

## **Klamath restoration deal released to public**

***Agreement could be ratified as early as February; critics condemn concessions***

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Klamath Basin farmers, Indian tribes, fishing groups and conservationists have released for public review a restoration agreement designed to provide a long-term water supply for Klamath Basin farmers and fish.

The plan, three years in the making, could be ratified as early as next month.

Its ultimate success is contingent upon several factors, said Greg Addington, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association, including federal and state funding, congressional and executive branch approval and removal of four lower Klamath River dams.

Also for the plan to work, stakeholders need a critical mass of Klamath Basin water users to sign on, Addington said.

The plan includes an agreement for landowners to cede irrigation water for conservation purposes in low-water years under assurances they will have full access to water in high-water years.

And it calls for the acquisition of 30,000 acre-feet of water in the upper basin -- enough water to irrigate 18,000 acres of pasture land. And it requires participating landowners to support efforts to improve wildlife habitat.

"Our goal was to ensure the long-term viability of irrigated agriculture inside and outside the Klamath Project," Addington said. "It's now up to our members to decide if they are better off with or without (the agreement).

"That's our focus over the next 30 days -- talking to membership and others in the community, and explaining what has happened, what it means and how it will affect them," he said.

Tom Mallams, president of the Klamath Off Project Water Users Association, said the association "can't sign the agreement in its present form." Mallams said off-project farmers and ranchers are getting little in return for ceding rights to a substantial amount of water.

"The project irrigators are always saying the plan is better than the status quo," Mallams said. "If this is implemented as it's written, I think we will look back and say the status quo wasn't so bad after all."

Karl Scronce, president of the Upper Klamath Water Users Association, disagreed. The agreement ensures some water delivery even in low-water years, he said, which is better than the alternative.

"With river flow requirements as high as they are in the current biological opinion and the lake level minimum requirements where they are, I think agriculture could be in severe trouble without the agreement," Scronce said.

More than two dozen organizations were involved in crafting the agreement, including three tribes, three Oregon agencies and two California agencies, four counties, four federal agencies, fish and conservation groups and several irrigation districts.

The earliest the agreement could go into effect is 2012, Addington said, given that federal agencies already are devising their 2011 budgets.

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