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Bill setting stage for Klamath Basin restoration passes Senate
Senate Bill 76 major piece of largest watershed recovery project in the United States

SALEM – The Oregon Senate approved legislation to restore the Klamath River Basin and protect Oregon utility ratepayers today. SB 76 is the product of over 26 conservation, tribal, federal, state, county, agricultural, and business interests who signed an Agreement in Principle on the Klamath Basin Restoration last fall.

“My overall view is that when such diverse interests come together to craft and support legislation—from farmers and ranchers to conservationists—from PacifiCorp to ratepayer groups—from the Governor’s office to the Klamath Tribes—the results create balanced solutions for the environment, improvements for fishing and agricultural economies, and protections to ratepayers,” said Senator Jackie Dingfelder (D-Portland), chair of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, during her floor speech.

The legislation passed today is a major step in the process of dam removal on the Klamath River by the year 2020. This entire agreement is still subject to voters in California, the Obama administration, and the Department of Interior. The specific intent of SB 76 is to protect utility customers by setting caps on costs and liabilities to PacifiCorp customers. SB 76 also gives oversight and ultimate authority on the money collected to the Oregon Public Utility Commission – Oregonian’s watchdog for utility rates.

After decades of often contentious disagreement about the Klamath Dams, stakeholders were faced with the decisions to either relicense the dams through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or explore decommissioning of the dams. SB 76 builds a fund of up to \$180 million that provides Oregon customers certainty. Without SB 76, costs to customers for FERC relicensing will begin at \$180 million and could go much higher.

In addition the financial considerations that went in to the decision to support decommissioning the dams, removal will benefit Oregon’s agricultural sector, economic development, and environment.

“Managing our water resources wisely is a key component of the Senate Democrats’ agenda for this session,” said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin). “The affects of this bill will be wide-reaching and benefit diverse groups across the state. It will help resolve issues of water certainty for farmers and ranchers in the Klamath Basin. We can also expect to see improvements in the major salmon runs on the west coast, which will be especially helpful to coastal fishing industries in Oregon.”

SB 76 will now move to the House for consideration.

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