Klamath Crumbles
Decades of collaboration and compromise crushed in the hands of Congress

HAT CREEK
A helicopter, back hoe, and crane make for a big day of restoration

WOLF CREEK
Field report from a remote area of the Eastern Sierra

Cover photo: Val Atkinson
A message to you

Our goal with each issue of The Current is to bring our stories and projects to life, with more images, videos and links... offering you a rich perspective on the work your support makes possible. We are thankful to you, our donors, who help us ensure that there will always be resilient populations of wild fish thriving in healthy waters for a better California.

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For over 15 years CalTrout has worked with a diverse set of stakeholders on the Klamath River to restore fish runs and provide community stability in California’s second largest watershed.

In this article, guest writer Frank Eldredge looks back on how the Klamath Agreements were developed and how a broad diversity of stakeholders came together to ease tensions and solve problems around one of the West’s most contentious water issues.

Klamath Agreement

Historic Klamath River Basin Restoration in

UPDATE 12-17-15
Curtis Knight, Executive Director

To our bitter disappointment, we learned this week the Klamath Agreements were not approved by Congress before the end of the legislation session, effectively killing the broadly supported and locally developed package of three separate but coordinated settlement agreements. Congressman Walden (R-OR), Congressman LaMalfa (R-CA) and Congressman Bishop (R-UT) deserve to be called out for their lack of leadership and vision in letting time run out. In the end, they did what a lot of people blame Congress for doing—nothing. We are grateful for the efforts of Congressman Huffman (D-CA), Senator Wyden (D-OR) and Senator Merkely (D-OR) leadership in DC. But in the end, it wasn’t enough.

The Agreements, hammering ranchers, government agencies, four hydroelectric dams (PacifiCorp) and environmental opponents in a major way, ultimately relicense the dams.

is at stake is the largest restoration in our nation’s history, an inestimable local and national asset. The local communities of everyone involved have done the hard work of parties and have come up with a fair compromise to come up with
Its Crumble

Peril

Senator (D-OR) for their support and the end, it wasn’t enough. encountered out by Indian tribes, agencies, the owner of the environmental groups, have 3s to act since 2010. What river restoration project in unprecedented removal of 4, and a blueprint for how western water dispute can es and find common ground. of the Klamath Basin have instaking negotiations and with the agreements. In the end, Congress has failed the Klamath basin and its communities.

What next? Many stakeholders still remain committed to working together to find a solution to water sharing, habitat restoration and dam removal. But lack of congressional approval of a locally brokered solution will force parties to the courts, regulatory agencies and the Obama administration for solutions. PacifiCorp will be required to reengage in the FERC dam relicensing process which could still lead to dam removal. But it is also possible that FERC may ultimately relicense the dams.
Federal Government Not Delivering

The Klamath River begins in southern Oregon where snowmelt from the Cascades feeds rivers that form Upper Klamath Lake, and from there the river carves its path through the rugged Siskiyou Mountains in northern California before emptying into the Pacific Ocean at the town of Requa. In its prime, the Klamath River was one of the top three salmon rivers on the West Coast (along with the Columbia and the Sacramento), supporting up to a million spawning adult salmon annually. But the mighty Klamath has been dealt many grievous blows over the past century and a half from the effects of gold mining, lumber harvesting, water diversions for farming and ranching, and the building of dams. All of these impacts have cumulatively taken a heavy toll on the native fish: Coho and Fall Chinook salmon numbers have dropped to roughly 10 percent of their historic numbers.

The agreements worked out by local communities represent an historic opportunity to reverse this decline and ensure a sustainable and healthy future for the Klamath River and the people who depend on its waters. If the four Klamath dams are removed in 2020 per the agreements, salmon and steelhead would gain access over 300 miles of additional spawning habitat and cooler water in upper basin tributaries that have been closed off to them for nearly a century.

FEATURE CONTRIBUTOR

Frank Eldredge
26-year CalTrout Member

Frank joined in 1989 and is embarking on a second career writing about conservation and fly fishing topics.

