

Let's work together to avoid the anger that came in 2001

Klamath Falls Herald and News Editorial
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There's been much progress since, but relations are still fragile

The Klamath Basin is struggling toward another agonizing growing season. There's little snow in the mountains and the prospect is for even less water from the snowpack than there was in 2001 when the Klamath Reclamation Project was cut off from its main reservoir — Upper Klamath Lake.

But there will be some water this year and it will come early enough in the irrigation season to do some real good thanks to an increased flexibility by the federal government on how water allocations are determined. There is also more awareness by Basin residents of the difficulties people face. There were better relationships built in the years that followed 2001 and more up-front action by state and federal government to help this year.

The Bureau of Reclamation announced Thursday that the Project would get 150,000 acre-feet starting in May. That's about one third of the normal amount — a tremendous cut, but at least irrigators know what to expect. They didn't have that in 2001.

What they had was a dreadful summer of dying crops, bitterness and economic hardship that led to bankruptcies and foreclosures.

After the worst of the bitterness played itself out in the years following the cutoff, efforts to understand each other were begun by the people who depend on water and compete for it.

People at both ends of the 250-mile Klamath River began to see there was more to gain by working together than by perpetual conflict and costly court cases. People with different interests on the river — farmers, fisherman, ranchers and tribes — began to see the benefits of cooperation. That led to an effort to put together an overall solution to the problems of the Klamath River — the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement. Not everybody agreed, but it is a major step in the right direction.

This year will test those still fragile relationships.

Nobody likes what's ahead. Irrigators will get far less water than they usually do. Some people will think even that's too much. In 2001, racial comments dealing with the Tribes were common, making things worse.

Let's not give way this year to the anger that many will surely feel. Let's work through what is going to be a difficult year without unnecessarily making things worse.

Editorial board

Pat Bushey wrote today's editorial. The members of the Herald and News editorial board are Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Steve Miller and Opinion Editor Pat Bushey. The community advisors to the editorial board are Ernie Palmer, Kate Marquez and Steve Harper.

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