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Klamath Basin water history

The 1800s

Irrigation Begins

1882 — Farmers begin irrigating in the Klamath Basin. The Linkville Water Ditch Company is incorporated and a shallow canal is dug connecting Linkville (Klamath) town lots to Link River above present day Klamath Falls.

During the early days of settling, homesteaders in Bonanza begin using native suckers for fertilizer and oil. They attempt to get laws passed to prevent Native Americans, who have fished for suckers for centuries, from catching them.

1884 — The Linkville ditch is enlarged by William Steele and extended 15 miles.

1886 — J. Frank Adams completes a 6-mile canal from the Lost River to Adam's Point. Originally his canal received water from White Lake, but after a dry winter, he tapped Lower Klamath Lake as a more secure supply.

1887 — Charles and Rufus Moore excavate a canal on the west side of the Link River to furnish power to a sawmill and float logs down from Upper Klamath Lake. The brothers build a second canal to water gardens and orchards in west Klamath Falls.

The Klamath Project Begins.

May 15, 1905 — After Oregon, California and the U.S. complete the necessary legislation, Secretary of Interior Ethan Hitchcock authorizes \$4.4 million to build the Klamath Project. The government immediately allocates \$1 million to begin construction.

1906 — Construction begins with the building of the A Canal using horse teams. Construction on the A Canal headworks is completed by June 1907. Work begins on the East Branch (B) Canal and Keno Power Canal. A levee is constructed by an

agreement between Reclamation and the California and Northeastern Railway, paralleling the present Highway 97 south of Klamath Falls.

1908 — President Teddy Roosevelt establishes the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, the nation's first waterfowl refuge. Construction begins on the South Branch (C) Canal. The canal requires a 4,300-foot flume across the Lost River slough. In September excavation begins on Clear Lake Dam. Dikes are built to the south of the dam to retain flood waters.

1911 — Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge established. Construction begins on the Lost River Diversion Dam and Lost River Diversion Channel.

1912 — Reclamation begins experimental farms in drained Tule Lake marshes, but plowing and growing prove difficult. .

1917 — Reclamation signs an agreement with the California-Oregon Power Company (COPCO) to build and operate the Link River Dam.
Dams, Canals and Pump Stations Are Built by BOR

1920 — Construction begins on the Link River Dam July 29 at the mouth of Upper Klamath Lake.

1921 — Construction begins on the Lower Lost River Diversion Dam (Anderson-Rose Dam) and the J Canal to serve the Tulelake area.

1922 — Homestead entries are opened to World War I veterans. Work begins on the Malone Dam.

1924 — Construction begins on the Miller Diversion Dam, Gerber Dam and North Canal in Langell Valley.

1925 — Potatoes and alfalfa become important Basin crops.

1928 — Tule Lake and Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuges are established.

1935 — In the 1920s and '30s, Reclamation widens and lines existing canals, replaces the C Canal wooden flume with a concrete one, and expands and modifies Clear Lake Dam.

1940 — Construction begins on the Tule Lake division with the P and P-1 Canals. Workers begin the Sheepy Ridge tunnel, a 6,600-foot east-west culvert that drains Tule Lake into lower Klamath Lake.

1941 — Pumping plant D is built to lift water from Tule Lake into the tunnel. With World War II, armed guards are stationed at project facilities and the Army selects the area for an internment camp. Housing for up to 16,000 Japanese-American citizens is constructed. Some German prisoners of war are also located at a site northwest of Tule Lake. They are put to work clearing moss from canals.

1946 — Lands for relocation camps are returned to the Project. A second wave of homestead entries attracts World War II veterans.

1956 —The Federal Energy Regulatory licenses a series of dams on the Klamath River.

1957 —The Klamath River Compact between Oregon and California and the U.S. sets goals and objectives for water management on the Klamath.

1958 — The Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge is established.

1962 —Iron Gate Dam is built on the Klamath River.

1964 — Passage of the Kuchel Act ends homesteading and dedicates the remaining Project acres to “the major purpose of waterfowl management, but with full consideration to optimum agricultural use that is consistent therewith.” The law enrolls 17,000 acres on Tule Lake refuge and 5,000 acres on Lower Klamath refuge in a lease program for farming. At first, farmers oppose the Kuchel Act, because they see it as a threat. Later, as environmental issues mount, they come to embrace the law for guaranteeing their right to farm on rich refuge soils.

1975 — Oregon begins to adjudicate Klamath River water rights.

1977 —A drought strikes the Pacific Northwest, producing a record low snowpack across a wide region.