BREAKING NEWS

The Klamath community is mourning the untimely passing of Troy Fletcher, Executive Director of the Yurok Tribe. Progress in the Klamath starts with diverse interests coming together, and this requires strong leadership. Troy led the tribes to reach out to farmers in the upper Klamath basin and, more than any other person, brought people together. His passion, strong leadership, and unwavering commitment to the Klamath River and its people will be remembered by all. The CalTrout community sends its condolences to Troy’s family and the entire Yurok Tribe. We will miss Troy and his vision greatly.

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adults a year. But the mighty Klamath has been dealt many grievous blows over the past century and a half from the effects of gold mining, lumber harvesting, water diversions for farming and ranching, and the building of dams. All of these impacts have cumulatively taken a heavy toll on the native fish: Coho and Fall Chinook salmon numbers have dropped to roughly 10 percent of their historic numbers.

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The key issue that needed to be resolved in the FERC relicensing negotiations was how PacificCorp, which owns all four dams, would address the requirement of the Federal Power Act to allow salmon to migrate and spawn above its dams. PacificCorp's opening gambit was to propose a "trap and haul" solution to transport salmon around the dams in order to avoid the high cost of building fish ladders. CalTrout played a key role in these discussions and joined others in pushing hard for a solution that allowed for natural salmon passage, either via fish ladders or dam removal. PacificCorp initially explored building fish ladders, but that solution turned out to be very expensive. CalTrout and partners contributed studies and other evidence in favor of removing the dams, and after running the numbers PacificCorp came to the conclusion that the most economical solution for its ratepayers was to remove the dams. A subsequent Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) done by the Department of the Interior validated that dam removal was the best way to restore the upper river habitat and fisheries.

The Klamath agreement history can be broadly grouped into three phases:

**2000 to 2006**
Negotiations regarding the mandatory relicensing of the four dams on the upper Klamath River as required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which concluded with key parties agreeing that removal of the dams was the best solution.

**2006 to 2010**
Negotiations and signing of two comprehensive agreements covering the Klamath River Basin and dam removals, which were supported by a broad and diverse coalition of over 40 stakeholders (including CalTrout).

**2010 to present**
Klamath agreements were further expanded to include a negotiated agreement between Upper Basin ranchers and the Klamath Tribes, making the settlement package even more comprehensive; the agreements sent to Congress for approval and funding, where they have been stuck for the last five years.

Photo by Matt Northam - Creative Commons
"The local communities did their part, but unfortunately the federal government has not yet delivered on their end of the deal."

Curtis Knight, CalTrout Executive Director

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"Lost in the rhetoric are the basic facts of the four dams: they are privately owned and operated by a corporation that wants to remove them, in contrast to the federally-owned dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers; they provide no water for irrigation and only negligible hydroelectric power; and, the cost of their removal would not be borne by taxpayers."
The Settlement Agreements (2006 to 2010)

Overcoming years of arguments and animosity, the key players in the Klamath Basin finally realized that it was time to try to work together and see if they could find common ground. What emerged from these years of discussions and negotiations were two major agreements:

1. **The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA)**, which established predictable water allocations for ranchers, farmers, fish, and wildlife refuges, and also identified restoration projects throughout the basin. The KBRA was signed by the Secretary of the Interior, the governors of California and Oregon, and 41 stakeholders in 2010.

2. **The Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement (KHSA)**, which detailed the plans to remove the four dams owned and operated by PacifiCorp. PacifiCorp would contribute the first $200 million towards the cost of the dam removals, most of which has already been collected through surcharges to its ratepayers. Any costs above that level would be covered by the state of California using funds from the Water Bond that was passed in 2014. The total estimated cost of the dam removals is around $300 million. The KHSA was also signed in 2010 by KBRA parties plus PacifiCorp.

