

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2007

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Young:

As the members of Congress representing the California and Oregon communities in the Upper Klamath Basin, we appreciated the committee's decision yesterday to agree to further oversight of the ongoing challenges in the Klamath Basin.

As we have learned first-hand, increased transparency and scrutiny are essential to uncovering misleading science, bureaucratic mistakes and unfounded agency decision-making that have led to disastrous results for both the environment and for people in this area. We therefore enthusiastically invite continued oversight and involvement by Congress. To that end, we would suggest the mid-Basin community of Yreka, CA as the location for a field hearing to explore and highlight the positive, proactive steps that have been taken in the Klamath Basin to address the problems that led to the 2001 regulatory shutoff and 2002 fish die off, and to highlight the ongoing settlement discussions that will hopefully lead to a long-lasting solution.

For years, the Klamath Basin has been characterized by political conflict, fought in the courts and in Congress. Indeed, the very fact that we have seen such positive environmental progress on the ground in the last several years, and perhaps more importantly, are finally seeing signs of movement forward on a long-term compromise through on-the-ground settlement talks, makes the partisan tone of our colleagues' recent letter to you all the more discouraging to us. It also must be very discouraging to those on the ground -- tribes, fishermen, farmers and environmentalists alike -- who have worked so hard to reach a constructive solution. We sincerely hope their letter doesn't disrupt or distract from this important citizen-led dialogue.

We continue to be encouraged by what we are hearing of these ongoing efforts by traditional adversaries to reach a long term solution to the problems of the Klamath Basin. Indian tribes, farmers, environmentalists and fishermen have, for over two years, been working together to develop a stakeholder driven solution. As in any compromise, no one interest expects to get everything it desires. And while we may not ultimately agree with each aspect of their solution -- whenever it may finally be reached -- we support and endorse their efforts to finally put their differences aside and move beyond the political and policy conflicts of the past. They

have recognized that continued political conflict and rhetorical attacks accomplish nothing but perpetual gridlock and bitterness.

Regrettably, we understand there are still interests -- both in Washington and in the Klamath Basin -- that do not want to see a solution to the challenges of the Basin. These groups see themselves and their cause as better served by conflict than constructive compromise. But the people who call this Basin home understand that they are better served not by continued conflict and partisan attacks, but rather by a long term solution. They see a better way forward. We believe the Committee, working in a bipartisan fashion, should reject continued divisiveness and instead publicly embrace efforts to achieve that "better way forward." Such a gesture would not only highlight and further a solution that could enable all interests in the Klamath Basin to get well together, but would also set an example and hopefully encourage similar cooperation in other western watersheds that have been characterized by conflict and strife.

To that end, and in the spirit of cooperation that has been forged through these settlement talks, we agree with the need for continued congressional oversight and involvement in these important issues. Accordingly, we urge you to hold a bipartisan field hearing in the Klamath Basin at your earliest convenience. We suggest you invite a witness from each of the respective groups involved with these talks -- tribes, farmers, fisherman, environmentalists and power interests, and ensure the hearing does not further continued conflict, but rather positively encourages a "way ahead." By highlighting the positive efforts that have occurred in the Basin since the devastating water shutoff of 2001 and the 2002 fish die-off, and the constructive dialogue that is ongoing, we believe Congress can highlight how political differences can be set aside in an effort to reach solutions that enable all interests to get well together.

We stand ready to assist you in this important effort.

Sincerely,


WALLY HERGE
Member of Congress


GREG WALDEN
Member of Congress


JOHN DOOLITTLE
Member of Congress