

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION KLAMATH PROJECT BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Two weeks ago, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) released its 2008 through 2018 Biological Assessment (BA) for the Klamath Irrigation Project on the Oregon/California border. The plan, intended for use over the next decade, dictates how much water is allowed to flow down the Klamath River to support salmon, how much will be reserved for endangered lake fish in Upper Klamath Lake, and how much will be diverted to irrigate farms.

The BA proposes dry water year type flows as minimums for all years, including wetter years. Such flows are not sufficient to avoid jeopardy to threatened coho salmon, nor are they consistent with previous NOAA recommendations or Hardy Phase 2 recommendations. By proposing dry year water levels as minimums through 2018, the plan minimizes BOR's obligations to provide salmon flows, and creates the risk of ten years of drought-like river conditions, which could doom struggling salmon runs and the communities that rely on them.

The BA now goes to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which can approve the plan or mandate changes through a Biological Opinion (BO). Since the last BO was approved regarding the effects of the Klamath Irrigation Project upon coho salmon, Klamath River fish populations have been in perilous decline. One of the largest adult salmon fish kills in history occurred within months of issuance of the 2002 BO and juvenile salmonids emigrating to the ocean have experienced extreme incidence of disease. The plight of Klamath River salmon can not be solely attributed to the operation of the Klamath Irrigation Project, however the resulting Klamath River flows have contributed to crippling salmon harvest closures, failure to meet the Klamath River spawning escapement objective three years in a row, and a coast-wide economic disaster. The proposed plan of using dry water year type flows as minimums for all years would exacerbate the problems facing Klamath River fish populations and those communities that depend upon these fish.

The Council should consider submitting comments regarding the BA to NMFS for consideration as they are develop the BO. We cannot afford 10 more years of Klamath-driven fishery disasters.

PFMC
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