3. A third agreement, the **Upper Klamath Basin Comprehensive Agreement**, was added in 2014 to resolve water disputes between ranchers and the Klamath Tribe in the upper watershed.
Key Dates in the History of the Klamath (prior to Agreements)

Circa 5000 BCE
The first Native Americans settle in the Klamath Basin

1850s
The first gold miners arrive and use water cannons to extract ore, which results in wiping out hillsides and silting the river

1905
The federal government creates the Klamath Reclamation Project, draining marshes and lakes to create fertile farm land

1908
President Theodore Roosevelt creates the Klamath Wildlife Refuge to protect critical habitat for migratory birds

Post WWI and WWII
Veterans are given homestead rights based on a lottery and promised an endless supply of water for farming

1917 to 1964
Four hydroelectric dams are built on the river, cutting off migratory salmon and steelhead from 300 miles of spawning habitat

2001
The federal government shuts off water to farmers to protect flows for fish as required by the ESA, touching off massive protests, illegal water diversions by farmers, and the famous "bucket brigade"

2002
The federal government takes the opposite approach in another drought year by delivering water to farmers, which leaves insufficient water for migrating salmon that results in a huge fish die-off

Continue reading the history of the Klamath Agreements on page 48.
By ANDREW BRAUGH
Mt. Shasta/Klamath Director

Battle of the Four Corners
How Hat Creek is much more than a restoration project

CalTrout’s Hat Creek Restoration Project originated to restore a legacy of fly fishing in Northern California. But we quickly realized that this project is about far more than fishing. As with so many of our projects, the deeper meaning lies in the connection between local people and the places that we work.

Whether we’re engaging rice farmers to restore floodplains in the Yolo Bypass, or incentivizing irrigators to restore flows in the Shasta River, our projects succeed because we use innovative approaches to solving complex social, economic, and ecological problems.

With Hat Creek, our restoration site rests on the sacred ancestral lands of the Illmawi Band of the Pit River Tribe. Therefore, a successful conservation outcome depends largely on our ability to engage the Illmawi in the project in a meaningful and lasting way.

Photo by Val Atkinson
meaningful and lasting way. The tribe’s priority remains the protection of their cultural resources including the numerous archeological sites existing throughout the project area.

Most CalTrout members know Hat Creek as one of California’s most famous Wild Trout Waters, but few realize the significance of these lands to the Illmawi people: the original inhabitants. Even fewer know about the deep and painful scar formed by the Pit River Tribe’s effort to reclaim their ancestral lands.
For those that know Hat Creek well, the “Four Corners” at the intersection of CA-299 and CA-89 just northeast of Burney, usually signifies that the long pilgrimage from the Bay Area is almost over and a weekend of epic fishing is about to begin.

The Four Corners, however, have an entirely different and much darker meaning for those that bore witness to the conflict that occured there on October 27th, 1970.

On that day, 52 armed police officers, including federal agents, state troopers, sheriff’s deputies, and 50 Forest Service personnel broke up a tribal protest. Now known as the Battle of the Four Corners, the Redding Record Searchlight described the melee, “Indians, both men and women, fought with bare fists, tree limbs, and planks of lumber. Officers and sheriff’s deputies swung billy clubs and sprayed mace.” “Then all hell broke loose,” recalled a tribal witness, “as the armed protectors of the law waded into our people, spraying mace, and breaking heads, swinging clubs and striking even those who already lay unconscious.”

In 1971, just one year after the conflict and less than five miles from the site, California Trout was incorporated to begin restoring Hat Creek and other Wild Trout Waters throughout the state.

Given this history, it goes without saying that the Illmawi people of the Pit River Tribe approach outside organizations, even ones dedicated to river restoration, with caution and suspicion. The Illmawi literally bled for this land at Four Corners.

Now, 45 years later, a fragile reconciliation is underway. We don’t pretend that the Hat Creek Restoration Project can change the past or ease the lingering pain from dispossession. Or that relations are now perfect. But in an effort to shape a path forward, we as an organization can genuinely commit to helping protect the things that matter most to those who came before us.
Not your typical day at the office!

Any time it takes a 110 ton crane, a back hoe, 60,000 lbs of ballast, and a Firehawk helicopter to complete a project, you know it's going to be an interesting day at the office. That's just what Andrew Braugh, CalTrout's Mt. Shasta/Klamath Director and head of the Hat Creek Restoration Project had in store for him last month. This was the day that woody debris would be installed in the creek as part of the multi-year, multi-phase project. It was a day that was much anticipated, long planned, finely orchestrated, and met with just a hint of trepidation. And it went off without a hitch.

