

NEWS RELEASE

Klamath Riverkeeper Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations Karuk Tribe of California

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Groups Want PacifiCorp Held Accountable for Toxic Discharges

Riverkeeper, Karuk Tribe, and Commercial Fishermen Petition CA Water Boards to Control Toxic Discharges from Klamath Dams

SACRAMENTO, CA- Today the Klamath Riverkeeper, the Karuk Tribe of California, and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association (PCFFA) jointly petitioned for the California State Water Board to hold PacifiCorp accountable for dangerously high blooms of toxic blue green algae in Klamath reservoirs. Since 2005, Iron Gate and Copco reservoirs have seen some of the most toxic blooms of the toxic algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* ever recorded in the United States (see <http://www.karuk.us/press/06-08-08%20toxic%20reservoirs.pdf> for details).

Health experts warn that even modest exposure to the toxin produced by the algae, called microcystin, can lead to skin rashes, vomiting, and diarrhea. High doses of the toxin, such as those found in the Klamath reservoirs each summer, could lead to massive liver failure and even death in humans. Microcystin also can poison and kill fish and wildlife.

“We want the California Water Board to hold PacifiCorp accountable for their dam’s pollution before someone gets sick,” said Klamath Riverkeeper Regina Chichizola.

According to the petitioners, the State water boards not only have the authority but the mandate to protect the public from toxins like these in water bodies. “PacifiCorp is clearly in violation of California’s Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act and it’s the responsibility of the California State Water Boards to hold corporate polluters like PacifiCorp accountable and require them to clean it up,” said Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations (PCFFA).

The Iron Gate and Copco reservoirs, behind the Klamath dams, have not only become “toxic algae factories” that generate microcystin, as set forth in the petition, but also have caused deteriorating water quality. Petitioners say the toxic releases have made many people not use the Klamath River.

For Karuk ceremonial leaders and participants, the toxic blooms also constitute an infringement on their freedom to practice their religion. During certain ceremonies, participants bath in the river for long periods of time making them especially susceptible to exposure. “This is one of the ways that companies like PacifiCorp are complicit in the genocide of Native American Cultures,” said Leaf Hillman, a Karuk Ceremonial leader and tribal Vice-chairman.

PacifiCorp’s dams provide optimal growth conditions for the toxic algae by trapping nutrient rich water in shallow warm reservoirs. Last year the microcystin toxin levels behind the Klamath dams exceeded World Health Organization guidelines for a “moderate health risk” by nearly 4,000 fold. Neither the United States EPA nor the State of California as yet have independent guidelines for these toxins.

The Klamath dams are owned by Portland-based PacifiCorp, which in turn is owned by Billionaire Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway Company. Although the Buffett family has a reputation for philanthropy, particularly among Native American causes, they have shown little interest in addressing the negative impacts their own company has had on the Klamath River Tribes and the West Coast salmon fishery.

Tribes, commercial and sport fishermen, Humboldt County, many river-based businesses, conservation groups, several state and federal agencies, and the Governors of California and Oregon have all called for the removal of the dams as a means to restore sustainable runs of salmon to what was once the third most productive salmon river in America. The human health impacts of the reservoirs have also been held up as a reason for dam removal.

According to Chichizola, “its hard to imagine how a guy like Warren Buffett can ignore the devastating impacts his company is having on the rural communities of the Klamath Basin and the economies of west coast fishing communities.”

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