

Where are we now?

What's happening in the Klamath Basin?

Perhaps the best comparison of life before 2001, and after 2001 in the Klamath Basin, would be something like prewar, an ambush, mass destruction, shock, then picking ourselves up and trying to survive the follow-up attacks.

Before 2001. A typical day on the farm was work, work, work. It was another God-blessed day, basking in the freedoms of America. One had a farm, machinery, kids, livestock, and the schedule of chores from dawn to dusk. Camaraderie was the cornerstone of our community. Neighbors helped neighbors. Life was hard, but there was always God, wildlife, neighbors, the harvest, and freedom to farm, and confidence in American's rights. Our Agricultural Organizations were active and dependent upon a small group of producers for input and action. On the ground, producers were doing the right thing, building projects to benefit wildlife and water, and growing crops.



Klamath Basin is one of the largest producing areas in the NW.

Brief History: Much of the Klamath Project was built from a lake bed, Tule Lake and Lower Klamath Lake. At the turn of the century, settlers came to ranch and farm at the lake's edge. The Bureau of Reclamation built the most efficient irrigation project in the United States, rerouting the water and building storage, much being in Klamath Lake. Since the water level is very shallow, most of the water used to irrigate fields returns to the system. And it was designed for the water to end up in the wildlife refuges. We are proud of the fact that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found no evidence of even one animal illness or death due to the strict precautions taken by Klamath Basin irrigators. The Basin was a closed basin before the diversions down the Klamath River were built, so water historically did not go over the Keno reef except on exceptionally high-water years. Sometimes the Link River went dry.

After World War I and World War II, veterans were invited to be in a lottery to win a homestead where the lake was. So these young families came to grow food for America for the rest of their lives. Each holds a water right signed by their President, since their land was reclaimed from a deep lake.

May, 2001. Irrigation water was withheld from the Klamath

Project. This was the first time in all known history that this land was denied water, except in drought year '92 when water was denied to Langell Valley. 2001 was the year Bruce Babbitt came back in the form of unworkable biological assessment (BA) for Reclamation. Klamath Lake was overflowing. Refuges were devastated. Farmers pumped their well water into the refuges while their fields went dry. Over 200 wells went dry. Farm laborers had to move away, many who had lived here for decades. They had no money or job or home to go to. Dirt blew causing accidents. People went broke. The elderly settlers, their children, and their children, cried. How could this happen? How, in America, could our country deprive our farms of water, our refuges of water, our community of an economy? How could 'environmentalists' tell us that we are bad, agriculture is bad, and we should let our land and our ecosystem forever go dry and die? There were meetings and gatherings constantly. Armed federal marshals guarded the headgates so farmers could not get water for their dying fields from the storage that they paid for.

2002. Full water deliveries were restored to farms and ranches.

December 2003. The vultures have arrived. Since the Bureau of Indian Affairs, through the Yurok Tribe, hired Dr. Hardy, a tribal biologist, to study the Klamath Basin, Biological Opinions and Project Operations Plans were formed by his science. Irrigators were not allowed at the table. Using year types that were 30% higher than average, his science called for more water to be demanded from the Klamath Project than was physically possible.

One year ago, the Department of the Interior (DOI) asked the Project irrigators to form a water bank. Our water bank design included farmers being paid to not irrigate land or else using our aquifer water rather than stored surface water to meet these unrealistic goals. Also, as soon as the results of the National Academy of Science report were to come out, the BOR would encourage re-consultation on the Biological Opinions of USFWS and NOAA Fisheries. After spending over 50 afternoons and evenings designing this intricate water bank that we knew would work, the Department of the Interior threw it out and created one of their own. The Operation Plan required 50,000 Acre Feet (AF) of water from the Project to send to the ocean, and they took 78,000 AF. They shut off our water for a few hours this summer because we had a wet spring. Their rules say that if there is more rain, irrigators get less water. So the blackmail was, with over \$200 million of crops in the ground, we had to pump our groundwater all summer at our own expense, in addition to the BOR water bank, while they poured our stored water down the river, or they would again shut down the Klamath Project water.