This 'woody debris' was not just a few twigs and branches placed in the creek. These were three separate log structures placed in locations along a quarter mile stretch of the river. Each structure was comprised of four trees weighing 8-9,000 lbs each. That's about 50 tons of woody debris to move and place in specific locations along Hat Creek. Cue the Firehawk helicopter that was necessary to move logs from their location in the nearby forest in order to protect the sacred ancestral land of the Illmawi Band of the Pit River Tribe. Cue the back hoe to place the logs into their predetermined, exact locations. Cue
the exhaled, held breaths of the crew followed by elated cheers for a job perfectly executed. Began in 2012, The Hat Creek Restoration Project's goal is to restore this designated Wild Trout Area to the iconic fishery it once was with over 5,000 fish per mile. The tasks have included planting over six acres of riparian corridor with some 5,000 native plants, shrubs, and trees; protecting cultural resources; constructing recreational trails, signs, bridges and parking areas; maintaining and monitoring all restoration components; establishing a the Hat Creek Youth Initiative and Pit River Tribe workforce training and jobs program.

The project and this particular endeavor could not have been done without the collaboration of dozens of partners including: Waterways Engineering, the Pit River Tribe, PG&E, Lomakatsi, Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Spring Rivers Ecological Sciences, UC Davis, and The Pacific Forest and Watershed Stewardship Council.

For more on the legacy of Hat Creek see the fall issue of The Current here. For more on the Hat Creek Youth Initiative, see the spring article here.
All in a days work
Photos by Val Atkinson
Your donation makes a difference to fish, water and people.

Fish are to the ecosystem as canaries are to the coal mine. As such, abundant wild fish mean healthy waters and healthy waters mean a better California. Your donation to CalTrout will help ensure that California will always have resilient populations of wild fish thriving in healthy waters.

Please support Caltrout in the most sustainable, cost-effective way; donate online with a recurring gift today at www.caltrout.org.

Your Support

Being a CalTrout member brings you into a community of Californians who believe that clean, cold water and wild rivers benefit fish and people. Our work relies on the support of our members. Please renew your membership in 2015. If you're not yet a member, join today, it's easy!
Support CalTrout in 2015 and receive our 2016 Calendar featuring finalists from the 2015 photo contest.

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Abundant wild fish mean healthy waters and healthy waters mean a better California. Your donation to CalTrout will help ensure that California will always have resilient populations of wild fish thriving in healthy waters.

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Join CalTrout today!
3rd Annual Humboldt Steelhead Days
January 22 - February 6, 2016

The northern third of California’s coast is home to some of the most important salmon and steelhead rivers and watersheds in the state. Come celebrate!

The 3rd Annual Humboldt Steelhead Days will span three weekends and a total of sixteen days. The focus of the festival is to promote steelhead angling opportunities on the Trinity, Mad, and Eel Rivers—with fishing, educational events, expos, and food tastings happening throughout Humboldt County—for locals and out-of-town visitors alike.
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Humboldt Steelhead Days includes fishing contests, seminars, theatrical performances and film and is a growing tradition in Humboldt.

CalTrout is hosting several Eel River events including a kick-off party on January 22, screening of the International Fly Fishing Film Festival (IF4) in Scotia and Eureka, and the Humboldt Steelhead Expo in Eureka on January 30. Non-profit partners Mad River Alliance and Mountain Community and Culture are sponsoring events on the Mad River and Willow Creek/Trinity River respectively.

Join us and get a chance to fish the peak of the run and have a ton of fun!

Photos by Nina Danza
Wolf Creek
By Mikey Wier

On the way back from a staff meeting in Mammoth Lakes this September I decided to stop by Wolf Creek off Hwy 108 to take some photos and video of a meadow CalTrout is helping restore as part of our Sierra Headwaters Initiative. Wolf Creek is a tributary to the West Walker River flowing in from the north and a sister stream to Silver Creek. Both Silver and Wolf Creek are restoration sites for native Walker River Basin Lahontan cutthroat trout.

