

Important good news about water arrives mixed in with the bad

Long Lake storage feasible; will the economics work?

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Despite the drought and the shortage of water for agriculture and fish, there was some good news last week about Klamath Basin water: Storage in the Long Lake Basin is technically feasible.

That won't put any more water in the Klamath River or local irrigation canals this year, or any time soon. But it could pay off in the long range for those who depend on the Klamath River along its entire 250-mile length from Klamath Falls to the Pacific Ocean.

There's been interest for decades in the feasibility of using the Long Lake Basin west of Upper Klamath Lake to store water. The Bureau of Reclamation has been studying it for years.

Last week, the Bureau said it has completed studies that show water storage in the basin is technically feasible. The Bureau is now moving into a study of the economic feasibility of such a plan, which could take another four or five months. Estimated cost of the construction of the dam and other facilities needed at the basin range from \$550 million to \$2.3 billion.

Bureau of Reclamation officials said the signing of the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement prompted the financial study of the Long Lake project for its environmental impact related to the agreement.

The restoration agreement is a wide-ranging document aimed at bringing a settlement to many issues involved in allocations from the Klamath River, including irrigators, tribes and fishermen. It was signed by most of the interests involved, including the states of Oregon and California, but not by all.

Long Lake's storage, if developed, would be a type that doesn't exist in the upper Klamath Basin. The main storage reservoir for the 240,000-acre Klamath Reclamation Project is Upper Klamath Lake. It's Oregon's biggest natural lake (most of the time), but it's shallow and its broad surface area means it loses a tremendous amount of water through evaporation.

Long Lake's configuration would be different. It would be a much deeper lake with less loss of water through evaporation. Its releases could be timed to bring the best benefit.

Long Lake wouldn't solve every problem. Storage doesn't create precipitation — it provides a place to store it if it does fall. The Basin would still need good water years. Improved storage, however, would improve the value of those good water years and lessen the damage done by droughts.

The Basin has a lot riding on how the figures come out on the economic study.

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