

# Klamath Be Dammed

## The Environmental Impact of Dams on the Klamath River Basin

### An Overview of Dams

Between 1918 and 1962, six dams were erected on the Klamath River. The goal was to regulate water flow and provide hydroelectric power. However, the adverse effects of dams cannot be ignored. They create areas of stagnant water, which leads to higher water temperatures and increased production of toxic blue-green algae. Dams also create a barrier that prevents aquatic wildlife such as salmon from traveling upstream to spawn.

### Impact on Salmonids

Located in southern Oregon and northern California, the Klamath River Basin is crucial habitat for coho salmon, chinook salmon, and steelhead trout. Iron Gate, the lowest of the Klamath dams, blocks off more than 420 miles of habitat on the Klamath River and its tributaries. The result is rapidly declining salmonid populations due to the loss of habitat and warmer, stagnant water that is not conducive to spawning.

### 2002 Klamath River Fish Kill

In 2002, an estimated 70,000 chinook salmon died upon returning to the Klamath River to spawn. The massive number of dead salmon was attributed to epizootic disease, which greatly increases when warm water provides a perfect place for toxins and pathogens to grow. 2002 was also a drought year, yet a large amount of water was diverted out of the Klamath for irrigation. Low water levels due to drought and irrigation, low water flow due to dams, and a high density of migrating salmon led to this preventable disaster.

### The Proposal

The 2010 Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement proposed that the four lower dams be removed beginning in 2020. Although awaiting approval from Congress, the plan has support from forty parties including farmers, fisherman, and American Indian tribes. PacifiCorp, the company running the Klamath Hydroelectric Project and managing the dams, has also agreed to the settlement.

### Future of the Klamath

90% of salmonids in coastal California waters are federally threatened or endangered. Formerly one of the top three salmon rivers in America, the Klamath River has suffered major consequences due to the presence of dams. With the removal of the four lower dams, natural water flow will be restored and salmonid populations will begin to increase. Furthermore, the benefits are not exclusive to the fish. It is estimated that more than 4000 people will be employed over 15 years in order to remove the dams. American Indian tribes, fisherman, and even farmers will benefit from the removal of the dams.

↑ Upstream migration  
of salmonids



Dam to remain intact



Dam removal proposed



Dam removal proposed and  
presence of blue-green algae