“Don’t overlook those oily little fish.”

-- Michael Pollan

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21:11/01. KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL AND SALMON RESTORATION PLAN ONCE
AGAIN MOVES FORWARD: After the disappointment of several years of Congressional foot-
dragging in broad-based stakeholder efforts to ratify the hard-fought Klamath Settlement
Agreements, signed in 2010 by more than 40 stakeholder Parties (including PCFFA and IFR)
after a full decade of negotiations, litigation, conflict and back-to-back water and salmon
fisheries disasters, the Klamath dam removal plan is once again moving forward — but this time
without involving Congress in the process.

On 6 April 2016, U.S. Dept. of Interior (DOI) Secretary Sally Jewell was joined by
California Governor Jerry Brown and Oregon Governor Kate Brown as well as the President and
CEO of PacifiCorp (the Company that owns the Klamath dams) Stefan Bird, and many other
officials and stakeholder groups in a signing ceremony held on the banks of the lower Klamath
River, to formally amend the Klamath Hydropower Settlement Agreement (KHSA), originally
signed in 2010. The Amended KHSA recommits the state, federal and stakeholder Parties to the original goal of Klamath four-dam removal by the end of 2020, but in a way that now does not require special Congressional authorization as was originally planned. Instead, the Company will now apply directly to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the federal agency that since 1930 has regulated and licensed power dams, to voluntarily surrender its current 1957-issued license and eventually transfer the ownership of the dams to a separate California non-profit corporation organized specifically to remove them in 2020. None of the money to be used for this major dam removal effort will come from federal sources. A $200 million fund is already being built up by monthly PUC-approved surcharges on PacifiCorp power rates paid in Oregon and California, where PacifiCorp has more than 600,000 customers. This fund is increasing at a rate of about $1.5 million/month and has already accrued about $100 million. The remainder of the approximately $297 million estimate required for full dam removal will come from the recently passed 2015 California Water Bond Act (Proposition 1).

“These agreements will enable the largest dam removal project in the nation,” said Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, NOAA Administrator. “While more work lies ahead, these agreements support efforts to recover fisheries, sustain the region’s farming and ranching interests, and benefit the environment and the communities who rely upon the Klamath River.”

Portions of the hard-fought, grass-roots-supported Klamath Settlement expired on 31 December 2015 because of years of Congressional inaction in the GOP-controlled U.S. House of Representatives. Key members of the U.S. House of Representatives’ GOP leadership, including Reps. Greg Walden and Doug LaMalfa, refused to back a House version of the Merkley-Walden-Boxer-Feinstein bill already poised to pass in the Senate (S. 133) that would have fully authorized the Klamath Settlement, including its special dam removal decision process provisions. That Senate bill would have put this particular dam removal decision in the hands of the Secretary of Interior, rather than FERC. Multiple engineering and scientific studies were done over several years to support that “Secretarial Determination,” all concluding that dam removal was feasible, that its adverse impacts were minor and could be mitigated or eliminated, and that restoring free passage for salmon in the Klamath would result in approximately doubling the salmon runs of the Klamath River, once the third most productive salmon river system in the continental U.S. However, removing jurisdiction over the Klamath dams from FERC, where it ordinarily would reside, became controversial in this House of Representatives, and blocking the bill in the House was also seized on as a tactic by those who oppose their removal, such as Siskiyou County and certain landowners who fear that their property values near the reservoirs would be reduced.

Both Siskiyou County and Rep. LaMalfa still adamantly oppose Klamath dam removal, in spite of numerous peer-reviewed scientific and engineering studies demonstrating not only its feasibility, but debunking all of their past objections and predictions of problems as baseless. But PacifiCorp points out that the dams are privately (not publicly) owned, that the decision to remove them and replace their power by more cost-effective modern generation facilities is a
sound business decision, and that the Company is well within its rights to upgrade its own power generation facilities.

