Klamath Tribes and the ranching and farming community in the Upper Klamath Basin for putting in the enormous time and effort to negotiate this settlement. This is a moment that can be celebrated by all of us who care about Southern Oregon's

economic and social vitality.”

"I congratulate the Upper Klamath Basin community and the Klamath Tribes for their work to settle one of the most complex and difficult water disputes in the West," said Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. "The settlement unifies the Upper Klamath Basin by providing for a sustainable irrigation economy and protecting jobs while also restoring the streams of the native homeland of the Klamath Tribes in a manner that recognizes their senior water rights. I look forward to working with partners of the basin to enact legislation that makes this agreement and related agreements in the lower basin a reality."

The Comprehensive Upper Basin Agreement includes three key elements:

- A Water Use Program that will increase stream flows in the tributaries above Upper Klamath Lake – adding at least 30,000 acre feet annually to inflows to the lake, while creating a stable, predictable setting for agriculture to continue in the Upper Klamath Basin;
- A Riparian Program that will improve and protect riparian conditions in order to help restore fisheries; and
- An Economic Development Program for the Klamath Tribes.

Funding for restoration projects in the Agreement will come largely through the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA), signed in 2010. The overall cost of the Upper Basin settlement agreement and the Klamath Agreements of 2010 is approximately \$545 million, a significant reduction from the original cost of the Klamath Agreements, which was estimated to cost \$1 billion.

The new Agreement also resolves water right disputes that were not addressed in the KBRA. The most senior water rights above Upper Klamath Lake are held by the Klamath Tribes. Full exercise of those rights would preclude irrigation in many years. Under the proposed Agreement, the Klamath Tribes conditionally agree to share in times of shortages, limiting regulation to specified in-stream flows, and allowing some water for water rights holders with rights junior to the Klamath Tribes. In exchange, the Tribes will receive active landowner involvement in riparian restoration, resolution of ongoing water litigation, and economic development funding to create employment opportunities and aid in the exercise of tribal cultural rights.

Don Gentry, Chairman of Klamath Tribes, said, "I am very pleased with the Klamath Tribal Council's support of the Proposed Agreement. If approved, we will see an increase in water flows, improved habitat for current and future fish populations, and economic opportunities for our Tribe and Tribal members. It will help us restore our homeland and honor the Treaty our ancestors signed 150 years ago."

Cattle rancher Roger Nicholson said the benefits will be felt across the region. "Settlement will allow the social and economic healing of the agricultural and Tribal community, and once again establish a united community."

Becky Hyde, rancher and board member of the Upper Klamath Basin Water Users, said, "We look forward to sharing the agreement's details with our neighbors in the upper basin and the broader community. For the first time in decades, there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

The full Agreement and an agreement summary are available at:
<http://www.oregon.gov/gov/GNRO/Pages/index.aspx>.

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