1978 —Bald eagle is declared a threatened species on Feb. 14. Bear Valley National Wildlife Refuge established to protect bald eagle roost sites.

1980s — scientists for the Klamath Tribes and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife grow concerned about the status of suckers in the Klamath Basin.

1988 — The Lost River and shortnose suckers are declared endangered species on July 18.

1992 — A drought focuses attention on the role of lake levels in protecting sucker habitat. The wildlife service recommends Upper Klamath Lake be kept above a

minimum elevation of 4,139.0 feet during summer months, although it allowed that the lake could drop to as low as 4,137.0 feet in four out of 10 years. Other steps are recommended, including fish ladders, screens and a sucker salvage program to remove suckers each fall when canals are drained and return them to the lake. For the first time in the Klamath Reclamation Project's history, irrigation deliveries are curtailed.

1993 — Final recovery plan for suckers is approved by the wildlife service in April.

1994 — A second drought hits the Klamath Basin. The surface elevation of Upper Klamath Lake falls to 4,136.86 on Sept. 27, the lowest level since records began in 1905. With salmon stocks dwindling, commercial fishing for coho salmon is halted from Washington to California.

1995–1997 — Large numbers of suckers die in a series of fish kills.

1996 — Reclamation agrees to meet minimum instream flows below Iron Gate Dam to protect habitat for anadromous fish. During the 1990s, scientists studying the lake begin to focus on the roles of algae, nutrients, temperature, ammonia and alkalinity in triggering periodic die-offs of suckers.

An Interior Department solicitor published a legal opinion that water for Native American tribal trust obligations and endangered species take precedence over deliveries of irrigation water to farmers and wildlife refuges.

1997 — Coho salmon are listed as a threatened species June 6.

1998-99 — Winter storms bury Oregon with the heaviest snows since 1974. Record snowfall is recorded at Crater Lake.

1999 — Critical habitat is defined for the coho. On July 12, a biological opinion from the National Marine Fisheries Service concludes project operations would affect, but not likely jeopardize, coho. A controversial study by Thomas Hardy, a Utah State University hydrologist, is published in the fall. It calls for instream flows to protect the fish far higher than those set by FERC, or those agreed to by Reclamation in 1996.

2000 — At a conference of environmental groups and wildlife refuge officials, Klamath Project farmers announce they are willing to sell as much as 30,000 acres of farm land, following four years of profitless growing. Imperial Holly announces it will no longer contract to grow sugar beets — a major Basin crop — in Oregon and shuts down its northern California refineries. In autumn, the Klamath Basin Water Supply Initiative is approved by Congress. It authorizes the Bureau of Reclamation to study ways to improve water storage and quality in the Basin.

Potato farmers, hit by another profitless season, seek to have the federal government buy a portion of their crop for dumping.

The Klamath Crisis of 2001

February — Klamath Project officials warn farmers that a growing drought may leave them without water.

Feb. 22 — Federal officials declare a drought.

March 1 — Project manager Karl Wirkus announces irrigating water may not be available.

March 9 — More than 400 project farmers stage a massive rally at the Bureau of Reclamation offices. . Environmentalists file notice they will sue if water is diverted to farms.

March 13 — A new biological opinion from the wildlife service calls for a minimum elevation in Upper Klamath Lake of 4,140.0 feet above sea level to protect suckers.

March 19 — A new biological opinion calls for increased flows below Iron Gate Dam to protect coho salmon habitat.

March 21 — Sen. Gordon Smith chairs a Congressional hearing to review the new biological opinions.

March 26 — Federal officials meet in Klamath Falls to explain the science behind the biological opinions. Refuge managers begin making contingency plans to address a water cut-off.

March 29 — Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber declared a drought and asks Secretary of Agriculture to provide emergency aid.

March 30 — Sen. Gordon Smith asks President Bush to help resolve the dilemma.

March 31 — The Klamath Project's 2000 operating plan expires.

April 1-2 — Interior Department, Klamath Project officials and scientists from the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are called to Washington to review the biological opinions and proposed 2001 operating plan.

April 4 — A district court judge rules the Klamath Project is in violation of the Endangered Species Act and cannot deliver irrigating water. The judge also declares the Hardy Phase I report the “best available science” for protecting coho.

April 6 — The Department of Interior announces that no irrigation water will be available from Upper Klamath Lake. A compromise lake elevation is arrived at to protect sucker habitat and provide sufficient water for salmon. Clear Lake and Gerber Reservoir are tapped for 70,000 acre-feet of water for farmers in Langell Valley and Horsefly irrigation districts. The Department of Agriculture approves emergency aid for the Project's 1,500 farmers.

