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Press Release

Salazar Announces Release of Klamath Dam Removal Studies

Draft Environmental Analysis also Released, 60-Day Public Comment Period Opens

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WASHINGTON, DC – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today that the federal government has completed numerous peer-reviewed scientific and technical studies providing new and detailed information about the environmental and economic impacts of removing four Klamath River hydroelectric dams – fulfilling a major condition of the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement (KHSA), which was negotiated among state, local, tribal and water provider leaders and announced in February 2010.

The analysis and studies describe pluses and minuses to potential dam removal on the Klamath River. They reveal that, over the next few decades, dam removal and the implementation of a related watershed-wide restoration program could significantly increase salmon harvests in the river and ocean, eliminate the toxic algae blooms in reservoirs, and restore more normal water temperatures in the river, which is important for salmon.

Dam removal could also result in some small increases in long-term flood risks as well as a short-term impact on juvenile fish populations from the release of the sediment built up behind the dams. The studies also describe how these risks could be mitigated. The studies estimate that dam removal would result in the loss of some recreational opportunities on the Klamath River reservoirs, and some decrease in property values for landowners nearby. Dam removal will not have any direct impact on water supplies in the basin as these facilities do not provide storage for irrigation uses.

While the dam removal would result in the loss of hydroelectric power generation, which will have to be made up from other sources, and the loss of around 50 jobs from managing those facilities, it would also create a substantial number of jobs – varying in nature, duration, and location – estimated at approximately 1,400 during the short-term.

Over the full period of analysis, the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) is estimated to support approximately 4,600 jobs. While many factors can impact employment estimates over a 50-year economic study period, an estimated 450 jobs would be supported on average annually from the dam removal and as improvements to water quality and the fisheries occur. A federal study also shows that the most probable cost of removing the four dams fall under the $450 million state cost-cap, negotiated in the KHSA.
The dams currently generate enough electricity to power roughly 70,000 homes, although if the dams are retained, the additional costs from construction of required fish passage facilities, which could be substantial, will likely be passed on to ratepayers. The KHSA also calls for the parties to pursue opportunities on development of replacement energy.

A summary of these studies is available here.

The Department of the Interior, in association with the California Department of Fish and Game, also released an environmental analysis known as a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS/EIR). According to the terms of the KHSA, Secretary Salazar will make a final decision on dam removal based on a complete review of the scientific and technical data as well as the information in an environmental analysis, which includes input from the public.

“The reports issued today represent the most complete body of information to date on the science involved in Klamath River dam removal and the project’s potential for job creation,” said Secretary Salazar. “The science and analysis is vital to sound-decision making, but I also look forward to hearing from the people of the Klamath Basin who have endured a long cycle of irrigation shortages, fishing closures, poor water quality, fish disease and a large salmon die-off in 2002, and closure of the tribal fishery in Upper Klamath Lake for twenty-five years. Their input and perspectives will help shape the path we take toward strengthening the health and prosperity of all that depend on the Klamath for their way of life.”

“I am pleased to see the initial analysis shows there could be substantial economic as well as environmental benefit from the effort to restore the Klamath basin,” said Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber. “This is just one example of the tremendous opportunity we have to get Oregonians back to work across the state restoring the health of our watersheds, fisheries and forests and better position Oregon for long-term prosperity.”

“These agreements are an essential step toward restoring the health of the Klamath Basin,” said California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird. “Their effects on Klamath communities and biological and other resources have been carefully studied. Only with such close scientific scrutiny can we make the most informed decisions. This is a testament to the strong collaborative effort that continues to take place."

The Draft EIS/EIR identifies the effects of the proposed action – dam removal and implementation of the KBRA – as well as several other alternatives, including options for leaving all dams in place as well as options for leaving two dams in place. The KBRA is watershed-wide program to restore fisheries, improve water quality and provide water supply certainty to communities and water users in the Basin.

The Draft EIS/EIR has been prepared by the Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Reclamation, and the California Department of Fish and Game. The 60-day public comment process for the Draft EIS/EIR is open Sept. 22–Nov. 21, 2011.

Visit www.KlamathRestoration.gov to view the Draft EIS/EIR and obtain a schedule for public hearings as well as instructions for submitting written comments. Hard copies of the Draft EIS/EIR are available for viewing at various public libraries and at federal and state natural resource agency offices in and near the Klamath Basin.

The Final EIS/EIR will include an addendum of all public comments received when it is published. A final decision by the Secretary is expected in March 2012. If the Secretary opts to remove the dams, the Governors of Oregon and California will have 60-days to concur.

Underscoring the Obama Administration’s commitment to openness and scientific integrity, the Department will summarize the technical reports that have been prepared for the Secretarial Determination process of removal of Klamath-area dams and publish it later this fall into a single “overview report.” This report will be available for public review and will then receive an additional peer review by an independent panel of experts. An additional economic survey that is being conducted will also be included in the summary report.

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