

Governor signs Klamath dams bill

Federal officials meet about water agreement

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Kulongoski

Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed a bill Tuesday allowing PacifiCorp to charge its customers to help pay for dam removal on the Klamath River as federal officials met in Klamath Falls to work on a final dam removal agreement.

Dam removal is a key component of the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, which seeks to resolve water disputes among farmers, tribes, fishermen and environmentalists. Proponents say removal would restore salmon runs along the Klamath River.

“Every farmer and fisherman whose livelihood depends on a healthy river system will benefit from the restoration of the Klamath Basin,” Kulongoski said in a press release.

Tom Mallams, an irrigator off the Klamath Reclamation Project and president of the Klamath Off-Project Water Users, said the governor views dam removal as his legacy.

He criticized the governor’s support of dam removal, saying neither government officials nor PacifiCorp have fully disclosed the full cost of removal nor what it would have cost to keep the dams and install fish ladders. He said he also doesn’t understand how Oregon ratepayers should pay for dam removal in California. “That’s not a legacy, that’s a travesty,” he said.

State and federal government officials and representatives of PacifiCorp signed a tentative agreement in November to move toward dam removal. A final agreement is expected by September.

PacifiCorp customers

As part of that tentative agreement, Kulongoski pledged legislation that would allow PacifiCorp to charge its Oregon customers \$180 million, the bulk of the removal costs of the four dams, over 10 years.

PacifiCorp has said the increase for most ratepayers should average about \$1.50 per month.

A number of dam removal proponents, from tribal groups and environmentalists to irrigators and fishermen, praised the governor’s activity and said they are continuing to work toward a final agreement on dam removal and restoration.

‘Word-tuning’

Steve Kandra, an irrigator on the Project and board member of the Klamath Water Users Association, said he had taken part in discussion about the final dam removal

agreement and the restoration agreement. He was not sure whether those involved would continue to meet this week.

“Basically, it’s word-tuning,” he said.

He said he was pleased with the governor’s signing of the bill but that the emphasis shouldn’t be on dam removal, but the overall goal of the broader restoration agreement. Dam removal is just a component of the effort.

“I wish the focus would not be on the four dams and their status but on resolving conflict,” he said.

Mallams said he was aware of the meeting in Klamath Falls, but his group has not been included in dam removal discussions.

“That’s just not something we agree with,” he said.

Requests for further comment by the governor’s office and Greg Addington, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association, were not immediately returned.

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