April 30 — A federal court denies request to restore water deliveries to the Klamath Project.

June — Announcement by the Department of the Interior that there will be external review of scientific basis for 2001 water cut-off.

July — Canal headgates are partially opened in defiance of the April 6 decision, beginning a summer-long civil disobedience effort at the A Canal head gates. Klamath Tea Party on July 4 draws national attention.

July 2 — Congressmen Walden and Herger ask Interior Secretary Gail Norton to determine if the “God Squad” can be used to scale back efforts to protect endangered Klamath Basin fish. That request is denied a week later.

July 24 — Norton announces 70,000 acre feet of water is made available for the Project and refuges for 30 days. The water is “too little too late” and some is passed directly to the refuges.

President Bush signs into law the Fiscal Year 2001 supplemental appropriations act, which contains \$20 million in aid for Klamath Project farmers.

Aug. 21 — “Klamath Bucket Brigade” draws more than 15,000 people and national media attention. Homesteader Jess Proctor fills first bucket.

Sept. 6 — Norton announces cooperative effort to free additional water for the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge.

September 11, 2001 – Terrorists attack the nation flying planes into the twin towers and the Pentagon. Headgate protesters make the decision that federal agents are needed by the country elsewhere and begin the process of voluntarily disbanding.

Sept. 26 — Federal law enforcement officers leave A Canal head gates after spending 74 days guarding the facilities.

Oct. 2 — Norton announces Interior has signed an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to review scientific and technical information regarding aquatic endangered species conservation in the Klamath Basin.

Oct. 11 — Klamath Basin farmers file a new lawsuit against the federal government claiming the cutoff of irrigation water amounted to a seizure of private property worth \$1 billion.

Oct. 25 — Checks begin to arrive as part of \$20 million in federal emergency aid granted to Basin farmers.

2002

January — President George Bush meets with Sen. Smith and Rep. Walden in Southern California and the three fly in Air Force One to Portland. Bush is briefed on the 2001 water crisis. In Portland, Bush pledges to help farmers and fish. He later established a cabinet-level work group promoting sound and independent peer-reviewed science and making money for Klamath River water and environmental projects a priority. Enacted and requested Bush administration funding in the Klamath Basin watershed for fiscal years 2003-05 exceeded \$260 million. Key projects include completion of the A Canal fish screen, advances on removal of Chiloquin Dam, on-farm water conservation and environmental water bank.

January — Reclamation and fishery agencies begin to develop a new 10-year Klamath Project operations plan. Assistant Interior Secretary Bennett Raley and Reclamation Commissioner John Keys ask KWUA to develop “water bank.” Water users begin the first of nearly 40 meetings to develop water bank, which essentially compensates Project irrigators for pumping groundwater and idling land to leave Project water in the Klamath River.

February — NAS interim report is released. It questions the science that led to high lake levels and downstream fish flow requirements in the 2001 Klamath Project operations plan.

March 13 — Dr. William M. Peters, chairman of the Committee on Endangered and Threatened Fishes, testifies before the House of Representatives Committees on Resource that “despite the availability of a substantial amount of data collected by federal scientists and other, no clear connection has been documented between the low water level in Upper Klamath Lake and conditions that are adverse to the welfare to the suckers.”

April — Environmental organizations bring suit in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California claimed the BOR is in procedural violation of the ESA with respect to coho salmon. They seek a temporary restraining order to preclude irrigation diversions if certain Klamath River flows are not met. The request is denied in May.

Secretary of the Interior Norton and Secretary of Agriculture Anne Veneman show up at the A Canal head gates to mark the beginning of the irrigation season.

May — President Bush signs into law the 2002 Farm Bill, which includes \$50 million in EQIP funding for the Klamath Basin and language for the Chiloquin Dam Feasibility Study. The USFWS estimate the dam on the Sprague River blocks 95 percent of the spawning habitat for endangered shortnose and Lost River sucker fish.

September — Klamath River fish die-off occurs near the mouth of the river.

October — NMFS biologist Michael Kelly alleges a violation of law, rule or regulation and gross mismanagement by agency employees during the 2002 formal consultation on Klamath Project operations with the BOR. Kelly filed for protection under the federal Whistleblower Statute. In March 2003, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel determined the allegations do not warrant further investigation and close the case file.

Vandals are believed responsible for turning off an electrical switch that causes the loss of an estimated 92,000 yearling king salmon at a series of off-site ponds operated by Iron Gate Hatchery.

2003

March — Department of Interior implements Environmental Water Bank to provide more than 100,000 acre-feet of additional water for environmental purposes.