When I was a kid, both these creeks were full of wild brook trout. At the time, the native strain of Walker River LCT were thought to be extinct. In the 1980s a remnant population of LCT was found in a small tributary and in the 90s and 2000s work started to expand habitat for these endangered native fish. Wolf was the first to be treated starting in the mid-2000s. Brook trout were
mechanically removed and replaced with this native strain of Lahontan cutthroat trout by the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The process took a few summers during which the creek was closed to fishing. About four years into the process, brook trout somehow managed to slip back into the system above the barriers. The creek was treated again and finally reopened to fishing after several years of being closed.

The season is short on Wolf Creek and only lasts from August 1 to November 15. The creek was low but there were plenty of nice little LCT in each pool where there was sufficient depth and cover. It’s hard to imagine fish living through the winter in these high elevation creeks given the flows these past few years, but somehow they manage. If I crept up slow and stayed low I’d get a chance to watch or film several small but brilliantly beautiful wild cutties. Some pools held only one fish and others held up to five or six. All the fish were very skittish and bolted if you got too close or cast a shadow on the pool. I didn’t bother fishing and spent the afternoon collecting some photos and footage for a Sierra Headwaters video. Patience paid off and I was even able to grab a couple
Wolf Creek

Silver Creek is currently in the third summer of going through the process of removing invasive brook trout to expand habitat for native LCT. It remains closed to fishing until a stable population has taken hold. CalTrout is also conducting restoration work in upper Wolf Creek meadow along with several other meadows in the area including Pickle, Upper and Lower Sardine, and Cloudburst with partners including the US Forest Service and others.

Wolf Creek is near the Marine Corps base off Hwy 108 and the marines stationed there often use the area for training. It’s not uncommon to see buggies, quads and large trucks buzzing by on the road or hear gunshots during training exercises. The Marines even have a private ski lift tucked up in the hills. While I was out on the creek a large helicopter flew over several times making passes through the canyon and right over the meadow. As the sun fell down over the hill and the temperature began to drop, I hopped in the truck and rattled my way down the long dirt road back toward the highway. The aspens were starting to change and that cold crisp air seeped through my cracked windows. I felt like I’d had a good conversation with an old friend even though I hadn’t said a word all day. Fall in the Eastern Sierra is magical.
CalTrout is pleased to present screenings of The International Fly Fishing Film Festival in the following locations:

North Coast -
Scotia
Saturday, January 23
Winema Theater
Eureka
Friday, January 29
Eureka Theater

Peninsula - Palo Alto
Thursday, March 17
Guild Theater

East Bay - Orinda
Wednesday, March 23
Orinda Theater

Marin - Larkspur
Thursday, March 24
Lark Theater

Sacramento
Wednesday, April 27
Tower Theater
Craig's Corner
by Craig Ballenger, CalTrout Ambassador

Winter Steelheading in California

Between the Russian River to the south and the Smith River tucked away near the Oregon border, Northern California's Lost Coast has been the subject of many stories and one fine movie recounting the so called 'golden years' of steelhead angling here.

The collapse during the 1960's in rivers such as the Eel, overlooks the fact that steelhead populations seem fairly stable today, despite statewide drought. Clearly, the most popular rivers are the Trinity and the Klamath, yet there are miles and miles of water on each that are seldom fished. Even the fabled Smith has had the number of anglers diminish over the years. While working over there last winter on the Eternally Wild film project, only a couple of weekends found the Hiuchi Cafe hopping in early morning darkness. And most fish just from the Forks down, leaving the South and Middle Forks to a few walk and waders. The few deeply committed winter steelheaders I know remind me that I know most, which is to say there are not many of them. This cult of anglers subscribe to a lifestyle of night driving, often through rain and snow, to either jump in a boat, or wade in rain all day,
They study flow graphs on their phones, glassy eyed, over cheap coffee in late night, rural cafes. Their quarry though, is so remarkable that one angler I spoke with, who had fished from the Olympic Peninsula south to our Lost Coast Rivers last winter, claimed he landed five big chromers swinging, all season. When asked if it was worth it, he replied grinning, "Hell yeah!"

