

Agreement charts course to follow in settling Basin's costly water battles

Not all issues were resolved, though, and we hope more can be

Klamath Falls Herald and News Editorial
February 21, 2010

Thursday's historic events in Salem reflect the Klamath Basin's complexity and importance. Representatives of more than 30 organizations signed historic agreements in the Oregon capitol that they believe establishes a route for settling costly legal, cultural and emotional problems of water allocations from the Klamath River. We think so, too.

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed on. So did U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and a long list of others in the rotunda of the state capitol building, including representatives of the Klamath Tribes, Klamath County, the state of California and PacifiCorp, the owner of four dams that could be taken out.

There are others who didn't sign and have legitimate interests in the Klamath Basin. That also reflects the complexity of Basin water issues.

Some of the Upper Basin irrigators in the "off-Project" area, which isn't part of the 240,000-acre Klamath Reclamation Project, didn't sign. Neither did the Hoopa Tribe from the Lower Klamath Basin. Nor did two environmental groups that had been part of the multiyear effort to bring more certainty to water allocations and end the expensive court fights. Siskiyou County has yet to make an official decision, but individual Siskiyou supervisors have opposed the restoration agreement in the past.

Dam removal included

There are two agreements, but they're so tightly linked that they might as well be considered one. They call for removal of four Klamath River dams — three in California and one in Oregon. They outline the ways the water will be shared in the future, including the mechanisms for dealing with shortages. They put in motion future restoration and rehabilitation projects throughout the river's 263-mile length from Klamath Falls to the Pacific Ocean in northern California.

They also call for \$21 million to pay for about two-thirds of the cost of the 90,000-acre Mazama Tree Farm in northern Klamath County, which would go to the Klamath Tribes in return for its efforts in working out water rights issues. The Tribes will pay the other third of the tree farm's cost.

All of these goals and agreements depend on studies of dam removal and if they would really restore the river's salmon runs and its other impacts. Dam removal has been a long-standing goal of tribes in the river Basin. The earliest that dam removal would proceed, if the studies support the action, would be 2020.

There's also the issue of the leadership of the Klamath Tribes, which has been in conflict. The existing leadership did sign the agreement Thursday, but the internal conflict over its legitimacy continues.

Conflicts are a part of the Klamath Basin — fish vs. crops, irrigators vs. tribes and Upper Basin vs. Lower Basin. Things boiled over in 2001. That's when almost all of the

water for the Klamath Reclamation Project was shut off to help fish at both ends of the river — salmon on the lower Basin and suckers in the Upper Basin — which had the force of the Endangered Species Act behind them. But much of the problem goes back to an era when the Endangered Species Act didn't exist, insufficient attention was paid to tribal treaty rights and the federal government promised too much water to too many people.

Following a period of hostility after the 2001 water cutoff, Tribes, fishermen and irrigators began to build bridges. Those who lived and worked in one end of the Basin visited those in the other. They recognized common interests and ways to work together.

Even with the signing, some conflicts remain and we hope that the agreement can be massaged enough to eliminate more of them. The process is also a long way from over. But make no mistake, Thursday's event in the Capitol rotunda was a lot more than a photo op.

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