Many good things happened this year. Klamath Water Users won Oregon's 'Leadership in Conservation' award, sporting over 600 projects that conserve water. We joined Coastal Fishermen and County Commissioners for tours of their docks and our irrigation system. They are dealing with the same 'environmentalists', who have limited their catch and regulated many of them out of business. Then the feds came in like good buddies, offering to buy their boats to be nice, while their local



A popular misconception is that the farmers in Klamath Basin are taking water and using it to irrigate a desert. When in fact the Bureau of Reclamation built the most efficient irrigation project in the United States, rerouting the water and building storage, much being in Klamath Lake. Since the water level is very shallow, most of the water used to irrigate fields returns to the system. And it was designed for the water to end up in the wildlife refuges. A system that benefits the economy, the area, the nation AND the wildlife is a good thing.

communities and economies are being decimated, and while the fish are having record runs.

This summer, within seven months, a \$14 million fish screen was built on the A Canal so endangered sucker fish could not swim by. Attorney James Buchal filed to delist the suckers, the motion was granted to study this concept, but the Department of Justice filed to stop the study. The removal of the Chiloquin Dam, which blocks 95% of sucker habitat, has been approved. Portland Democrat Congressman Earl Blumenaur and Democrat Mike Thompson again introduced legislation to tell farmers what they could grow on our farmed leaseland, and fortunately it was again shot down.

Even though we live 200 miles from the coast, the tax-exempt 'environmentalist' groups and Tribes blamed the Klamath Project when Trinity River fish died near the mouth of Klamath River in 2002. Our water consists of 3-1/2% of the total water at the mouth of the river. Several scientists have proved that they were wrong, but the facts don't count with groups sporting an agenda.

In October the National Academy of Science final report came out, giving irrigators encouragement that the science shutting down irrigation supplies to the Klamath Project was flawed. The committee found no causal connection between Upper Klamath Lake water levels and sucker fish health, or higher flows on the Klamath River helping coho. The fish that died in 2002 were not caused by lack of more Project water, and more water would not have prevented the fish die-off. "Recovery of endangered suckers and threatened coho can not be achieved by actions focused on the operation of the Klamath Project."

Since this is the best available science in the United States, one would think that the Project Operation plan for 2004 and thereafter would reflect that science. Think again. The BOR is not supporting re-consultation to change the Operation Plan to the best available science. (Incidentally, the BOR is the largest wholesaler of water in the country.)

Next year the BOR demands 75,000AF water, and 100,000 AF downsize in 2005, regardless of water year types. Now the

Department of the Interior wants us to negotiate with the Klamath Tribes and Klamath Basin Rangeland Trust (KBRT). The Tribes want 690,000 acres for the Winema Forest back, which they sold twice, and all the water rights in the basin. They also filed against the irrigators in a lawsuit. KBRT gets paid \$300 per acre by the Federal Government to buy Upper Basin water easements for \$200. The irrigators just want certainty for irrigation deliveries, but we are told that we have to support these other two agendas or we will not have as much irrigation water. Our little basin is surrounded by government property. In fact, The Nature Conservancy and federal agencies have bought over 94,000 acres of ag land in the Upper Basin, converting it to swamp that evaporates twice the amount of water as irrigation would use, and increases the phosphorus load. Like a neighbor expressed today, "When is it going to be over? How much is enough? Nothing is enough!"



Small groups of misguided individuals are helping to ruin the economy, the Klamath Basin, and habitat for the wildlife.

While we have been overwhelmed with the issue of water quantity, the Clean Water Act and our water quality is quickly becoming the issue of our lives. The development of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for agriculture make our issues of the past pale in comparison. The TMDL for phosphorus in the headwater region of upper Klamath Lake is lower than natural background levels. This means that our allocation for agricultural practices will be zero. Temperature is another unobtainable goal. The only way we can deliver water that is cooler than the water we use is to refrigerate or eliminate the use of water in the first place.

If only we could go back in time 5 years, when days were filled with honest labor, and nights were spent with our families, we trusted our government, and we were ignorant of the agenda being planned for our demise. Now our days and nights are spent at meetings, our families do not see each other, our money is tied up in litigation to defend our rights, and no one knows whether our government will allow us to farm next year.

If we learned anything, it would be: get involved, God is good, learn your rights, know your laws, and don't sleep or turn your back. If we don't defend our rights, what our fathers and grandfathers did to establish and protect that freedom will have been in vain.

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