

KBRA still waiting for federal legislation

Parts of the agreement can proceed under existing funding and laws, supporters say

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Three months after stakeholders, including two governors and a top federal official, signed the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, work continues to implement it and a related Klamath River dam removal deal.

But until there's federal legislation and millions of dollars in funding, there's only so much that can be done.

"I wouldn't say it's in a holding pattern," said Paul Simmons, attorney for Klamath Water Users Association and its member irrigation districts, "but the whole effort can't land until there's federal legislation."

The agreement aims to resolve water conflicts in the Klamath River Basin between irrigators, tribes, fisheries and conservationists. It also advocates removal of four Klamath River dams to provide fish passage.

Stakeholders signed the restoration and dam removal agreements in February, ending years of closed-door negotiations and talks.

Now, those stakeholders are focused on implementing the documents, said Ed Sheets, a consultant originally hired to facilitate negotiations. He is now working with stakeholders on implementation.

The KBRA out-lines what needs to be done in the next few years, and much of it is administrative and preparatory.

Among those provisions is formation of the Klamath Basin Coordinating Council, the body charged with overseeing implementation of drought and fishery plans for the region.

Scientific studies required to determine whether four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River should come out are under way, Simon said. The actual decision isn't due until mid-2012.

State and federal officials are also drafting an environmental impact report and scheduling public meetings on the KBRA.

"This signals the beginning of the scientific and legal reviews mandated by the national Environmental Policy Act and the California Environmental Quality Act," a press release said.

Draft legislation

Greg Addington, executive director of Klamath Water Users Association, said there is draft legislation being circulated among the stakeholders, but it's not likely it would be introduced in Congress this year.

"There are people in Washington who are interested in (the legislation) and in what it says," Simmons said.

Sheets said there is plenty for the stakeholders to do in the meantime.

“I think it’s my hope that some things can proceed under existing authority and funding,” he said.

Side Bars

About the restoration agreement

It would cost roughly \$1.5 billion to implement all aspects of the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement and its related dam removal agreement.

Among its key provisions:

- Removing four hydroelectric dams, owned by PacifiCorp, pending studies to determine feasibility of removal. Removal would improve passage for anadromous fish species.
- Establishing sustainable water supplies and affordable power rates for irrigators.
- Helping the Klamath Tribes acquire a 92,000-acre parcel of private timberland called the Mazama Tree Farm.
- Providing funding for habitat restoration and economic development throughout the region.

Public scoping sessions planned

Federal and state officials will host public meetings regarding the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement as part of the scientific and legal review of the document.

Following are the times, dates and locations of the meetings:

- July 7 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Copco Community Center in Montague
6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Yreka Community Center in Yreka
- July 8 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Klamath County Fairgrounds in Klamath Falls
- July 9 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Chiloquin Community Center in Chiloquin
- July 13 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Chetco Activities Center in Brookings
- July 14 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Arcata Community Center in Arcata
- July 15 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Karuk Tribe Community Room in Orleans

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