



Protecting Water for Western Irrigated Agriculture

February 27, 2015

P.O. Box 216 Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601

The Honorable Greg Walden
U.S. House of Representatives
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Klamath Settlement Agreements

Dear Congressman Walden:

On February 13, 2015 the Family Farm Alliance board of directors, by unanimous vote, took action supporting the concept captured in recent Senate legislation to advance the settlement agreements (outlined below) developed for the Klamath River watershed. The Alliance is a grassroots, non-profit organization that represents family farmers, ranchers, agricultural water purveyors and allied industries in the 17 Western states. We have long advocated that the best solutions to the challenges faced by Western irrigators come from the ground-up, driven by local interests.

The three Klamath Agreements - the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, the Klamath Hydro-Electric Settlement Agreement, and the Upper Klamath Basin Comprehensive Agreement - reflect an intensive, collaborative effort that has consumed much of the last decade. Most of the local irrigation districts that are signatory to the Restoration Agreement are members of the Family Farm Alliance. Over 90% of Alliance members in Oregon have formally expressed support for the Klamath Agreements, either by being signatories, or via the support of umbrella organizations like the Oregon Water Resources Congress, the Klamath Water Users Association, or the Upper Klamath Water Users Association.

Without these agreements successfully making it through Congress, local irrigators face no protection from enforcement of significant tribal water rights, no viable plan for dealing with the Endangered Species issues, and no identifiable path for working toward target power rates that are similar to other Western agricultural regions. The Klamath irrigation community wants to move on to stability and has spent thousands of hours over the last decade at the negotiating table to reach this outcome. Most importantly, the Family Farm Alliance board of directors views the Klamath settlement agreements as a critical means of keeping Basin family farmers and ranchers in the business of producing food and fiber for our country and the world. The settlement agreements are a unique solution that advances this critical need. What happens or does not happen for Klamath Basin irrigators could set a precedent example, not only for all Western family farms and ranches, but other areas of the country where agricultural production is beset with environmental challenges.

Understandably, the idea of removing dams is a sticking point for some in the agricultural community, and the Alliance does not universally endorse the removal of dams. In fact, the Alliance is a leading proponent of creating more surface water storage in the West. We are advocates for enhancing the benefits of existing water-supply dam-reservoir projects and for building new ones to meet the needs Western irrigated agriculture. The potential impacts and precedents of removing any dam are concerns to us as advocates for irrigated agriculture.

The Alliance endorses advancing the Klamath Agreements in Congress because they are good for irrigated agriculture in the Klamath Basin. We see the Klamath Settlement Agreements as unique to the Klamath Basin and its issues and their dam-removal components have no bearing on other agricultural region's decision-making. We believe the Senate legislation makes that clear. Moreover, no irrigation dams or flood control dams are removed as part of these settlements. Dams slated for removal are owned by a private company, Pacific Corp, which believes it is in the best interest of their Western states customers to remove them. Importantly, this is a private property rights issue. We believe that holders of private property rights in this country should have a say about what they do with their assets, and that is what Pacific Corp has exercised. In this instance, agricultural producers stand to gain increased water supply reliability in exchange for the expected fish passage benefits associated with removal of these dams. Our job is to advocate for approaches that keep farmers and ranchers in business so they can continue to feed and clothe the world. Reliable water is an essential component to this approach in the West.

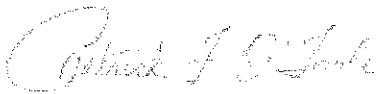
To date, the local irrigators who have actually experienced a threat to their livelihood and way of life with water shut-offs, paying for litigation, and Endangered Species Act pressures want these agreements in place. Proponents of these agreements believe they provide the most cost-effective, timely and politically viable solution.

With that said, we encourage you to advance House legislation that seeks to compliment the legislation previously introduced by Senators Wyden and Merkley. We support efforts to improve provisions associated with caps on federal liability and find ways to solidify other assurances as needed. We encourage you to use the expertise of Family Farm Alliance members and our organization's resources as you confront these challenges and seek to advance or refine the Klamath settlement legislation.

We are proud to join other organizations like the Klamath County and Oregon Cattlemen's Associations, the Klamath County and Oregon Farm Bureaus, the Oregon Water Resources Congress, the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce and the City of Klamath Falls who took similar care in making their informed decisions that support legislation to advance the Klamath Settlement Agreements.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me (970-376-6311) or Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen (541-892-6244) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Patrick O'Toole, President

cc: U.S. Senator Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein
U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer
U.S. Representative Doug LaMalfa
California Governor Jerry Brown
Oregon Governor Kate Brown
Deputy Interior Secretary Mike Connor
Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Estevan Lopez
John Bezdek, Department of the Interior