

Bureau of Reclamation commissioner: Agreement offers more tools



H&N photo by Ty Beaver Michael Connor, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, says the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement gives water managers more tools.

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The commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation called the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement a great opportunity to change the dynamic in the Basin and create a better path to the future.

Michael Connor was in the Basin Tuesday to meet with regional Bureau officials and others and view parts of the Klamath Reclamation Project's infrastructure.

Following are his responses to questions about the restoration agreement and its impact on the Project:

Q: What would be the impact to the Project's water supplies in the interim before the restoration agreement is fully implemented? What about in the long term?

A: Connor said the restoration agreement provides a number of tools to help manage water until the document is fully implemented, including committing more resources to the region and working with irrigators to develop a water management plan.

"We'll have more at our discretion," he said.

The long-term approach would involve stakeholders and other experts using scientific data to determine how much water is needed for fisheries, the lake and irrigation, and irrigators would have to be part of that process. That process will create more certainty

for the water supply, he said.

Q: How does this restoration agreement compare to others concluded throughout the West?

A: Connor said the document is complicated and is uniquely designed to work for the Klamath Basin.

“It’s complex, but a lot of others have been complex,” he said.

He noted that water settlements in Arizona and other places have involved issues such as affordable power and even the need to turn more control of water resources to local agencies, as the restoration agreement calls for.

Q: This agreement will require a lot of funding. What is the likelihood that appropriations in the required amounts will actually occur?

A: Connor said securing funding for efforts such as this are always tough, but he said his office has already had conversations with President Barack Obama’s administration and is eager to start speaking to Congress about it.

Congress found creative ways to fund legislation in the past, and he is confident a similar arrangement can be found for the restoration agreement.

He noted that none of the other water settlements the Bureau was involved with failed because of lack of funding. Instead, failure came because something else fell through during implementation.

Q: The restoration agreement is a 50-year contract. Do you see it being renewed 50 years down the road? Why or why not?

A: “Fifty years is a long time and speculation on my part to say what will happen,” Connor said.

But aspects of the agreement will last beyond that 50-year time frame, he added, and if the agreement works like it should, those involved will view it as valuable tool and want to see it continue.

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