

Darrel Lockard, Circuit Rider

I found this browsing the web trying to keep up with current events. Just thought it is a good reminder that water doesn't affect just us.

## Judge Recommends Higher Electric Rates for Klamath Irrigators

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**GRANTS PASS, Ore.** -- An administrative law judge has recommended that Klamath farmers' request for continued cut-rate electricity to pump irrigation water be turned down by the California Public Utility Commission.

In findings posted on the California Public Utility Commission Web site, Administrative Law Judge Michael J. Galvin found that the Klamath Water Users Association could not document any benefit to PacifiCorp, the owner of four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River, from water that first runs through the 180,000-acre federal irrigation project straddling the Oregon-California border.

A final decision from the commission is not likely for at least a month. If it goes through, farmers would go from paying 0.6 cents per kilowatt hour, as they have since 1917, to the regular irrigation rate of 7.9 cents, a 12-fold increase. Earlier this year, the commission agreed to give the farmers a four-year transition period to the higher rates.

Conservationists, commercial fishermen and Indian tribes hope that paying more to pump water will force farmers and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to use less water for irrigation, leaving more for Klamath River salmon and waterfowl on nearby national wildlife refuges.

About 750 farms are on the Oregon side of the project, where the Oregon Public Utility Commission has already started phasing in higher rates, and about 220 are on the California side.

Farmers argued that water will now be recirculated around the project multiple times rather than being pumped uphill to the refuges and the river.

"Lands will continue to be farmed," said Scott Seus, a Tulelake, Calif., farmer. "Ultimately it will hurt

PacifiCorp's hydroproject because they won't be able to access water they've had for 90 years of history.

"We're just very outraged that there is an assumption out there that the utilities ought to get something for nothing. They pay for coal, they pay for natural gas. We provided them water."

PacifiCorp spokesman Dave Kvamme said from Portland that the recommendation would restore fairness to rate payers in the region, because any continued subsidy of Klamath irrigators would have to come from increased rates for other customers.

Cecil Lesley, chief of water and lands for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Klamath Falls, said higher rates would likely mean less water pumped around the Klamath Reclamation Project, but it was hard to say whether less water would be used. Farmers could change what crops are planted, and would decide how much water to use based on whether they were making money.

Authorized in 1905, the Klamath Reclamation Project built a network of canals to drain Tule Lake in California and Lower Klamath Lake in Oregon and now irrigates 180,000 acres of farmland that produce grain, alfalfa, onions, potatoes, horseradish and cattle.

On most projects around the West, the Bureau of Reclamation built dams to provide low-cost power for irrigators. But in Klamath, they ceded that responsibility to a utility that has since been taken over by PacifiCorp.

The judge found that while farmers had senior water rights to PacifiCorp, they could not document any increased benefit to the utility from running the water through the irrigation project, or document that they provided more water to the river.

He added the farmers did not pay upstream water users with senior water rights, such as the Klamath Tribes, for water that went through the irrigation project, yet were asking to be paid for doing the same thing.

"I think the PUC simply recognized the unfairness of continuing a subsidy that has not been updated for more than 90 years," said Glen Spain of the

Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, which represents California salmon fishermen and argued against the farmers in the proceedings.

"There is a lot of marginal land in upland areas that is very unproductive that is irrigated simply because the power and water are cheap," Spain said.

"Ultimately removing those conservation disincentives will make the project and farming community more efficient."