

Governor appeals to Warren Buffett for help in dam removal

August 3, 2020



Dam Removal Snag - 650 words, 1 file image

The Klamath Dam Removal Project has hit a snag that has California's governor appealing to one of the world's richest men to help remedy.

A deal for one of the largest dam removal projects in history was reached in 2016 to remove four hydroelectric dams along the lower Klamath River. Under the agreement, the dams' owner PacifiCorp would hand them over to and allow the nonprofit Klamath River Renewal Corporation (KRRC) to oversee their removal. The Iron Gate Dam is the closest of the four dams to Del Norte County, situated just west of Hornbrook, about 200 miles from the mouth of the Klamath River. Area tribes, including the Yurok, and environmental groups have stated the project is critical to saving salmon species.

However, word came back from the Federal Energy Regulatory Corporation (FERC) July 16 saying the agency would only allow the Oregon-based PacifiCorp to transfer the dam's licenses if PacifiCorp remained

listed as a co-licensee. The FERC argued KRRC has “limited finances and no experience with hydropower dam operation or dam removal.”

Pacificorp spokesperson Bob Gravely told the Herald and News in Klamath Falls, Oregon, that “the company is now concerned it may be exposed to liability if the costs of dam removal ‘spiral’ beyond the allocated \$450 million and that the company may just look to relicense the dams itself and continue operating them.”

To keep the company from walking away from the deal, Gov. Gavin Newsom appealed by letter directly to Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, the parent company of Pacificorp.

“Since time immemorial, the indigenous peoples of the Klamath Basin have stewarded the Klamath River, the second-largest river in California and once the third-biggest salmon-producing river on the west coast,” Newsom wrote. “It served as a centerpiece of community, culture and sustenance. Then beginning 100 years ago, construction of dams threatened this way of life, devastated salmon runs and altered the characteristics of the river itself. A century later, the river is sick, and the Klamath Basin tribes are suffering.

“We stand at an unprecedented moment of reckoning about our past and, more importantly, our future,” Newsom continued. “In this moment, we have the opportunity and obligation to see ourselves clearly and decide whether we are living up to the values that I firmly believe all Californians stand for: equity, inclusion and accountability.”

In a joint statement, the Yurok and Karuk Tribes, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, American Rivers, California Trout, Klamath Riverkeeper, Trout Unlimited, Save California Salmon and Sustainable Northwest lent support to Newsom’s outreach.

“With every year that passes, Klamath River salmon edge closer to extinction,” the statement said. “While we are gratified that PacifiCorp remains willing to talk, we can’t afford any more delays in this process. It’s time for Warren Buffett’s PacifiCorp to do the right thing and allow this dam removal agreement to move forward. It’s not only the right thing to do, it’s in the financial interests of PacifiCorp’s ratepayers and Berkshire Hathaway’s shareholders. The agreement offers PacifiCorp unprecedented liability protections and \$250 million in public funding. Walking away from the agreement will put PacifiCorp ratepayers on the hook for all the risks and liabilities associated with fish kills, toxic algae blooms, lawsuits, and violations of Tribal rights. We urge Warren Buffett and PacifiCorp to end the delays and move the dam removal process forward immediately.”

According to an Associated Press story, Coho salmon from the Klamath River are listed as threatened under federal and California law, and their population in the river has fallen anywhere from 52% to 95%. Spring chinook, once the Klamath Basin’s largest run, has dwindled by 98%.

“Fall chinook, the last to persist in any significant numbers, have been so meager in the past few years that the Yurok canceled fishing for the first time in the tribe’s memory,” Robert Jablon wrote for the AP.

