

# Klamath County approves water deal



From left to right, Klamath County Commissioners Al Switzer, Cheryl Hukill and John Elliott. Elliott will sign the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement on behalf of Klamath County.

## ***Commissioners unanimously support Klamath agreement***

**By TY BEAVER**  
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The Klamath County Board of Commissioners unanimously agreed to support the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement Tuesday.

Commissioners said the agreement isn't perfect. Commissioners Al Switzer and Cheryl Hukill said they still don't fully agree with the idea of removing dams that provide power.

However, they see no better alternative to move the county and the region forward, and said that by signing, the county can continue to advocate for opponents and supporters of the agreements.

"Klamath County has got to be at the table," Switzer said.

"If we are not at the table, we are letting our citizens down," Switzer said.

Commissioners also voted to support a related Klamath River dam removal agreement. Commissioner John Elliott will sign both agreements on the board's behalf.

## **The agreement**

After years of negotiations among stakeholders, a final public review draft of the restoration agreement was released in early January. Stakeholders had until Tuesday to have their constituents review it and decide whether to support or reject it.

All three commissioners said they've spent the past week meeting with proponents and opponents of the landmark document, reading it in detail and seeking answers to their questions. More than 400 people attended a public hearing sponsored by the county in late January, and commissioners questioned stakeholders at a meeting Monday.

## **Working together**

Switzer said it was sad that the documents have split the community. Both groups need to start

working together to make it work for everyone involved, and litigation is not the way to keep the community whole, he said.

Elliott said the agreement is the best path forward. The county and others can't continue to reject solutions and risk not participating in the agreements' implementation, he said.

"I find the alternatives are not equal," he said.

The commissioner said he's noted a changed attitude from federal and state agencies. Officials are listening and seeking input from the community on how to improve the Basin, yet allow life to continue. Others involved need to take the same position, Elliott said.

Hukill said she reviewed the restoration agreement to see what would be best for the whole of the county. While she disagrees with dam removal, she said it was a private business deal between PacifiCorp and the state and federal governments.

"Just as when Gottschalks announced that they were closing their store, I had no right to interfere with a private business deal," she said from a prepared statement.

Tom Mallams, president of the Klamath Off Project Water Users, said he was disappointed but not surprised in the board's decision.

He said public officials need to take a stand against out-of-control spending and that water rights adjudication should be completed before there's any settlement.

"They said in there we can't rely on litigation to solve these problems, but the legal system is there to solve some of these problems," he said.

Greg Addington, executive director of Klamath Water Users Association, said he was pleased with the board's decision and was glad to see the commissioners decide to be engaged in the process.

"This further emphasizes it's not just about dam removal," he said of the decision. "It's about the whole county."

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