
Coastal Voices: Removal of dams will do little for Klamath salmon

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While I appreciate efforts by the Triplicate, April 18, 2019, “Gitlin’s town hall includes dam removal debate,” to outline the discussion, April 3 of the removal of four dams on the Klamath River, there remain several questions that went unanswered near the end of the town hall.

Scott Wright made several claims regarding the credibility of one of the scientists who reported grave reservations about the reliability of the science claiming great benefits of restoration from dam removal. I think he expected that we were to believe that a man who was hired by the Department of the Interior as their most senior scientist tasked with verifying the results of the science paid for by the department was a man with a meager academic pedigree, a limited and unrecognized professional career, and the sole whistleblower, whose claims got zero traction and were found to be meritless.

Really. I am not sure just how Wright came to that description of Paul Houser but the reality of the man’s career is most certainly less of a fantasy. Houser graduated from the University of Arizona, not some minor western desert college, with two degrees and a Ph.D. from one of the most respected departments in the country. From there he went on to a well-respected career, which included several years in federal service, along the way publishing over 200 peer-reviewed articles and papers. He then had the brief period of employment with the Department of the Interior where his denunciation of the science surrounding the Klamath River Dam removals found him to be at cross political purposes with the then-Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

A later examination of Houser’s findings, coupled with the support of eight of the project’s field scientists and the findings of the Klamath River Expert’s Panel, found that his description of the results promoting dam removal to be flawed, biased towards dam removal, lacking in science to support water restoration, and wildly speculative to be on target.

These conclusions played a large part in allowing the legislative process to lapse in Congress and dam removal in 2012 was effectively a dead legislative issue. Houser was clearly not the only person involved with Klamath River dam removal that had reservations about the projected positive transformation of the Klamath River.

Wright continued with his notion that multiple dam removals over the past 20 years on the West Coast of the U.S. have resulted in increased population numbers of adult salmon returning to West Coast Rivers. The

reality is that currently, ocean salmon counts have noted that salmon populations have declined over the past 25 years to a point where they are less than 1 percent of their historic high point population.

This is similarly true for over 30 percent of the current stocks of fish in general in the Pacific Ocean. No one, not Wright, not the KRRC, not the state's Water Quality Board, or even the preacher from the Church of Environmentalism and Dam Removal can claim that dam removal at the tune of \$450 million will result in anything more than an insignificant amount of restoration in the Klamath River.

East Coast rivers that have experienced dam removals have similarly noticed no significant fish population increases directly attributed to dam removal. There have been noticeable increases in fish populations when attention has been given to factory fishing operations and during periods of nonfishing off Canadian and U.S. waters.

Simple geography will show that with the removal of the Iron gate, J.C. Boyle, Copco 1, and Copco 2 dams will open up about 60-plus miles of unrestricted main branch river, all to be controlled by water releases from the Keno and Link River dams. The waters in these two reservoirs consist of acres of algae infested, shallow, warm water, which will be employed during the late summer and early fall to flush the remaining 250 miles of the Klamath River to aid in salmon population recovery?

The reality is that there is little to be gained from the dam removal, which will change what currently exists below the dams. There are no unidentified water sources that have the capability of improving water quality. There will not be significant cooling or anything but marginal water quality improvement following dam removal. If the current returns of adult salmon to the Klamath river continue to decline as expected, the \$450 million for dam removals seem to be rather pointless.

More importantly, dam removal will delay for many years and at an incalculable economic cost to Del Norte County the discovery of what will change the situation on the Klamath River.

As I indicated during the discussion, there are literally dozens of studies, which point to much more realistic causes for the decline of the salmon populations of the West Coast. Studies that can be associated with historical declines of the salmon populations in the Klamath River and go beyond speculation. If the goal is to eliminate aesthetically displeasing man-made structures on the Klamath River then, by all means, remove the dams. If the goal is to improve water quality and restore the salmon stocks, dam removal is an expensive path towards delay and disappointment. It is akin to that of tilting at windmills.

While I can certainly relate to the angst that dam removal adherents may experience if the dams do not come down, they may wish to know that a much greater benefit to the health of the environment of the Klamath River, if the focus on dam removal was shifted, to a more measured approach to the problem, which is inclusive of the many other more persuasive causes for salmon population decline. It becomes counterproductive to the issue when dam removal has all the trappings of an organized religion rather than being based on the overall path towards discovery of why salmon populations have continued to decline despite years of dam removals on the West Coast.

Samuel Strait lives in Crescent City.