

Water agreement challenges

Perspectives vary on the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement

First of three parts

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Mike Carrier says securing the federal government's full support is one of the biggest sticking points for the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement.

Jim Cook says he's concerned the restoration agreement glosses over concerns of the Shastas by allowing Klamath tribal members to fish in their ancestral lands.

And more than one person is worried about funding a nearly \$1 billion effort to resolve water conflicts in the Klamath River watershed.

"Unfortunately, it will always be a challenge to fund a 50-year major restoration effort on one-year Congressional budgets," said Glen Spain, northwest regional director of Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

In the first of a three part series, stakeholders were asked to detail their concerns and talk about the next steps for the restoration agreement and how its success or failure could impact the Basin's communities.

Siskiyou County Supervisor Jim Cook

Q: What, in your view, are the stickiest or most problematic parts of the KBRA? Why?

A: Cook said he believes there are several problems with the document, but he specifically mentioned about its lack of concern for the Shasta Indians because the agreement grants unlimited fishing rights to the Klamath Tribes on lands associated with the Shastas, a non-federally recognized tribe.

"The Shasta's are all very concerned about the lack of care over their concerns," he said.

Q: What exactly is the process to get the KBRA implemented?

A: Cook wasn't completely clear about how the restoration agreement would be implemented, and that causes him concern because he's worried it will not be implemented properly.

"It's going to take some real work," he said.

Q: What's at stake here? Who benefits, and in what ways, if the agreement is implemented? Who would benefit and how if the agreement isn't implemented?

A: "All it's going to do is change the situation on the river," Cook said. "I don't think there are any clear winners or losers."

If the restoration agreement is implemented, Cook said, he thinks it will cause new problems that will have to be fixed. If it isn't implemented, leaders in the region will have to look for ways to solve the Basin's water conflicts.

Q: What about the funding? Estimates have said it would cost \$1 billion over 10 years to implement the KBRA, with about \$600 million of that coming from redirected funding.

Does that estimate still hold true? What about the other \$400 million? Where would that come from, and how is it possible to secure that as the country continues to suffer financially?

A: Cook said he sees numerous problems securing roughly \$40 million per year in federal funding to implement the agreement.

The issue also is entangled with the state of California's future bond measure to build water infrastructure. Should that bond fail, the restoration agreement would not receive \$250 million slated for the removal of four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River.

Mike Carrier, natural resources adviser to Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski

Q: What, in your view, are the stickiest or most problematic parts of the KBRA? Why?

A: Carrier said getting support from leaders and lawmakers in Washington, D.C. might prove problematic. "Congress has a lot on its agenda right now, and the demand for federal dollars, combined with concerns over additional spending, weigh heavily," he said.

However, he said he is optimistic federal lawmakers will see the value of the KBRA as a model for solving the region's problems.

Q: What exactly is the process to get the KBRA implemented?

A: "The most important thing that needs to happen is passage of federal legislation that authorizes federal participation in the agreement and federal financial support. For Oregon, we are ready to participate just as soon as the federal legislation passes."

Q: What's at stake here? Who benefits, and in what ways, if the agreement is implemented? Who would benefit and how if the agreement isn't implemented?

A: Carrier said the resolution of long-standing conflicts over water use for irrigation and flows for fish and water quality are at stake.

The agreement would provide stability to irrigators regarding irrigation and affordable power. It would ensure coastal fishermen have salmon runs.

"It gives parties an opportunity to move from conflict in the courtrooms to working together to restore habitat, water quality and sustainable agriculture in the Klamath Basin," he said. "No one benefits from the agreement not being implemented."

Q: What about the funding?

A: Carrier said the federal Office of Management and Budget is reviewing the agreement and determining potential sources of funding. Given the time to implement the agreement and the cost compared with a similar settlement, the amount being requested of the federal government is fair, he said.

He added that the uncertainty in the region eliminated by the agreements would benefit the country, keeping U.S. taxpayers from having to pay for failed crops and suspended fishery seasons.

"It makes good sense to ask for federal support for 10 years to rebuild the Basin's fisheries and secure its water use when the alternative is indefinite federal liability by not addressing these problems," he said.

Greg Addington, executive director of Klamath Water Users Association

Q: What, in your view, are the stickiest or most problematic parts of the KBRA? Why?

A: "The complexity of the document. Unfortunately, it is not an easy document to read and lends itself to 'cherry picking.' People on both sides tend to pull pieces out of context and use it to further a position. The document represents binding commitments and compromise, which are difficult for everyone.

"Evaluating this agreement in the face of another potential water shortage for Project irrigators is quite problematic and the necessity for congressional involvement is daunting.

"If there is agreement amongst parties to move forward, implementation of the agreement will be incremental over time. Benefits won't appear overnight."

Q: What exactly is the process to get the KBRA implemented?

A: "Assuming support from stakeholder parties, the next phase towards implementation would be federal legislation. The process will be political and likely continue to be publicly debated.

"Congress would have to authorize the agreement (through legislation) and then appropriate funds. Setting up KBRA-related management entities would be a priority. Beginning work on federal power delivery should also happen soon."

Q: What's at stake here? Who benefits, and in what ways, if the agreement is implemented? Who would benefit, and how, if the agreement isn't implemented?

A: "This question is obviously subjective, but I personally believe the agreement can benefit a broad spectrum of the population in the region.

"The local economic development opportunities will provide jobs and revenues locally. The stability available for irrigators should also help them and the local economy. All irrigators have the opportunity to benefit from water and power related elements.

"Tribal economic development will also provide local benefit. Ultimately, what I think doesn't matter. Klamath Project districts themselves will evaluate the agreement and decide whether to move forward or not.

"Who benefits if the agreement is not implemented? Lawyers and those who have built reputations and fundraising campaigns based on Klamath conflict."

Q: What about the funding?

A: "Federal budgeting issues are not my area of expertise. One thing is certain, lots of money has and will continue to be spent in the Klamath watershed.

"Our preference is that it be directed in a coordinated watershed-wide approach. This agreement goes a long way to making that a reality.

"I am certain it will be challenging, but there is a national recognition that something needs to be done. Congress knows of Klamath only through the conflict and acrimony that has historically occurred. This is the only option I know of and is certainly the only option that has the diverse support that is likely to be needed politically."

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