Over all, the fishing in California may be as good, if not better than Oregon and Washington Rivers. Perhaps simply because there is less fishing pressure here. Steelheading techniques came to their own in Northern California during the early part of the 20th century. The tradition is here. There are more river miles of steelhead angling to be found in California than anyone could comb in a lifetime.

To experience a big steelhead peel your reel is one of the experiences of a life time. And though our rivers are quite remote, you can get to any one of them in a day. Worthy of slipping off the couch, donning some rain gear and heading out for an old time adventure. You'll likely have the river pretty much to yourself.
Forks of the Kern

This summer I had the pleasure of visiting the fabled Kern River. The Kern is one of the most interesting inland river systems in California. It’s home to three distinct species of our native trout, the California Golden Trout, Little Kern River Golden Trout and the Kern River Rainbow. Before ever visiting the Kern I’d looked at it on the map several times. The first thing that caught my eye is the upper reach of the main stem. It flows directly north to south in almost a straight line for near 20 miles, cutting through the southern most toe of the Sierra Nevada range. The Kern originates high in the mountains with it’s source waters coming from over 10,000 ft through this arid landscape of the Kern and later by the tributaries the river is known as the Forks of the Kern.

The Forks of the Kern is within the Kernfells Wilderness. From Kernville drive about 12 miles to the trailhead. The trail begins at 7,800 ft and drops 1,000 ft in 2.3 miles down to the river. As you go down the hill the trail crosses the Kern and you have the option to head to the river and fish. Upstream of the river entering the trail I took the main stem and headed up the Hill. At this point you can go higher up or back down to the river. I opted to go higher up and back down to the river. Once there, I was able to fish at will and didn’t have to worry about the crowds.
feet. As it wanders down the trail it’s met by the South Fork of the North Fork of the Kern River. This confluence is known as the Kern.

Within the Golden Trout section, it’s about an hour drive downstream. It descends just over 1000 feet down to the river. At the bottom of this section is the Little Kern. From there you can either hike up the Little Kern or cross over to the river. Being my first time down, I caught a little of both.

The Little Kern was very low. I estimated about 20 cfs or less. There were only a couple pools within a few miles of the confluence that were even holding fish at these flows. Hiking up the Little Kern is mostly off trail. At summer flows it’s easy to cross in several places which is a good strategy for working your way up river. I could see there being pretty good fishing at higher flows. With this being the 4th year of drought though, many of the fish from the tributaries had been forced to move down into the main stem or into the isolated cold reaches way up river.
The main river, however was flowing well compared to most of the other California rivers I’d visited this summer. It’s hot and relatively arid in this reach but most of the water comes from high in the mountains so it stays pretty cold. The water temperature was in the 60’s here even in mid-August.

The main Kern is a classic trout stream. Crystal clear water with tons of nice runs and riffles. The algae growing on the rocks gives the water a green hue making it a bit hard to spot fish. It’s all wild trout up in this reach. Apparently there has been some cross breeding with planted rainbows in the lower river over the years but the farther up river you go, the more pure strain of Kern River Rainbows you will find. The average bow in this section is 8-16 inches. However, the skilled and persistent angler can definitely find some fish up to 2 feet long. There are also rumored to be some really nice browns up in this section but they don’t give themselves up easily.

I worked my way upriver and discovered some really nice pocket water. I began by throwing my fly into the most likely looking seams and pockets in and around the boulders. There were lots of feisty wild rainbows willing to take my fly. It wasn’t uncommon to catch a couple fish out of each pocket. I was surprised by the number of fish we caught in a matter of a couple hours using a dry dropper rig.

Forks of the Kern can be a nice day hike with plenty of hours to fish if you get an early start. Make sure to leave at least an hour or more to make it back up the hill before dark. It’s a bit of an uphill slog after a long day of hiking and fishing. You can also hike for several miles up river from this location and find good fishing for several days or even weeks. There are some pack outfitters in the area who will pack in your supplies and set up a base camp or do a food drop for you too.

