

# Water deal - Irrigation district votes yes



The water level of Upper Klamath Lake, directly impacts Klamath Reclamation Project irrigators. H&N file photo

## Irrigation district backs deal

### *Klamath Irrigation District board votes unanimously for agreement*

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January 27, 2010

The second-largest irrigation district in the Klamath Reclamation Project is throwing its support behind the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement.

Klamath Irrigation District's board of directors voted unanimously Tuesday to support the landmark document. The district covers nearly 39,000 acres of the 200,000 acres of the Project, represents more than 2,700 irrigators and is the single largest district by area in the Project in Oregon.

A final draft was released in early January. Stakeholder groups have until Feb. 9 to decide whether they want to remain part of the agreement. The agreement advocates removal of four Klamath River dams to reestablish fish passage and aims to settle water conflicts in the Klamath River Basin.

Klamath Irrigation District is the second irrigator group on the Project to support the agreement. Klamath Drainage District, the third largest irrigation district, covering 27,000 acres, earlier this week voted unanimously to support the agreement.

### **Opposition**

Several irrigators from the district testified in opposition to the restoration agreement, questioning its ability to provide affordable power for irrigation and saying it would allow the federal government more control in the region.

“We’re getting in bed with the government that is trying to put the knife between our ribs,” said irrigator David Oxley.

The district’s board acknowledged the document has flaws, but said it provides an opportunity for the region’s residents to control the future and ensure agriculture survives in the Basin.

“I think it’s time to get off the fence and get on one side or the other,” said Ed Bair, board member and vice chairman.

Irrigator Brent Cheyne said he appreciated the work the irrigation district put into the document, but said he couldn’t support it. He is against removing the hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River and views the agreement as creating a welfare system that won’t be effective.

“This restoration agreement deserves a ‘no’ vote,” he said. “This is a time for patriots, not politicians.”

### **Best way forward**

Dave Cacka, the board president, said he appreciated the perspectives provided by other irrigators, and he admitted that the restoration agreement isn’t perfect. However, he said he has yet to hear a viable alternative and sees the document as the best way to move forward.

“Without this, you will pay tariff power and have water uncertainty,” he said.

He also said the region would be no more involved with the federal government under the restoration agreement than it is otherwise, pointing out that the federal agencies already have offices here and the Project is federally-administered endeavor.

### **Power costs**

Irrigator John Wells said he was concerned about the power aspect of the agreement. Although irrigators have been assured that power rates would be close to three cents per kilowatt hour, he’s heard those rates would be higher, and there’s not enough money in the agreement to get the cost to that level.

“I’m scared it’s going to be too little, too late,” he said. “By the time we get it to 3 cents, a lot of irrigators are going to be out of business.”

Bair said the a low power rate would be partially dependent on making the right investments, but language in the agreement calls for the rate to be comparable to rates in other irrigating communities in the West, making it about 3 cents.

“It is justifiable,” he said.

The board added that it would be up to the districts and individual irrigators to make the restoration agreement work and ensure their descendents can continue to farm and ranch in the Basin.

“We are going to direct the future and I think that is the shining part of the agreement,” Bair said.

### **Side Bar**

**Other votes in support**

The board of supervisors in Humboldt County, Calif., is officially supporting the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, and Klamath County's economic development agency announced Tuesday it also is endorsing the water agreement.

The document will bring more economic stability to the region's agricultural community, which will ultimately benefit others in the Basin, said a press release from Klamath County Economic Development Association.

"The KBRA helps create a community where we can focus on positive economic growth in the future," said Albert Wedam, KCEDA president.

In Humboldt County, supervisors voted unanimously to support the restoration agreement and a related Klamath River dam removal agreement.

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