

# Dam removal: Have a dialogue, make the decision

## ***Keep asking: What's the alternative if it doesn't happen?***

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If you're on the fence about dam removal on the Klamath River, it's time to get off. The draft dam removal agreement has been made public. You can access it at [www.doi.gov](http://www.doi.gov) — the Department of the Interior Web page.

Read it. Study it. Ask questions. Decide. One question you should ask yourself is what happens if the dam removal agreement doesn't proceed.

Klamath County commissioners should ask themselves that as they go page by page through the 132-page draft document that was released Wednesday by PacifiCorp and about two dozen other groups with direct interest in the issue.

So should U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, who has been the Klamath Basin's biggest champion on water matters. And U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who sounded a note of encouragement on the draft plan. And U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, whose newness in the position probably warrants some extra time to sort it out, but sounds supportive.

All three Oregon state legislators — State Sen. Doug Whitsett and State Representatives Bill Garrard and George Gilman — oppose dam removal. What's the alternative? Take another look. The status quo is not even a possibility.

PacifiCorp estimates that it would take hundreds of millions of dollars to install the fish ladders and screens required if the dams stay in place. The costs don't end there.

Conditions to meet standards set by the State of California and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission could add many millions more in costs and include steep reductions in the amount of power produced because of flow restrictions.

The cost of power per unit "could have skyrocketed," said Dean Brockbank, vice president and general counsel for PacifiCorp Energy. So much for all of that "cheap green power" the dams produce.

## **Application hits buzz saw**

PacifiCorp owns the dams, which it has been operating on a year-to-year basis since 2006 when its 50-year license lapsed. It filed for a license renewal and ran into a buzz saw.

Fishermen and tribes on the lower Klamath River, who had long campaigned against the dams because they saw them as a reason for the decline in Klamath River salmon runs, strongly opposed relicensing. The Upper Klamath Basin was also going through almost-annual struggles over water allocations, including the shutoff of most of the irrigation water on the Klamath Reclamation Project in 2001.

Bitter relations between the upper and lower Klamath Basin mellowed as people at both ends of the river found common interests. That developed into a lengthy closed-door process involving many representatives of various interests who issued the draft Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement 20 months ago.

The document was aimed at settling many natural resource issues for the Basin, including making water supplies more certain for irrigators. It's supported by many interests, but not all, who have historic, economic, legal and cultural ties to the Basin.

The proposed restoration agreement depends on the dams being removed, though the dams can be removed without the agreement being implemented.

The final decision on dam removal would come after several years of study. There has already been good science on it, and there will be much more.

The dam-removal proposal is on the table. Have the dialogue. Then decide.

**Opinion Editor Pat Bushey wrote today's editorial.**