

# Klamath Dam Removal Deal Needs More Work

by Erica Terence

For all the fighting over the merits and shortcomings of the deal to remove four ecologically destructive dams on the Klamath River, too little has been done to keep up the pressure to actually take the dams out.

Our voices are needed now more than ever at a state water board meeting in Sacramento on Tuesday February 17. At that meeting, negotiators will report back to water board regulators on progress towards a final dam removal agreement. Based on that report, the water board will decide whether to once again delay clean water permitting for the dams or resume environmental review.

Challenged by citizens in the streets, badgered in the media and cornered by the courts and public agencies, PacifiCorp finally negotiated the beginnings of a dam removal deal. Rather than throw this imperfect deal out, we must work hard over the next four months to transform it into an agreement that meets the social, economic, and environmental needs of the Klamath River.

What needs changing?

First, state water quality regulators must be fully empowered to enforce the Clean Water Act in the 12-year interim between now and dam removal without triggering a right of withdrawal from the agreement.

Second, PacifiCorp should be offered immunity solely for the act of dam removal, not for water quality and public health violations related to toxic, tumor-promoting algae pollution in the reservoirs behind the dams.

Third, a number of off-ramps that steal certainty from the agreement must also be eliminated.

Finally, payment for dam removal cannot be tied to a California bond that would fund new dams or the Peripheral Canal at the expense of the other rivers around the state. If the money to pay the tab cannot be recovered from PacifiCorp ratepayers under oversight by the Public Utilities Commissions, PacifiCorp should be a good corporate citizen and supply the remainder.

The burden of meeting the river's needs and upholding the public's rights in a

final dam deal rests on PacifiCorp, the states of California and Oregon, the federal government and several tribal governments. But the burden of pressuring them to make the necessary changes rests squarely with us, all the people who care about the river and its fish.

Extremists on both sides of the debate are trying to drag the deal down. But the clean water, habitat and fisheries benefits scientists say will flow from dam removal are too important to reject the deal and return to a protracted relicensing process that has only once - in hundreds of similar proceedings – resulted in dam removal.

Besides, sovereign tribes, commercial fishermen and farming communities most directly affected by over-allocation and mismanagement of water in the basin deserve a chance to rewrite their own destiny in a way that works for them.

Restoring the Klamath is up to us. If we stay organized and active, we can shape a solution that truly benefits the Klamath, and the rural communities that depend on it.

*Erica Terence grew up on the Salmon River, one of the few major tributaries to the Klamath River that's still undammed, and is now the Klamath Riverkeeper.*