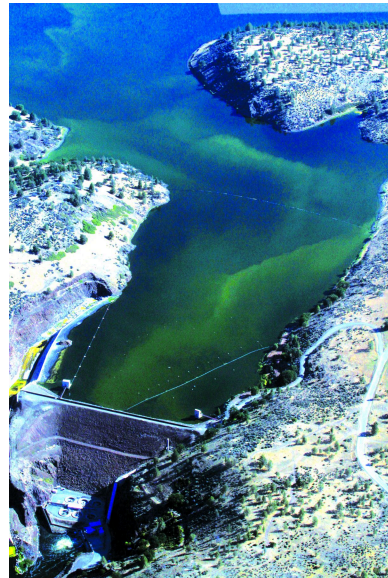


Dam removal closer: Klamath project advancing

July 27, 2019



The Klamath Dam Removal Project is expected to take another big step July 29 when a supplemental submission is made to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

The project aims to remove the Klamath River's lower four dams in California and Oregon, all owned by PacificCorp. — the John C. Boyles Dam, Copca 1, Copca 2, and the Iron Gate Dam — all of which currently are being used to generate power.

Matt Cox of the Klamath River Renewal Corp. (KRRC) said his organization believes the supplemental submission will provide FERC with the information it needs to make a determination on a pair of applications the renewal corporation has submitted.

KRCC is a private, nonprofit organization overseeing a variety of aspects involving removal of the dams.

"In 2018, KRRC submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission what is called our definite plan," said Cox, "which is a comprehensive roadmap for the project.

"It is common for FERC, in large projects, to request that the project is reviewed by what is called a board of consultants. This is a group of FERC-authorized experts that have broad expertise in areas relevant to the project, such as cost estimating and all sorts of things.

"They have reviewed our submission, provided us with feedback, asked some questions, and gave us an opportunity to make what was already an incredibly strong and thorough submission even more complete and compelling."

Cox said KRRC has spent about seven months going over the questions and suggestions that it received from the board of consultants. He said KRRC plans to submit additional information that answers those questions.

"They had some pretty important questions," said Cox. "For example, KRRC's budget.

"So KRRC's budget will show that it is more than adequate to remove the dams as proposed in the current license transfer and surrender applications. That is extremely important."

Total authorized funding for the project is \$450 million.

Although Cox said he could not give an exact figure until July 29 for what his organization's updated cost estimate will be in the supplemental submission, but said it will be less than \$450 million.

Crescent City Concerns

Meantime, the Crescent City Council and the Crescent City Harbor District both have drafted letters to the California State Water Resources Control Board supporting the dam-removal efforts, although the Del Norte Board of Supervisors wrote a letter to the water board expressing concerns about potential sediment impacts to Crescent City Harbor.

The county board voted 4-1 in March to send a letter to KRRC requesting mitigation dollars in the event the project results in excessive silt at the harbor and impairs the local recreational salmon fishery.

Cox said KRRC has taken some preliminary steps to work with Crescent City Harbor to address its concerns.

“We have met and talked with Del Norte County, Crescent City and the harbormaster. There is some ongoing work with them,” Cox said.

“Nothing is finalized yet, but I think it will probably include establishing some sort of baseline levels of what is going on in the harbor.

“It is early for me to speak to that because it is ongoing,” said Cox, “but I will say that the lowest dam, Iron Gate, is 200 miles from the ocean, and Crescent City is almost 20 miles north of where the river comes out.

“Also,” said Cox, “the composition of the sediment behind these dams is a very fine silt. Some of it will make it all the way out to the ocean and will likely just drop to the ground or disappear.”

Next Steps

Cox said FERC will consider which license to transfer first, and KRRC hopes to have that answer soon.

“We believe FERC has all the information that they will need to make the transfer determination and we hope that that is something that can happen quickly,” Cox said.

“If it is adjudicated favorably, then they will look at the license-to-surrender application.”

The surrender application likely will take longer to process than the license-to-transfer application, he said, because of the required environmental reviews that come with it.

“It will get a full environmental review at the federal level,” Cox said, “so from a timing standpoint, we have driven the process forward by being timely with all of the responses to requests for information.

“The ball is in FERC’s court for when the project will take place, and they are going to do a thorough review of everything that we have submitted to them before they make a determination.”

KRRC already has received a clean-water certification from the State of Oregon, but they await certification from the California State Water Resources Control Board.

“That is in the middle of the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) process, but public comments have ended for that,” Cox said.

“We can’t make the wheels of government move forward more quickly, but we are doing everything that we can to make sure the process moves smoothly ...

“Ultimately,” he said, “we want this project to move forward as quickly as possible so the fish can come back, the river water quality can improve, and the tribes in the entire Klamath River Basin can get the economic and cultural benefits from a free-flowing Klamath River.

“We are working to make that happen as quickly as possible. But FERC will determine the timeline under which this project unfolds.”

