

# Climate change could lead to more people in Basin

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February 7, 2010



Hamilton

Climate changes could cause long-range population increases in the Klamath River Basin, experts say.

Roger Hamilton, a former Oregon Institute of Technology professor and past Klamath County commissioner, is now involved with the Climate Leadership Initiative at the University of Oregon.

“Historically, we are getting warmer,” Hamilton said, noting Klamath Basin-specific trends from 1916 to 2004 showed a 4 degree temperature increase. Especially significant, he said, are winter temperature increases.

“A couple degrees of temperature increase can make a huge difference in snow pack,” he said, noting climate change already has resulted in warmer winters. Long-range trends show snow packs decreasing 75 to 80 percent by the end of the century.

Hamilton said climate change could cause an influx in rural areas. Even with warmer temperatures, higher elevation areas like southeastern Oregon will be cooler than more heavily populated urban areas facing potentially extreme summer heat.

“With increases in temperature,” Hamilton said, “the real problem is going to be more people” in rural areas, including the Klamath River Basin.

If that happens, existing attitudes and suspicion of outsiders could lead to more resentment of outside intervention in local affairs, said Mark Clark, an Oregon Institute of Technology history professor.

“Folks feel they’re no longer in control of their destiny,” he said.

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