May 28, 2024

Congressman Doug LaMalfa

408 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

SENT VIA EMAIL

Congressman Cliff Bentz

1239 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

SENT VIA EMAIL

**Subject: April 30th Three County Board Meeting**

Dear Congressman LaMalfa and Congressman Bentz:

On April 30th the counties of Klamath, Oregon, and Siskiyou and Modoc, California held a joint three-county board meeting to tour the Klamath Project and meet with local leaders and irrigators. We discussed a variety of topics ranging from the history and culture of the Project to current challenges and opportunities. Therefore, we are writing this letter to highlight a few of the items discussed and to seek your assistance in resolving the challenges and accomplishing the opportunities.

* On April 5th the Counties sent a letter (Attachment 1) to Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Commissioner Touton calling for Reclamation to provide a full water allocation to Klamath Project irrigators. Again, on May 13th following Reclamation’s announcement of far less than a full allocation and the April 30th three-county meeting, the Counties sent a follow-up letter (Attachment 2) calling for Reclamation to immediately adjust their allocation to provide full deliveries to the Klamath Project from Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River. Hydrologic conditions and snowpack are more than adequate to provide a full allocation. The Klamath Project is approximately 230,000 acres of fertile land that produces a variety of food products including potatoes, onions, grains, beef, horseradish, and mint. Farming and ranching in the Klamath Project provide half a billion dollars in regional economic activity. Just to highlight one such business, Cal-Ore Produce is an organization of family farmers who grow potatoes on over 2,500 acres of land, resulting in over one million sacks of potatoes every year. These potatoes are available to consumers at Wal-Mart and Whole Foods, and in french fry form at In-N-Out restaurants throughout the western United States. This vital agricultural production is only possible with adequate water deliveries, meaning that shorting irrigation supply removes food from the tables and plates of American families. Through this letter, we again make the request to supply a full allocation to the Klamath Project, and to secure adequate allocations for the Klamath Project every year moving forward.
* Reduced or lack of irrigation supplies over the last several decades have had impacts far beyond agriculture and the regional economy. When irrigation canals remain dried out, the infrastructure crumbles and cracks, causing significant public safety concerns. This also damages adjacent roads and bridges. When the Project is not irrigated, summer and fall winds cause massive dust storms that present a health problem to residents in the area, depositing soils into the Klamath River and Upper Klamath Lake, and obscuring visibility and air quality.
* The Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge (LKNWR) is vital to the United States refuge system, waterfowl, threatened and endangered species and the Pacific Flyway. However, for the first time ever, the LKNWR went dry in 2021 and only recently received water deliveries due to the efforts of Tulelake Irrigation District and partners in the area. To combat the potential continuation of drying up the lease lands, and to assist in the recovery of fish species, the Klamath Drainage District, in coordination with other entities, agencies, and groups has developed a conceptual restoration plan to reconnect the Klamath River and Lower Klamath Lake at the LKNWR’s Unit 2. This would allow fish access to perennial wetlands for the first time in decades. The plan, if implemented, would also establish rotational wetlands for waterfowl habitat and soil health. We ask that you support this feasibility project and provide any available resources to complete it.
* Recently, Congressman Cliff Bentz has introduced legislation advocated by the Klamath Water Users Association, Klamath Project irrigators, and the Tri-Counties. Congressman Bentz’s bill, H.R. 7938, the “Klamath Basin Water Agreement Support Act of 2024” calls for actions to align water supply and demand, authority for Reclamation to implement certain environmental and mitigation projects, and authority concerning power costs. Full details of H.R. can be found in Attachment 3. We would appreciate any support you can provide in advancing this bill.

We appreciate your attention to these issues. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these topics further, please contact, Elizabeth Nielsen, Siskiyou County Deputy County Administrator, at enielsen@co.siskiyou.ca.us or (530) 842-8012.

Sincerely,

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Michael N. Kobseff

Chair, Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

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Shane Starr, Chair

Modoc County Board of Supervisors

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David A. Henslee, Chair

Klamath County Board of Commissioners

cc: Karl Stock, Bureau of Reclamation

 Lanie Paquin, Bureau of Reclamation

 Alan Heck, Bureau of Reclamation

 Senator Brian Dahle

 Assemblymember Megan Dahle

 Senator Ron Wyden

 Commissioner Touton

 Director Paul Souza

 Rural County Representatives of California