The four Klamath dams in question (J.C. Boyle, CopCo 1 and 2, and the Iron Gate Dams) together can reliably generate only about 82 Megawatts of power – less than 2% of the generation capacity of PacifiCorp in its six state region. And the Company has already brought on more than 17 times that amount of power in new renewable (i.e., non-carbon based) sources. The dams also do not provide significant irrigation, nor any significant flood control, nor do they store a significant amount of water – they are all in fact designed as run-of-the-river dams whose only purpose is to generate a small amount of hydropower. Both the California and Oregon Public Utilities Commissions (PUCs) formally endorsed Klamath dam removals under the KHSA several years ago as the cheapest and best option for PacifiCorp’s ratepayers, compared to the immense costs and much larger liabilities and uncertainties of retrofitting these archaic structures with modern fish passage and cleaning up the water quality problems they create, as would be required under current laws, and which then might still prove ineffective. Under the Amended KHSA, PacifiCorp is to submit its Application for Surrender of License to FERC on or about 1 July 2016.

For more information, see the 6 April DOI Press Release on the signing ceremony. The Amended KHSA is also available from that DOI Website. Nearly $20 million has already been spent on major NEPA and CEQA feasibility studies on the impacts of dam removal, and these studies, including several levels of peer reviews, can be found at www.klamathrestoration.gov. These many studies will be the basis for PacifiCorp’s upcoming application to FERC for a license surrender. Photo of Iron Gate Dam by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, public domain.

21:11/02. FEDS ANNOUNCE PROBE OF FUNDING SOURCES FOR DELTA TUNNELS: In a move welcomed by environmental and fisheries advocates alike, the U.S. Department of the Interior’s (DOI) Inspector General’s office announced this week that it has opened an investigation into funding sources behind the Delta Tunnels, also known as the “California Water Fix.” The proposed plan, which the California Brown Administration has been pushing for years, would involve construction of two massive underground conduits which would siphon fresh water directly from the Sacramento River to farms in the San Joaquin Valley, in the heart of California’s lucrative and disproportionately politically powerful agricultural regions. This latest announcement by the DOI may well be the beginning of the end for the infrastructure plan, coming as it does in the wake of decisions by state agencies to suspend planning deadlines for the project late last month.

PCFFA and IFR, along with several environmental and social justice groups, have opposed the Delta Tunnels since their inception, maintaining that the plan will take waning water resources needed to sustain dwindling California Chinook salmon populations and use taxpayer dollars to hand that water over to industrial irrigators. Sublegals previously reported on funding irregularities concerning the Tunnels (see Sublegals 21:08).

For more information, see this 11 April report in the San Francisco Chronicle, or any of the number of pieces that Dan Bacher has produced reporting on the issues troubling the Tunnels, like this 30 March report.

21:11/03: PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ANNOUNCES RESTRICTED WEST COAST SALMON SEASON: The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) announced last week its final recommendations for the 2016 commercial, recreational and Tribal ocean salmon fishing seasons. Reflecting poor ocean salmon abundance projections, the final
season recommendations feature several gaps in fishing opportunity over time and area all along the West Coast. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will likely finalize the recommendations as regulations later this month.

Coming off of four years of drought, West Coast salmon-supporting rivers have suffered from the dual threat of low flows and increased human pressure on those limited water resources. Salmon runs have paid the price, with fish production and survival on those rivers, which include the Columbia, Klamath and the Sacramento among others, dropping precipitously. The short-term result is severe and wide-spread restrictions on fishing, while the long-term threat of species decline looms ever larger.

Commercial salmon fishing historically ran from April through October, although more recent seasons have been limited to May through September. This season, however, features deep cuts to fishing time. The Monterey North and South management areas (Pigeon Point to the Mexico border) is feeling the tightest pinch, with fishing allowed during only two months of the year. Northern California will not be fishing in half of June nor all of July, and the Oregon/Klamath Management Zone is closed in the later part of the season. The Oregon-Washington zone is the least restricted, although there are several sporadic one-week closures over the course of the season.

