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Humboldt County Supports Klamath Basin Economic Restoration Act of 2011 H.R. 3398 (Thompson) S. 1851 (Merkley)

Humboldt County supports legislation that authorizes restoration of the Klamath River Basin and settlement of the hydroelectric licensing of the Klamath Hydroelectric Project in accordance with the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement and the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement, and legislation that provides implementation funding.

Overview

Humboldt County supports the Klamath settlement agreements because they provide an unprecedented opportunity to resolve longstanding disputes involving dams, water diversions, and salmon runs in the Klamath Basin, that extends across nine counties in northern California and southern Oregon. The agreements are the product of a multi-year negotiation process between local governments, state and federal agencies, tribes, irrigators, fishermen, conservation groups, and a private utility to achieve sustainability for Klamath River fisheries, economic stability for affected agricultural interests, and substantial improvement to the overall ecosystem health of the Klamath River basin. The agreements will result in removal of the four lowermost dams on the Klamath River by 2020, and create a comprehensive framework and mechanisms to achieve major watershed restoration through improved river flow regimes, habitat rehabilitation, improved water quality, and fisheries reintroduction.

Background

The Klamath River basin has struggled with competing demands for water and rotating environmental crises for over a century. Humboldt and other coastal counties in northern California and southern Oregon have historically been dependent upon a healthy Klamath River and its fisheries. Over the past 60 years we have experienced a decline of once-abundant Klamath stock, loss of commercial processing facilities, the progressive decimation of our salmon fleet and emptying of our harbors, and suffering among the families in our fishing communities. Klamath water conflicts have been the focus of regulatory proceedings and litigation in various venues, without resolution. Regional conflicts intensified in the late 1990s and early 2000s with listings of threatened and endangered species, abrupt water shut-offs to irrigators, blooms of toxic algae, water disease outbreaks, devastating fish kills, and commercial fishing closures.

Efforts to achieve a more comprehensive solution to the Klamath River basin water management issues gained momentum in 2006 as local governments, state and federal agencies, tribes, irrigators, a private utility company, and conservation groups began constructive discussions outside the courts. Humboldt County was one of nearly 30 parties that actively participated in the nearly four-year negotiation process leading to the development of the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement and Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement. In February 2010, we became one of 28 signatory parties to these agreements. The Klamath settlement process brought stakeholders with different interests together to work constructively toward real changes and improvements. Humboldt County is committed to supporting the Klamath settlement agreements, maintaining the underlying partnerships, and assisting with implementation over the next 50 years.

Key Benefits

Restoration of fish populations – The Klamath settlement agreements will deliver a tremendous boost Klamath River fisheries which are in steep decline. Coho salmon are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, Chinook populations are a fraction of what they were historically, and other species such as green sturgeon and Pacific lamprey are declining as well. The San Francisco Chronicle concluded that demolition of the four dams on the salmon-starved Klamath River would be the equivalent of the Berlin Wall coming down (Editorial, 11/14/08). Annual production of adult Chinook salmon is forecasted to increase by 81%, with comparable increases expected for other species.

Restoration of natural processes – Removal of the dams and re-establishment of habitat connectivity and variable stream flows in the Klamath River will contribute significantly toward restoration of physical, chemical, and biological processes and interactions that are essential to a functioning aquatic ecosystem.

Community benefits – The agreements will alleviate ongoing economic and social hardships to various communities who value and depend on the river, by improving water quality, fisheries, and ecosystem health. These improvements will help restore cultural values for Indian tribes whose ways of life are centered on the river. The Klamath River is the ancestral home of the Yurok and Karuk Tribes and salmon is one of the cornerstones of their cultures.

Economic benefits – Implementation of the agreements will provide a significant boost for sustainable jobs and economic productivity for Humboldt County and other coastal counties. Humboldt County's economy is linked to the Klamath River through fishing, recreation, and tourism. For the coastal region from central California to northern Oregon, implementation of the agreements will cause an increase of \$7.3 million (2012 dollars) of net revenue for commercial ocean fishing of Chinook salmon and 450 new jobs associated with commercial fishing. Implementation will also have significant economic benefits to ocean and river recreational fishing and tribal harvest. Residents and businesses in 12 coastal counties (Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey Counties in California; Lane, Douglass, and Coos Counties in Oregon) will benefit from improved commercial and sport fishing opportunities, and reduced risk of fishery closures.

Equity and fairness – Coastal communities have lived with the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the Klamath dams and excessive water diversions for decades. Dams and excess diversions have taken the natural wealth of the river and redistributed the benefits to the upper basin. Humboldt and other counties situated downstream have seen tremendous losses to our commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries. The Klamath settlement agreements provide a remedy for these historic wrongs using an approach that benefits the entire basin and supports upper basin farmers in maintaining their livelihoods.

Local solution – The Klamath settlement agreements were developed by local stakeholders working in collaboration to find mutually acceptable solutions.

Cost-effectiveness for utility ratepayers – Public Utility Commissions in California and Oregon have determined that dam removal is in Pacificorp ratepayers' best financial interests compared to the alternative of upgrade the dams to legal fish passage requirements. In addition, the dams are aging, crumbling infrastructure and have a limited lifetime due to sediment accumulation and loss of capacity. Removal of the four dams will ultimately cost ratepayers less than allowing the dams to remain in place.

Wise use of federal tax dollars – Dam removal will be achieved at no cost to federal taxpayers: the cost of dam removal will be borne by Pacificorps' ratepayers (total of \$200 million) and the State of California (\$35 million to \$92 million depending on full or partial removal). Implementation of the restoration agreement proposes to redirect already allocated funds to the Klamath Basin and reduce the risk of additional future fishing closures and disaster relief payments.

Water resource management – The agreements will lead to increased storage within Upper Klamath Lake, voluntary retirement of certain water uses and water rights, and limitations on the quantity of water diverted from the Upper Klamath Lake and Klamath River for delivery to irrigators. In exchange, irrigators benefit from the agreements through predictability of water deliveries and affordable power.

Benefits for National Wildlife Refuges – The agreements provide firm water delivery commitments for National Wildlife Refuges which are critical components of the Pacific Flyway for birds in North America. This includes, for the first time ever, significant water commitments for the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, one of the nation's oldest and most important refuges. With concurrence from our irrigation partners in the Upper Klamath Basin, fish and wildlife and national wildlife refuges will become authorized purposes of the Klamath Irrigation Project, under an approach designed to enhance fish and wildlife that is also respectful of the important agricultural values of the Project.

Interim measures for dam operations – The agreements contain conditions and measures applicable to PacificCorp for interim operations of the four dams to provide readily achievable water quality improvements and avoid continued degradation, until the dams are removed in 2019-2020.

References

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www.klamathrestoration.gov