For more information on fly fishing the Kern River or guided trips, contact Guy Geans at the Kern River Fly Shop in Kernville.
Forks of the Kern
REFLECTIONS

Photos by CalTrout Members and Followers

VAL ATKINSON, San Francisco, CA: 'Fall Casting"
VAL ATKINSON, San Francisco, CA: ‘Fall Casting’
REFLECTIONS
Photos by CalTrout Members and Followers

VAL ATKINSON, San Francisco, CA: ‘Shasta’
Photos by CalTrout Members and Followers

VAL ATKINSON, San Francisco, CA: 'Shasta'
REFLECTIONS
Photos by CalTrout Members and Followers

VAL ATKINSON, San Francisco, CA
SIIERRA MEADOWS INITIATIVE
Learn about CalTrout’s meadow restoration projects protect native inland trout, increase ecological resiliency and sequestor greenhouse gases.

GOLD FEVER TRAILER
CalTrout's Mikey Wier brings you this IF4 Oficial Selection. In Gold Fever, the 'nuggets' are huge wild brown trout from the heart of the Mother Lode in the Sierra Foothills of California.
ABOVE ILIAMNA
By Jason Ching - Fly high above Lake Iliamna, Alaska, following the crew of the Alaska Salmon Program as they conduct sockeye salmon surveys during one of the largest salmon returns in years.

FARQUHAR BIRD FLY
By Fish the Swing - Giant Trevally are a predatory fish that have even been known to eat birds. This video is proof that they also eat bird flies made from flip flops that wash up on the shore.
Who We Are

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

DARREN MIERAU,  North Coast Director
Darren has a Masters Degree in Fisheries Biology from Humboldt State University and joined CalTrout in 2011. Before joining the organization, Mierau worked on numerous North Coast projects as a local watershed restoration scientist with McBain and Trush, Inc. Darren is currently directing, among other projects, the Eel River Recovery Keystone Initiative, the organization’s largest endeavor to date. He is a founding Board Member and current President of the Coastal Ecosystems Institute of Northern California, 2011.

Photo: Matt Northam - Creative Commons

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Years of Congressional Inaction (2010 to 2015)
The Agreements stipulated that Congress must pass a bill by December 31, 2015 authorizing the agreements. Congressional involvement is required to address a variety of issues such as funding for the KBRA restoration projects (with a price tag of $466 million), changes to how the Bureau of Reclamation operates the Klamath irrigation project, a transfer of land to Indian tribes, and federal assumption of liability if any property damage occurs as a result of removing the dams.

Finally, in January of 2015, Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) packaged the three Klamath agreements into one bill called The Klamath Water Recovery and Economic Restoration Act (S. 133). With the Senate bill in motion, all eyes turned to Congressman Walden (R-OR) and Congressman LaMalfa (R-CA) whose districts encompass the dams and the majority of the agricultural interests in the basin, looking for a companion bill to be introduced in the House of Representatives.

The Causes of the Stalemate
One of the primary hurdles in the Republican-led house was that certain Republican lawmakers, several of whom sit on key committees that oversee the Klamath Basin legislation, are ideologically opposed to dam removal and are fearful of the precedent it would set. The dictum "dam removal anywhere leads to dam removal everywhere" resonates with them. Republicans representing the Klamath Basin are heavily influenced by a vocal subset of their constituents who are fiercely opposed to dam removal and any change to their traditional way of life. Resistance is particularly vehement in Siskiyou County, home of "The State of Jefferson," where any attempt by the federal or state government to meddle in local affairs is viewed with suspicion.

Lost in the rhetoric are the basic facts of the four dams: they are privately owned and operated by a corporation that wants to remove them, in contrast to the federally-owned dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers; they provide no water for irrigation and only negligible hydroelectric power; and, the cost of their removal would not be borne by taxpayers. Also lost in the rhetoric was the degree to which these are ground-up, local solutions - hardly an example of the federal government imposing its will on a community.

If the agreements expire, PacifiCorp will be forced to resume the FERC relicensing process and might end up building fish ladders or removing the dams on its own, in either case passing on the higher costs to its ratepayers. Meanwhile, the Indian tribes will be able to exercise their senior "time immemorial" water rights whenever they deem it necessary to protect salmon runs. Congressman from California who served in the Klamath Basin, acknowledged at a hearing, "We know the tribes can make a case." Without the agreements, the Klamath status quo ante: communities divided and under duress, a return to lawsuits and battles that, change inevitably reduces the amount of water available to the Upper Klamath.