For more information, see this 14 April San Francisco Chronicle article, and review the 2016 Ocean Salmon Season Alternative Description, and PFMC’s comments thereon, at the PFMC website.

21:11/04. COALITION URGES CALIFORNIA WATER MANAGERS TO COMPLETE WATER QUALITY PLAN BEFORE EVALUATING TUNNELS: Over 150 organizations representing water users, the fishing industry, conservationists, Tribes, and more submitted two letters to the California State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) demanding that the State Board complete a long overdue water quality plan for the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary before it goes ahead with adjudicating the Delta Tunnels plan, also known as the “California Water Fix.”

Under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), the State Board is required to develop water quality control plans for waterways that are compromised by pollutants. The State Board is also required to revisit established plans every three years. Such plans must establish water quality criteria that are protective of beneficial uses of the waterway, including supporting endangered species as well as fisheries uses downstream. Critics of the Delta Tunnels, including PCFFA and IFR, are have been calling on the Board to complete the latest water quality control plan for the Delta Estuary so that the Board has an analytically sound baseline against which to analyze the Tunnels’ impact on the Delta. To date, the State Board has resisted that request.

The coalition directed the second letter to the EPA, which has the authority to force the State Board to complete the plan, or to undertake drafting the plan on its own. Whether it is the EPA or the State Board that ultimately completes the plan, the coalition hopes to ensure that flow quantity and pollutant loads are firmly established before the Tunnels, a massive infrastructure project, disrupt the Delta-Estuary ecosystem any further.

For more information, see this 5 April Daily Kos article, which includes the text of the two letters, as well as the extensive list of signatories.

21:11/05. NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE FINALIZES NEW FORAGE FISH PROTECTIONS: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has finalized regulations
that prohibit the initiation of any new fishery on a set of forage fish species on the West Coast until the environmental and ecosystem impacts of such a fishery are analyzed. Forage fish are smaller marine species that play an important link in transferring energy between trophic levels in the ecosystem. The rule does not change regulations for currently managed forage fisheries, such as herring and sardines, nor does it impact the ability for Tribes to start forage fisheries. It does define the forage species for which new fisheries are prohibited, which include Pacific sand lance, silversides and certain varieties of herring, smelt and squid that are not currently targeted. While there are not any known commercial fishermen interested in beginning fisheries on the newly protected species, global demand for forage species is increasing for reduction purposes, in which small, oil-rich fish are processed to create fertilizer, farmed-fish food, and fish-oil nutritional supplements, among other uses.

For more information, see this 4 April Oregonian article. Pacific Sand Lance photo by NMFS, public domain.

21:11/06. LAWSUIT CHALLENGES COLUMBIA RIVER HATCHERY OPERATIONS:
The conservation group Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC) filed suit 31 March against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Department of Commerce, arguing that the agencies are not ensuring that hatcheries will not harm endangered stocks of salmon and steelhead. WFC seeks “consultation,” a requirement that NMFS biologists provide advice on how to mitigate the hatcheries’ potential negative impacts on wild stocks of salmonids. WFC would see the hatcheries defunded absent that consultation.

However, The Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission (Commission), which represents the interests of the Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Nez Perce Tribes, has expressed deep concern over the aims of the lawsuit. The Commission believes that the potential to shut down the hatcheries ignores the critical role they play in bridging the gap between the status quo and salmon restoration, and pointed out that dams and water diversions are the real cause of salmon population declines on the Columbia. “Columbia Basin salmon were not decimated because of hatcheries. The Columbia Basin has hatcheries because natural fish were decimated,” said Commission Chairman Jeremy Wolf.

For more information, see this 7 April Indian Country Media Network article and this 5 April Yakima Herald article.

