

# Uncertainty drives need for restoration agreement

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Klamath Falls Herald and News

July 25, 2010

I represent farmers throughout the Klamath Reclamation Project whose only aim in life is to be left alone to farm and ranch as generations have for a hundred years or more.

The Project is a huge component of the economies of Klamath, Modoc and Siskiyou counties. The Klamath Water Users Association board is made up of producers who, like their neighbors, have shared goals and ambitions.

Our lives changed in 1992 when the Endangered Species Act became the driving force of our water supplies. From that point on, it became a monthly issue of whether we met the biological opinion on the lake and river levels and fears of facing a shut-off the next day.

## **Total uncertainty**

Irrigation district managers and those involved in the everyday workings of the Project can attest to the total uncertainty this type of management brings to the farm community. Most folks on the street or above the lake or even within the Project were too busy with their everyday lives to realize how hard that was, or even that it was happening.

Twenty years of lawsuits, which cost us all with little benefit, a court-ordered flow regime and total shutoff in 2001, bring us to 2010. 2010 is far from over; court-ordered flows downriver last fall bled Klamath Lake low.

## **Communitywide**

Then a semi-drought in January and February brings us to a situation where many farms will not irrigate, and those that can will have a third of their water supply. This does not pay the bills, provide tax revenue to the counties or the city of Klamath Falls, or support businesses.

Hence: The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement - an agreement signed by most irrigation districts and KWUA. Why? We believe it is a way to make our water supply stable and certain so we are not faced with constant threat of shut-offs or hindered in our pursuit of operating our family farms.

It wasn't an easy decision by KWUA's board, but after much investigation, we feel it is unquestionably the best and most viable way for our economy to go forward.

Power: Eight or 10 years ago water users began to negotiate our power contract, knowing without it our Project system would be in jeopardy since this Project relies on affordable power to lift, drain, and reuse water five to seven times, making it one of the most efficient projects in the country, but it can't be done with tariff-priced power.

Negotiation with PacifiCorp had short-term results in the form of phased-in power rates ramping up to tariff rate. We asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for intervention, believing that the power rate was a license condition and should continue.

### **Building the dams**

In the beginning of the Klamath Hydroelectric Project the United States opted to let COPCO (now PacifiCorp) build the dams instead of building them themselves, as occurred in much of the West at that time. We understood the beneficial irrigation rate to be a trade-off for the right to develop this power. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission decided otherwise.

Here we are in 2010. Some are paying full tariff for power and some will be soon. The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement will bring some form of wholesale power to the Project. It's nothing like the original contract, but it's better than 11 to 13 cents per kilowatt. Power has become the largest budget item on many farms; I, for one, did not need that.

The dams are not our dams. The United States forfeited that right in the beginning. If PacifiCorp decides it's cost effective (or not) - to remove those dams, it will.

### **Water, power**

Components of the restoration agreement that we have some ability to influence, and which are most important for our family farms and ranches, relate to certainty of water and affordable power.

Those dams will not provide affordable power to run pumps, but the restoration agreement can. After 20 years of experience with the Endangered Species Act, we know that not adapting will change our farming economy into something that none of us will recognize in the future. Someone once said, "Idealism is a wonderful thing, if you can afford it." We can't!

I challenge Oregon State Sen. Doug Whitsett, Oregon State Rep. Bill Garrard and California U.S. Rep. Tom McClintock to engage with a larger number of your constituents to save family farms before it's too late. Please come to irrigators with an open mind and let's go forward to save this community.

### **The author**

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