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March 21, 2015

RE: SB 206, SB 264 & SB 265

Chairman Edwards and Committee members,

I am Joe Watkins the District Manager of the Klamath Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWCD) and a Board Member. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed bills you are considering. The KSWCD is governed by a county wide elected board of 7 members and works on behalf of the citizens of Klamath County. The mission of the KSWCD is to promote the wise and productive use of natural resources. I am here representing the Board with this testimony. The official position of the KSWCD Board is that we do not support the Klamath Basin Restoration agreement until there is Federal Legislation and funding enacting it. The District Board believes many bad decisions have been made regarding water regulation in our County. All of these decisions have had and continue to have huge negative impacts on the counties farming and ranching interests. These decisions and the attempts to mitigate them in the past have depleted our aquifers, reduced the agricultural economy, reduced property values, convinced landowners to sell out (two multi-thousand acre ranches sold within the last month in the upper basin, and divided our communities.

Agriculture is the largest economy in Klamath County accounting for estimated 300 million dollars yearly when the use of water to meet agricultural needs is met. The conditions that must be met within the Proposed Agreements will reduce water supplies to Klamath county irrigators by 25% with mitigation efforts of water right retirement, land idling and aquifer pumping costing tax dollars but still not making our agricultural economy whole. Other requirements that must be met are riparian management plans attached to the deeds of properties for control of private property. The overbearing regulation of water, given through administrative recommendation, to tribal interests is having a huge impact on that economy with no certainty of benefit. In fact water required to be left in Klamath Lake since 2001 due to ESA and tribal requirements is having a huge negative effect with ESA listed fish populations declining as much as 86% from 2001 to 2011. Although the populations are in decline the same failing management strategies remain in place restrict water for agricultural purposes.

More regulation determined by a OWRD department official in concert with the tribal, US Fish and Wildlife, and a designated landowner, the JME is to work out the details of the KBRA. Based on past experience with this process agriculture will lose even more water. Putting the fox in charge of the henhouse does not yield good results. More stringent and long term water regulation having long term effect may never be reversed and devastate the most important economy in Klamath county.

Instead of passing legislation to further a plan (KBRA) that does not have support of the people of Klamath County and only support from a few who think it is better salvage whatever is possible from a bad situation and are tired of trying to find a solution to an unthinkable set of conditions put in place by a disgraced Governor. The KSWCD would like offer some alternatives that should be explored.

1. Revisit the adjudication applying sound reasonable science instead of political addenda's to regulate water in our County.
2. Create more useable storage for agriculture if these huge amount of water are truly needed to support tribal instream needs.



3. Require beneficial use results to be shown i.e.; fish populations increased within a reasonable amount of time as a condition of the water regulation being put in place when it has detrimental effects on an economy of a County.
4. Establish a tribal harvest permit with supervision of use of the endangered fish to mitigate the tribal need and damage to the hunting and gathering right of the tribes that facilitated the water restrictions.

In closing, the ongoing battle over water has had a huge social impact on our county. The proposed agreements only serve to prolong the agony our communities are going through. Landowners in the County are constantly asking what do the agreements mean what should we do? Unfortunately we do not have the answers for them as the agreements are so confusing and still not finalized. We do not know what to tell them. The only good things I have heard said about the agreements is that a handful of people worked very hard on them and there is some assurance of reduced amounts of water for agriculture. This is not a good deal for agriculture. It will permanently downsize agriculture. Please do not pass any legislation that furthers the efforts of the agreements in an attempt to make them more palatable to the residents of Klamath County. Thank you for the consideration of our comments.

Joe Watkins  
District Manager and Board Member

Martin Kerns District Board Chair  
Rodney Cheyne District Board Vice Chair  
Corey Thompson District Board Secretary/Treasurer  
Jason Haggerty District Board Member  
Baron Knoll District Board Member  
Earl Miller District Board member