21:11/07. DROUGHT/EXTREME RAINFALL CONDITIONS EXPECTED TO BECOME THE STATUS QUO IN CALIFORNIA: A dismal prognosis for California’s future water supply was revealed last week in a Stanford University study. “California is trending toward more extreme weather, bringing new challenges for managing our water supply,” said researchers who studied the trends affecting California’s rainfall. “Even with an increased chance of drought,
the weather patterns that trigger exceptionally wet weather are also persisting” concluded the study. The researchers examined the “Ridiculously Resilient Ridge,” a persistent area of high pressure that can force storms away from California. Study authors concluded that California now has a different climate than it did 100 years ago, when many of the laws governing the state’s water supply and distribution were put into effect. UC Davis water expert Jay Lund added, “I think this is just another demonstration that California is a dry place and we have to learn to live with it for the most part. All the studies seem to indicate that if we manage the water well, California will still be a prosperous place in the future, even with more severe drought.”

For more information, see this 1 April San Jose Mercury News article.

21:11/08. WASHINGTON MORATORIUM ON GRAYS RIVER HATCHERY RELEASES: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) announced last month that it would cease releases of hatchery-raised steelhead into the Grays River watershed. The Grays is a tributary of the lower Columbia River, and the move is intended as a protective measure to preserve the genetic integrity of the native steelhead population in that region. The hatchery plan began in 2008, and WDFW is billing the move as the completion of a longstanding goal, claiming that the release of the hatchery populations as a measure to bolster wild stocks has brought them to a sustainable level. This report comes in spite of data showing that past years’ hatchery survival rate has dropped continuously in the midst of drought conditions.

For more information, see this 16 March post from the Chinook Observer. Steelhead photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, public domain.

21:11/09. CLIMATE CHANGE COULD THREATEN TRILLIONS IN WORLD ASSETS: Extreme weather brought on by climate change will slow global economic growth and damage the performance of stocks and bonds, according to a 4 April study led by the London School of Economics. Although the study did not try to identify which sectors were most at risk, havoc would result with the destruction of buildings, bridges or roads by storms or floods to losses of agricultural productivity and enforced movement of populations. The American fishing industry is already beginning to feel the effects of these changes, with warming oceans impacting food webs, causing harmful algal blooms, and inducing northward migration of targeted fish stocks.

Global regulators in the Financial Stability Board (FSB) say all the world's current non-bank financial assets are worth $143 trillion. "It makes financial sense to a risk-neutral investor to cut emissions, and even more so to the risk-averse," lead author Professor Simon Dietz, an environmental economist, told Reuters.

For more information, see this 4 April Yahoo News article.

21:11/10. FEDERAL JUDGE APPROVES $20 BILLION SETTLEMENT FROM BP OIL SPILL: U.S District Court Judge Carl Barbier on 4 April granted final approval to an estimated $20 billion settlement that resolves years of litigation over the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the worst offshore oil spill in the nation's history. The money is to be paid out over
roughly 16 years. The U.S. Justice Department estimates that the settlement will cost the oil giant as much as $20.8 billion, the largest environmental settlement in U.S. history as well as the largest-ever civil settlement with a single entity.

Judge Barbier set the stage for the settlement agreement with an earlier ruling that BP was "grossly negligent" in the offshore rig explosion that killed 11 workers and caused a 134-million-gallon spill. BP has estimated that its costs related to the spill, including its initial cleanup work and the various settlements and criminal and civil penalties, will exceed $53 billion. "We are pleased that the Court has entered the Consent Decree, finalizing the historic settlement announced last July," BP spokesman Geoff Morrell said in an email.

In Louisiana, where delicate coastal marshes were damaged by the oil, Gov. John Bel Edwards said the decision clears the way for the state to receive critical coastal restoration funding. While overall reaction to the settlement has been positive, there were lingering complaints that some of the BP payments may be tax-deductible for the oil giant. Court documents state that the civil penalties will not be tax deductible, although other settlement costs could be.

For more information, see this 4 April New Orleans Times-Picayune article.

