

Commissioners move agreement a step forward

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The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement took an important step Tuesday with its endorsement by the Klamath County Commissioners. Whether that's good or bad depends on your point of view. Our feeling is that an agreement is necessary to move the Klamath Basin past the legal battles that have been fought over water for years at a hideous cost.

That cost and the continued uncertainty are reasons that the Basin-wide settlement has the traction it does.

It also has a lot of opposition. The process is a long way from being done, but the unanimous decision by the three commissioners — Cheryl Hukill, Al Switzer and John Elliott — moves it forward.

Commissioners should be commended for stepping up and dealing with it, listening to people and wrapping things up with a well-conducted question-and-answer session with stakeholders who represented the basic interests in the Upper Klamath Basin.

No matter which way commissioners voted, someone was going away unhappy and undoubtedly some of those people have supported the commissioners politically in the past.

There was some dissatisfaction that commissioners didn't make a decision earlier, but in the end, they did the fact checking, put together their reasoning and voted. Good for them.

Tom Mallams was the leader of opponents to the restoration agreement from what's known as the off-Project area — irrigators in the Upper Basin who don't ranch or farm on the Klamath Reclamation Project. Certainly, he's ruffled feathers and undoubtedly had his ruffled in return. But he believes in what he's doing and sees the restoration agreement as a major threat to off-Project irrigators. Proponents have had to deal with his protests and problems and criticisms and that has strengthened the agreement.

Opposition will continue. The agreement, which is linked so tightly to a separate agreement to remove the Klamath River dams that they might as well be considered a single document, requires a large amount of legislation. Even if it has completed one piece of a complicated process, the process still has a long time to run.

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