Curtis Knight, CalTrout Executive Director, said, "What’s most disappointing is that it’s not about restoring salmon, but on political gamesmanship. Let’s not give the administration to roll up their sleeves and bring it back to Washington. The law is the game--did their part, but unfortunately, "The answer is no. At least for now."

The Last-Ditch Effort
There remained a glimmer of hope in December. Representative Greg Walden, author of dam removal, released a draft bill that would take dam removal out of the hands of the Senate and make the bill more palatable to his Republican colleagues to preserve the broader restoration goals. But the removal process over to FERC.

However, Walden’s approach quickly met opposition in the House, where the Obama Administration and congressional allies were not prepared to balance the White House’s negotiating position over many years. Rather than oppose any dam removal, Congressman Walden wanted to protect all four dams, which he claimed would be "vital to the health of the basin, the economy, the environment, and the water supply." He told the House that the current bill would remove the dams "at their own expense." Walden was critical of the Obama Administration, which had been negotiating for years to remove the dams.

"Unfortunately, Congressman Walden’s bill actually undermines the whole agreement for my constituents," said California Senator Barbara Boxer, who announced that she would oppose the bill in the Senate. The Obama Administration, for its part, was not prepared to support any dam removal, arguing that it was not the agency’s job to negotiate on behalf of the federal government. Boxer said she would oppose the bill in the Senate, where it would face a tough vote. She said she had been negotiating with the Obama Administration for years to remove the dams, and that if the bill passed, it would undermine the agreement reached by the two sides.

And in the end, Congressman Walden had to reconcile with the Senate bill. With the deadline of December 31, and the KHSA to expire in early 21, it remained unclear how the bill could salvage the delicate balance that was achieved in the negotiated agreements. The hard-won agreement had not only removed dam threats, but also protected habitat for endangered species. It was clear that the bill would not be signed into law by President Obama, and that Congress would be forced to consider a new bill in 21. A failure to act by several key...
As Doug LaMalfa, a Republican whose district includes some of the key players in the Klamath Basin could devolve to the situation we see now, is determined by conflict and mistrust, with an increasing pressure that will only intensify as climate change reduces the amount of water in the drainage.

Jonathan Kingsolver, a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, offered this assessment. "The Klamath Agreement is a success in terms of conservation and restoration of fish and wildlife. Unfortunately Congress did not deliver." Kingsolver was referring to the October 2006 Federal Court Order setting up the Klamath River Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) that required the Federal government to remove four dams on the Klamath River to allow salmon to migrate upstream, thus providing a pathway to a sustainable future for the Klamath Basin's local communities and their salmon resources.

The Klamath Agreements (KBRA, 2006) aim to restore the natural flow of the Klamath River and the habitats that support salmon, steelhead, and other fish species. The KBRA was designed to provide a comprehensive solution that would allow the removal of four dams on the Klamath River while ensuring the needs of local communities would be met. The agreement also includes provisions for water management, fish and wildlife conservation, and economic development.

The KBRA was a response to the decades-long conflict over water use in the Klamath Basin. The dams on the Klamath River were built in the 1950s and 1960s by the federal government to provide irrigation, hydroelectric power, and water for a town hall meeting in September, promising to find a way to open all water and shut everything down.

Hope as the calendar turned to 2016, Congressman Jared Huffman said in a statement, "while the KBRA expired on December 31, 2016, it’s hard to see how Congress can move forward with the KBRA expiring on December 31, 2016, it’s hard to see how Congress can move forward with a three-year window to fund the KBRA. A comprehensive solution that was reached through the three years that followed this agreement is unlikely to be preserved in any Congress. Republican Congressman LaMalfa has sent a severe threat to the Klamath Basin.

The documentary A River Between Us, by Jason Atkinson, poses this timely and relevant question at the conclusion of the film: "Are we big enough to finish the largest restoration project in American history?" The answer is no. At least for now.
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