

# Oregon senator supports Klamath Basin agreement

By [Matthew Preusch, The Oregonian](#)

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Courtesy of Sen. Jeff Merkley - Oregon Senator  
Jeff Merkley, left, visits with Klamath County rancher Tim O'Connor in the Klamath Basin in May of 2009.

An agreement to share water among fish and farms in the Klamath Basin today won its first explicit endorsement from Oregon's congressional delegation

Sen. Jeff Merkley said he supports the [basin-wide restoration agreement](#) and a companion deal that could lead to the removal of four dams on the Klamath River.

"These agreements are great news for Oregon, for the farmers and ranchers in the Basin, and for the Klamath Tribe and our fishing communities, and I want to congratulate all of the stakeholders who have worked tirelessly to create a vision for a brighter future for the Klamath Basin," Merkley said in a statement.

The Democratic senator's endorsement comes as environmental groups, irrigators, tribes and local governments continue to square off over the dam and water agreements.

This week the group [Friends of the River](#) and the [Hoopa Tribe](#) said they won't endorse the deals; however, the governors of Oregon and California; the Obama administration; numerous tribes and governments; and an array of irrigation and conservation groups continue to support the plan.

"The development of these agreements provide a blueprint for how policy should be created," Merkley said. "Former foes became active partners, and their incredible collaboration has produced better outcomes for each stakeholder than they could achieve under the status quo. Washington needs to take a serious look at how we get things done here in Oregon."

The 369-page water agreement, which was released last month and is expected to be signed soon, seeks to strike a balance in the basin between diversion of water for agriculture and the needs of protected fish. It would require roughly half a billion dollars of additional federal funding.

A companion agreement calls for the removal four dams owned by the Portland-based utility PacifiCorp beginning in 2020, with removal paid for by a mix of ratepayer charges and California water bonds.

Also this month, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [posted its analysis](#) of the effects the agreements would have on fish populations.

"Removal of PacifiCorp Project dams and subsequent reestablishment of Basin connectivity and variable stream flows in the Klamath River are expected to contribute significantly towards restoration of the physical, chemical, and biological processes and interactions that are essential to a functional aquatic ecosystem," the report says.

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