

# Doing the easy thing isn't always right

Guest opinions

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“Professional polling companies have long been aware that voters who are undecided usually vote no. They also know that more voters vote no when the measure is difficult to understand.” — State Sen. Doug Whitsett, from the May 15, 2009 Oregon State Legislature — Senator Doug Whitsett News Update.

In their July 31 letter to the editor, our three elected state representatives opined that “Republicans oppose dam removal.” They appear to be trying to take a complex set of issues and turn them into a simple sound bite that resonates with the people in this county, a very clever and often successful scheme. I believe however, that the people in this county understand that the issues at hand aren't that simple.

I respect the time and effort these legislators and their families give, doing what is frankly a thankless job. And I thank them for their past support of the agricultural industry. However, doing the easy thing isn't always the right thing. Opposing dam removal in Klamath County is the easy thing. The hard and right thing is to accept that Klamath Basin irrigators (and the public in general) are operating in a drastically different world now than they were 53 years ago when PacifiCorp's predecessor, the California Oregon Power Company obtained the last federal license to operate those dams. There was no Clean Water Act or Endangered Species Act (ESA) to contend with. Klamath Project irrigators know all too well what this can mean. PacifiCorp in its attempt to relicense these facilities understands this as well.

## **Remaining viable**

We are not big fans of how either of these federal laws has been implemented. Klamath Project irrigators have been the poster child for ESA reform in the West. The Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA) testified before Congress and helped coordinate Congressional field hearings here in Klamath Falls. A significant ESA amendment effort was spearheaded when Republicans controlled both bodies of Congress and the Presidency. The effort failed and its chief sponsor, Congressman Richard Pombo, lost his re-election bid as a result. We know the ESA will be part of the landscape that we operate in for the foreseeable future and we must, and will, find ways to remain viable.

We are practical AND conservative people. We depend on eight dams to divert water within the Klamath Project. We support hydroelectric power. PacifiCorp is a private company that may well be choosing to make a practical business decision (and one that will necessarily be the least cost option for its ratepayers). Does the Republican Party

not support this company's private property rights, and its ability to make sound business decisions? Are PacifiCorp's customers willing to pay more (and probably significantly more) on their power bills to keep dams that will produce significantly less electricity than they do today? Well, we don't know the answer to that question, because our legislators' "poll" didn't ask it.

**Avoiding conflict**

The Klamath Water Users Association, a vast majority of Klamath Project irrigation districts, a group representing irrigators outside the Klamath Reclamation Project, the Klamath Tribes and many others have crafted an agreement that we all believe will work for the betterment of the communities we represent without detriment to others. The agreement provides protection to landowners and a significantly more secure and predictable supply of water for irrigators. If our legislators and others, on behalf of the "Republican Party" are successful in their opposition to this collaboration and the overall settlement, the likely result will be perpetuation of instability and damaging conflict. Their success will not ensure that dams are not removed. Moreover, there will be no benefit to irrigators, no economic development opportunities for the county and no protections to landowners throughout the county.

Klamath Project irrigators have fought the endless battles in the courtrooms, fought the media battles and have spent countless hours in meetings and conducting research exploring possible alternatives. We have settled on what we believe to be the course of action that will be most likely to succeed and provide real relief. To our elected officials who oppose this effort, I ask yet again, what is your alternative? And what do you propose to do the next time water users are told there isn't any water available for irrigation?

**Greg Addington is the executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association.**

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