

# Editorial: Fish, rivers win two long battles

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Our view: Removing dams can be a good thing. So can building dams. People need to be flexible about both ideas.

In California's contentious battles over water, it was a good week for the environment.

Rivers and fish won a couple of protracted fights. At the top of the state, a deal was cut to remove four hydroelectric dams along the Klamath River. In the lower half of the state, more water started flowing from a dam east of Fresno that eventually will restore year-round flows — and hopefully salmon — to the San Joaquin River.

Both developments are remarkable, and the byproduct of years of negotiation. Power companies, environmental groups, fishermen, and farmers and other water users all seem to want something different.

In the Klamath River case, they all compromised and gave up a little to reach an agreement. In the San Joaquin River case, there also was compromise — after a firm kick from a federal judge who said it needed to get done.

The Klamath River salmon run was once legendary. Now it's in shambles. There are a few hurdles to go, and about 10 years before work begins, but once the four dams in California and Oregon are removed, it will open about 300 more miles of the river to spawning salmon and steelhead.

The San Joaquin River rebirth also will take years, though not quite as long. Right now the river runs dry in two stretches totaling more than 60 miles after it gurgles out of the Sierra and into the southern San Joaquin Valley. Year-round flows should be re-established in four or five years.

We've argued for years that dams are needed to increase California's water storage. Why would we be celebrating the removal of dams on the Klamath?

The short answer is that modern knowledge of how to use reservoirs correctly is changing.

A century and half-century ago, the thinking was to dam wild rivers in strategic places. This would create huge reservoirs that generate electricity and provide irrigation water and flood protection.

That thinking also contributed to nearly killing off California's amazing salmon and steelhead runs. The Klamath River dams are expendable because they are used mostly

for hydroelectric power, not water containment. The four dams produce enough electricity for about 70,000 customers. But PacifiCorp, the company that operates the dams, told the Klamath Herald and News the company has installed wind turbines in the last three years alone that produce 10 times the power of the hydro dams.

See, times change.

Needing water and needing power are two different matters. The dams on Shasta and Oroville will never be torn down because they are important parts of the water infrastructure. But the state and federal governments have learned enough to realize they should not dam wild rivers that contain anadromous fisheries.

However, a reservoir like Sites in Colusa County would work. That lake would be in a basin west of Maxwell with no year-round streams. Instead, water would fill it through a canal when runoff on the Sacramento River is high in the winter and spring. Some years it would fill, other years it wouldn't. That sort of "off-stream storage" makes the most sense when discussing new reservoirs.

California has huge water problems to confront. That will take compromise by all sides and an admission that best practices change. To wit: New reservoirs can be good if they're in the right place, and old dams can be eliminated if they've outlived their purpose.

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