June — Conflicting requirements of “dueling BOs” leads to a near shutdown of Klamath Project to avoid dropping Upper Klamath Lake 0.1 feet below the USFWS biological opinion.

August — Senator John Kerry request DOI inspector general Earl Devaney to investigate whether White House staff sought to influence the management of the basin water resources that lead to the 2002 fish die-off.

(In a March 2004 response, Devaney states, “None of the individuals interviewed, including the Whistleblower, was able to provide any competent evidence that the Department utilized suspect scientific data or suppressed information that was contained in economic and scientific reports related to the Klamath Project. To the

contrary, the national Resource Council of the National Academy of Science Final Report, issued October 2003, specifically disagrees with the criticism that had been directed against the Federal agencies for using junk science. This position is bolstered by the findings of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, which concluded that in light of conflicting state of science evidence, the decisions were based on the best available science at the time.” The OIG also cleared Carl Rove of any “manipulative” behavior.)

September — Klamath Water Users Association awarded 2003 “Leadership in Conservation” award by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

October — National Academy of Sciences National Research Council Committee on Endangered and Threatened Fishes in the Klamath Basin release final report. Three key points: 1. The recovery of Klamath Basin endangered suckers and threatened coho salmon cannot be achieved by actions exclusively or primarily focused on the Project operation. 2. No evidence of a causal connection between Upper Klamath Lake water levels and sucker health, or that higher Klamath River mainstem flows help coho. 3. No evidence that Project operations caused the 2002 fish die-off or that changes in the operation would have prevented it.

2004

March — PacifiCorp files application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for new license for hydroelectric facilities on the Klamath River.

June — Klamath Water Users Association honored on the Oregon state capitol steps for “exemplifying the spirit” of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

July — House Resources Committee Water and Power Subcommittee holds field hearing in Klamath Falls with focus on the final NAS report, with the goal of using the report for a watershed-wide Klamath solution.

October — California, Oregon and Bush administration sign “Klamath River Watershed Coordination Agreement,” which emphasizes the parties commitment to solve fisheries challenges on the Klamath River on a watershed-wide basis.

2005

January — Case against BOR relation to the 2002 fish die-off is dismissed. A trial planned to address the die-off of salmon on the lower river in 2002 is dismissed on the basis of jurisdictional issues.

June — 28 groups, including state and federal agencies, irrigators, fishermen, Indian tribes and environmental organizations, begin settlement discussions that eventually lead to Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement released in January 2008.

October — Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reverses 2002-2012 Klamath Project biological opinion prepared by NOAA fisheries for coho salmon. The court finds the BO did not adequately explain the basis for a phased approach to flows and remanded the case to district court, instructing it to issue an injunction.

December — Reclamation releases “undepleted flow study” that shows the Project is efficient and uses little water. The study says that except in very dry years the Project makes more water available to the river at critical times than without the Project.

2006

February — Oregon and California public utility commissions decisions effectively end the 50-year association between the power company (COPCO and later PacifiCorp) and the Bureau of Reclamation. Klamath irrigators were third party beneficiaries and received low-cost power as a form of credit.

March — Pacific Fishery Management Council adopts a set of three harvest options to protect low adult fish returning numbers of Klamath River fall Chinook salmon. Option calls for a complete closure of ocean fishing along 700 miles of the Oregon and California coast.

April — 50-year FERC license expires for the Klamath Hydroelectric Project, which consists of seven mainstem hydroelectric developments on the upper Klamath River and one tributary hydroelectric development. The project will operate on annual licenses until a new FERC order on relicensing. The Oregon Public Utility Commission issues a decision to replace rates with new rate that will ramp up to tariff in seven years.

August — Commerce Secretary Gutierrez declares a commercial fishery failure for west coast salmon fishermen from Cape Falcon, Ore., to Point Sur, Calif., during to low numbers of fish.

2007

March — Sacramento Bee reports, “Thanks in part to fishing cutbacks, as many as 65,000 chinook returned to the Klamath River during the (2006) fall run, nearly double the minimum required by state and federal fisheries regulators who monitor the declining population.

June 27 — Washington Post story about Vice President Dick Cheney focuses on the Klamath Basin and accuses farmers of storming the head gates with “blow torches” and claims the NAS report was manipulated. 36 House Democrats in Oregon and California, including all four in Oregon and all in California except House Speaker

Nancy Pelosi, request National Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall of West Virginia hold a hearing.

2008

January 15 — Long awaited Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement is released.

February 26 – 12 Klamath Project districts representing over 90% of the acreage irrigated from the Klamath system indicate their support for the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement.