

## **Two Proposals in D.C. Have Klamath Ties**

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Two promising legislative proposals – one coming from the Bush Administration, and one authored by a California Democratic congressman – have ties to the Klamath River watershed.

### **The Bush Administration RWEF Proposal**

The Regional Water Enhancement Program (RWEF) is an important component of the Bush Administration's 2007 Farm Bill proposal, rolled out two months ago. The RWEF would invest mandatory funding of \$175 million to producers annually to address an important missing component in the federal government's conservation delivery system: large-scale, coordinated water conservation projects. According to high level policy officials in the Bush Administration, the challenges of the Klamath Basin were a driving force behind this concept.

The proposed RWEF would focus on cooperative approaches to enhancing water quantity and/or quality on a regional scale. This new program - in tandem with multiple conservation tools (including farmland management practices, easement purchases, and ecosystem restoration assistance) - is intended to provide flexibility to cooperative conservation partners to achieve improved water quantity and quality goals.

There is a need to fund projects that provide water quality or water quantity benefits at a scale that benefits more than just one or two producers. RWEF would provide substantial grant money to irrigation districts or other water agencies, which would be placed in a lead position to work with multiple producers to achieve locally-generated water quality and quantity objectives.

If consensus at a regional level can be reached on a common approach, there will be a better chance of positive community participation and ultimately, a better bang for the federal buck.

### **Endangered Species Recovery Act**

Closer to home, U.S. Representative Mike Thompson – a Democrat with a congressional district that includes parts of the lower Klamath River watershed - has sponsored a bipartisan bill called the Endangered Species Recovery Act. This legislation would provide tax incentives for eligible taxpayers to conserve habitat for listed threatened or endangered species on their lands.

Any one who has a clue about the Western landscape understands and appreciates the significant value of private landowners' contributions to fish and wildlife conservation. After all, half of the land in the West is in private ownership. The tax credit proposed in

Rep. Thompson's legislation would be available to land owners who have habitat important to recover federally threatened or endangered species. Land owners would only be eligible for the tax credit if they enter into an agreement with the federal government and the conservation easement or the management of their land coincides with an existing recovery plan by the U.S. Secretary of Interior or Commerce. Federal technical assistance would be provided to the land owners to make sure they understand the agreement and they are carrying out the management of the land in accordance to the recovery plan.

Virtually everyone I know supports the goals of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, this law could stand some targeted reforms, including common-sense changes to make it work better. In the past 32 years, more than 1,300 species were listed as endangered under the ESA. Only 10 have actually been recovered.

Rep. Thompson's bill is a classic example of what is needed to begin the process of updating the ESA and improving a three decade-old law that is seen by many landowners as more "stick" than "carrot".

I am pleased that Congress is going to take a hard look at how to make the ESA work better for all concerned, and I support Rep. Thompson's proposal to further engage private landowners in listed species and habitat conservation through this provision of tax incentives. This will be particularly helpful to family farmers and ranchers to enable them to work the land and also contribute to the conservation of listed species.

I urge you to contact your representatives and ask them to support both of these important measures, which have sure-fire applicability in the Klamath River watershed.