

## **Klamath River Dam Removal Approach Not a Panacea**

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Dam-breaching advocates and editors of national urban newspapers have whipped themselves into a euphoric frenzy over the recent announcement by PacificCorp on a draft agreement to remove four dams on the Klamath River in Oregon and California.

The Klamath developments coincided with another dam announcement by the Obama Administration. In that case, proponents of dam-breaching had less to cheer about, as NOAA Fisheries filed in federal court a "strengthened plan" for protecting salmon and steelhead that swim up and down the federal government's Columbia-Snake river hydropower system. A coalition of fishing and conservation groups and the state of Oregon immediately blasted the plan, since it puts the option of removing dams on the back burner.

Newspapers from around the country were critical of the decision to back off on Snake River dam breaching, especially when the largest dam removal project in the history of the world was advancing on the Klamath. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Tampa Tribune* were all critical of the new Snake River plan, one that essentially falls in line with the previous Bush Administration plan. Several other papers and environmental spokespersons heartily endorsed the Klamath plan, suggesting that it sets a precedent for other streams, including the Snake River.

These folks need to be reminded that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work when it comes to dam removal.

First – it's not a done deal. Questions remain about how effective dam removal really will be to the future health of the Klamath salmon fishery. The Klamath agreement sets out a requirement for studying how removing the dams would affect water quality and fish habitat.

Second -the issues surrounding the dams, salmon and water are not remotely similar to those faced on the Snake River. For example, the dams on the Klamath River are part of a corporate hydroelectric project designed to maximize power generation and timing benefits. The reservoirs do not store water for farmers. Economic studies suggest that removing the Klamath dams is cheaper than building fish ladders, improving water quality, and implementing other improvements to help salmon.

On the other hand, the dams and reservoirs on the lower Snake River are multipurpose federal facilities that provide enough power to light the city of Seattle. The dams are also critical cogs in the regional navigation system.

Finally - the unique nature of the Klamath dams and interests of the parties that depend on the river contributed to the very unique nature of the proposed settlement. Although a bitter pill for many in the farming community to swallow, dam removal is the political glue that holds this particular deal together. In exchange for not opposing dam removal on the Klamath River, irrigators get assurances and support from once-adversarial parties for affordable and reliable water and power in the future.

Just because a truly historic and important settlement has been developed on the Klamath River - one that hinges on dam removal - does not mean the same fit can be applied to other Western streams.