

## **Common Sense on the Klamath Becoming More Common**

By Dan Keppen

It looks like the regulatory hammer's falling again, and this time it's landing on our friends who make their living along the California and Oregon coastline.

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) on April 6 recommended imposing severe restrictions on the commercial salmon season, but stopped short of calling for canceling it altogether. The timing of this recommendation – to the day - fell five years after the Bureau of Reclamation announced that, for the first time in 95 years, Klamath Irrigation Project diversions from Upper Klamath Lake would be curtailed.

Upper Basin irrigators are sympathetic to the fishermen and want to help. Although little has been written in the mainstream media, it is obvious to me that farmers and ranchers are worried for the fishing families, coastal communities and tribal cultures that will bear the brunt of this latest decision. As Klamath Project farmer Steve Kandra told the press last week, irrigators want to see fishermen and Tribes catching fish.

The restrictions being placed on the fishermen this year could be just as equally devastating as the decision to shut off the Klamath Irrigation Project in 2001. The benefits are debatable and unknown, but the adverse impacts on people and communities are certain.

Last week, some of Steve Kandra's fellow irrigators met with a coastal fisherman and toured the Upper Klamath Basin, in an effort to allow both sides an opportunity to better understand each other's issues. This is nothing new, as irrigators and fishermen (especially from the Brookings and Crescent City area) have participated in a series of tours, hosted by both groups, over the past several years. Given the recent controversy and current tense emotions surrounding this issue, these people deserve credit for getting together at this time.

There are other encouraging developments, as well. The vast preponderance of early media coverage on the potential salmon fishery shutdown initially carried activist arguments that human-induced instream and terrestrial actions along the Klamath River were somehow solely responsible for this regulatory decision.

In recent weeks, a small but growing chorus of thoughtful voices with a different, more common-sense take has made itself heard on this issue.

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, in a letter to the PFMC, Congressman Greg Walden (OR) urged the Council and NOAA Fisheries to develop reasonable management measures to conserve Klamath River fish while providing some level of commercial and recreational fishing this year. Walden urged NOAA to give "prompt and positive consideration" to declaring a fishery disaster if fishing is seriously curtailed. Rep. Walden also suggested adherence to the comprehensive 2003 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study completed for the Klamath River, which

stresses the need for increased knowledge, improved management, and cohesive community action to increase Klamath fish populations.

California Governor Schwarzenegger's April 5 letter to the U.S. Commerce Secretary also endorsed a watershed-wide approach. In that letter, he reminded the Secretary that Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, Schwarzenegger, and federal agency heads signed "The Klamath River Watershed Coordination Agreement" in 2004. That agreement calls for development of a long-term management approach, common vision and integrated planning for the Klamath Basin. It references the same NAS study noted by Rep. Walden.

"I remain tireless committed to that agreement and the approach it dictates," wrote Gov. Schwarzenegger.

Both governors have urged that the Department of Commerce determine there has been a commercial fishery failure.

Closer to home, the Coos County (Oregon) Board of Commissioners, which represents coastal commercial fishing interests, in a letter dated April 3, 2006 to elected officials and federal policy officials, concluded that the crisis on the Klamath River arises from a collision of opposing ideologies, not of resource management. The letter goes on to describe a variety of factors that did not merit discussion in early media coverage of this issue, including the role of mitigation hatcheries, the need and role of affordable hydro power, weak stock assessment, the impact of protected seals and avian predators, and the need for additional cool water storage in the Klamath system.

And in your own backyard, Siskiyou County Supervisor Marcia Armstrong has written a piece called "Fish Declines – Defining the Real Problems", which raises similar arguments.

"Most of the articles I have read spread angry misinformation about the probable causes of the fall Chinook's decline," writes Supervisor Armstrong, pointing to the media focus on irrigation, dam removal, logging, mining and people from the Klamath River corridor. "Our lifestyles and the way we provide food for our families in Siskiyou County are unfairly villainized as morally inferior, so that it becomes acceptable to assault us over and over through waves of press and agency action," she said.

"It is all about perception and not fact," she adds.

Let's hope in the coming weeks and months that facts and commons sense prevail in this debate. And while I'll pray that the federal government will take all possible steps to provide a justifiable fishery for the short and long-term, it will be with the understanding that the folks who make their living on the land and water – the farmers, the tribes, and the fishermen – will be the ones who must come together and forge a workable, common sense solution.

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