

Big show of support for Klamath agreements

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SALEM -- High-level state and federal officials joined tribal, agricultural and environmental leaders in Oregon's Capitol Feb. 18 for a show of support for two Klamath Basin agreements five years in the making.

In an emotional ceremony, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar signed onto what Salazar called "the largest river restoration effort that America has ever seen."

The agreements are backed by tribes, fishermen, farmers, ranchers, environmentalists and federal, state and local governments.

"This agreement brings together dozens of groups that for years and years have stood toe to toe, but now stand side by side in this cause," Schwarzenegger said.

"The word historic is often overused, but today we are going to sign two agreements that by everyone's definition are historic," Kulongoski said.

Several groups, including some farmers and ranchers from the Klamath Basin and the area's two state legislators, oppose the agreements.

In all, 30 parties signed the agreements. One, a basin restoration pact, stipulates stakeholder responsibilities. A second agreement is a hydroelectric settlement that in part will serve to guide whether officials move on plans to remove four Klamath River dams.

Under the agreements, PacifiCorp ratepayers are on the hook for \$200 million of the projected \$450 million cost of decommissioning the dams. California lawmakers recently approved floating a bond measure to voters to cover the remaining \$250 million.

PacifiCorp plans to generate the \$200 million through a monthly surcharge over 10 years. About \$180 million of the \$200 million is expected to come from Oregon ratepayers, who make up the majority of PacifiCorp's customers.

Also under the agreement, the federal government is expected to provide as much as \$1 billion in restoration funds, with the bulk coming from Interior Department appropriations.

The secretary of the Interior in March 2012 is scheduled to make a final determination on whether to go forward with removing the dams. The decommissioning would start in 2020.

The agreements are contingent upon several factors, including whether Congress backs the plans and whether preliminary funding estimates for decommissioning the dams are in line with projected costs. Officials will base their determination in part on findings from a comprehensive study of the environmental impacts of taking out the dams.

But Salazar and others who spoke in Salem Feb. 18 downplayed possibilities the agreements ultimately could derail.

"Failure is not an option," Salazar said. "We will succeed in the days and months and years ahead as we move forward."

"Today is a great time for celebration," Schwarzenegger said. "Just 15 months ago we were all promising each other that we are going to do everything we can to go through our differences and to finalize an agreement to tear down those dams, and to say 'hasta la vista' to the dams on the Klamath River."

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