

Karuk Tribe • Tulelake Irrigation District • California Trout

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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For more information:

Craig Tucker, *Klamath Coordinator, Karuk Tribe*, cell 916-207-8294

Curtis Knight, *Mt. Shasta Area Program Manager, Cal Trout*, (530) 926-3755

John Crawford (President), Earl Danosky (Manager) *Tulelake Irrigation District* (530) 667-2249

UNLIKELY COALITION URGES SISKIYOU SUPES TO APPROVE KLAMATH RESTORATION AGREEMENTS

Fish and Farms would be better off today if the Klamath Restoration Agreements were already in place

Yreka, CA – In midst of a low water year that plagues farms and fish, an unlikely coalition of Siskiyou County constituents are urging Supervisors to sign-on to a pair of connected agreements that would provide more certainty for agriculture and restore fish habitat.

The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) and the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement (KHSA) were developed over the course of several years by Tribes, farmers, ranchers, fishermen, environmentalists and officials from county, state and federal governments.

“We must stop the Klamath’s rotating crisis. Every year we all face increasing economic uncertainty because we have yet to implement a strategy to manage our scarce water resources. More importantly, we worry whether or not we will be able to teach our children how to practice our culture – this is true whether or not you are a farmer, fisherman, or Indian,” said John Crawford, an irrigator in Siskiyou County and President of the Tulelake Irrigation District. The District sent a letter to County supervisors emphasizing the importance of the agreements for agricultural stability.

Proponents argue that this year is a perfect case in point for why the Agreements improve the lives of everyone in the Basin.

This year Klamath Irrigation Project deliveries are projected to meet only about 30% of the demand for water from Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River. The situation is due in large part to a lack of precipitation, but if fisheries managers had the flexibility to manage the system in the manner prescribed by the recently signed Klamath Basin

Restoration Agreement, more water would be available for fish in the important spring months ahead and more water would be available for agriculture as well.

The current management plan prescribes winter flows in the river without considering weather events in real time. In a dry winter like this past one, the result is that flows were held steady as if it were a normal water year. Under Real Time Management, flows would have been pared back to better reflect the actual weather conditions. This approach would have allowed resource managers to make use of the storage in Upper Klamath Lake and provide benefits for basin fisheries and a predictable and sufficient supply for agriculture.

According to Karuk Tribe Natural Resources Director Leaf Hillman, “We basically ran up a water deficit this winter gambling that a late season storm would bail us out, but the rains never came. Implementation of the Klamath Restoration Agreement would provide a more sound approach to water management.”

“By putting our collective heads together, we have found a better way of doing things. It took many years of difficult discussions between groups that historically have not been able to work together,” said Curtis Knight of Cal Trout.

In addition, Real Time Management and additional measures in the KBRA would directly address disease issues in the lower Klamath River. According to Knight, “water users in the Shasta and Scott Rivers are under regulatory pressure to protect salmon and steelhead but high rates of infection from disease in the Klamath River can confound local restoration and protection measures. The KBRA would benefit water users of Siskiyou County by funding disease research and providing more natural variable flows to disrupt disease hot spots.”

If Siskiyou County decides to not become a party to the Agreements along with Tribes, irrigators, fishermen, PacifiCorp and others, the groups will likely move ahead without the County. “Either way we plan to move forward, but we think the County deserves a seat at the table as stakeholders work together on developing the detailed plans prescribed by the Agreements,” said Hillman.

The Agreements call for an Irrigation Project water management plan, fisheries reintroduction plan, drought plan, dam removal plan and more. The basic principles of the plans are outlined in the Agreements, but signatories will be responsible for adding many of the details. Environmental and public interest laws will require a public review and input process before any major actions are implemented.

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Editor’s note: for more information including previous press releases, a technical memo describing how KBRA management would have helped address this year’s drought, and much more, go to www.klamathrestoration.org

