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Dam Removal Uncertain In Proposed Klamath Settlement

The Oregon-based utility PacifiCorp, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Native American Tribes are releasing a draft settlement agreement on Wednesday, September 30 that could lead to the removal of four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River and restoration of the river's once fabled salmon runs.

But the defining characteristic of the complex 130-page agreement is "could."

"Although an important step towards restoration of the Klamath River, the draft settlement provides little certainty that PacifiCorp's fish-killing and polluting dams will be removed by the proposed target date of 2020," said Steve Evans, Conservation Director of the California-based statewide river conservation organization Friends of the River.

"It's going to take a lot more work and effort by all parties to ensure that the dams are actually removed and the Klamath River salmon are restored in our lifetime," Evans said.

In addition to failing to guarantee removal of the Klamath River dams, Friends of the River noted that the draft settlement provides broad liability protection for PacifiCorp against future lawsuits (even in circumstances where PacifiCorp could be negligent), and will rely on the multi-million dollar appropriations from the State of California and the federal government to implement dam removal and river restoration.

"California budget cuts have caused drastic cutbacks in public safety, health, education, and environmental programs. It doesn't seem possible that the state will have the money any time soon to help implement the restoration project," Evans said.

Despite its flaws, Friends of the River will seriously consider signing the proposed settlement agreement.

"If we don't sign the agreement, we won't be at the table to protect the public interest and advocate for swift removal of the dams," Evans said.

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