21:11/11. CALIFORNIA KELP FORESTS DECIMATED BY CONFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) reported last week that kelp forests north of San Francisco Bay have been reduced by over 90% of historical levels this year. The kelp forests, mostly consisting of bull kelp (nereocystis luetkeana), constitute a key ecosystem driving the productivity of California’s coastal waters, and provide food for such commercial species as red abalone and red urchin, as well as shelter and cover for animals as diverse as sea otters and rockfish.

Though experts remain divided on which single factor is most to blame in the reduction of the kelp forests off of Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, they point to several conditions that have contributed to the historic decline, including a toxic algal bloom in 2011, an epidemic of sea star wasting disease, and unusually warm waters leading up to this year’s El Niño weather patterns. The kelp die-off has already impacted fishermen dependent on the abalone and urchin fisheries in the northern regions of the state, but biologists warn that if the kelp do not recover, this loss of such an ecologically pivotal species may cause economic shockwaves in other fisheries as well.

For more information, see this 30 March blog post from California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Kelp photo by National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, public domain.

21:11/12. CALIFORNIANS SAVED OVER 1 MILLION ACRE FEET OF WATER IN LAST TEN MONTHS: In a press release issued this week, the California State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) trumpeted the efforts of Californians to meet Governor
Brown’s mandated 25% reduction of recent years’ water usage. Though the state fell just short of that mark, the reduction figures released by the State Board indicate that in the period between June 2015 and February 2016, Californians reduced their water usage by 23.9%, nearly meeting the Governor’s goal and conserving 1.19 million acre feet of water. This, according to state figures, is enough water to meet the needs of just under 6 million Californians.

State officials were quick to note that, while Californians have done an amazing job stepping up their conservation efforts, the future of California’s water resources remains uncertain, and with drought conditions likely to persist, the CWRCB implores Californians to continue their efforts in spite of a relatively wet winter. Likewise, those with questions about the CWRCB’s ongoing policy efforts are invited to attend a public workshop on 20 April in Sacramento.

For more information, see this 4 April press release from the CWRCB.

21:11/13. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RELEASES DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN FOR ATLANTIC SALMON: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has released a draft plan to support the recovery of Atlantic salmon populations in the Gulf of Maine. Atlantic salmon, in common with many other once economically crucial fisheries in the Northeast, have seen a dramatic drop in their numbers over the last century. Where mighty runs of the fish once practically choked Maine’s rivers in spawning seasons past, recent years have seen returning salmon that number in the low thousands. In 2015, official numbers recorded a mere 731 fish returning to spawn.

The Gulf of Maine salmon population was listed as endangered in 2000, and efforts outlined in the draft plan to aid its recovery include plans to restore spawning rivers and their connection to the ocean, maintain genetic diversity in the population, and augment wild populations with hatchery fish. NOAA and USFWS will be accepting public comments on the plan, available here, through May 31, 2016.

For more information on the draft plan, or to view it in its entirety, visit the NOAA Atlantic Fisheries page.

21:11/14. MARCH RAINS MAY AID RECOVERY OF SACRAMENTO WINTER-RUN CHINOOK: State water and wildlife officials are quietly optimistic about the impact of this last month’s rains on this year’s run of Chinook salmon. The state’s reservoirs are at their highest point in the last two years, and more water means cooler temperatures in the streams where salmon lay eggs as well as more potential for water releases to sustain them during warmer months to come. Dams impounding Shasta Lake and Lake Oroville both planned early April releases in order to alleviate flood encroachment conditions, which would create favorable conditions ahead of the spawning season to start this month.

Despite some tentative good news, projections for returning winter Chinook salmon runs continue to be at historic low levels. State officials noted this rare good news in the quest to prevent total extinction of the endangered winter-run Chinook while touting plans to implement a five-year action plan aimed at aiding recovery for Chinook and other endangered Sacramento River fish species. In the wake of continued drops in salmon survival numbers however, many observers remain skeptical.

For more information on the prospects for this year’s Chinook runs, see this 16 March report from the Sacramento Bee.
21:11/15. WASHINGTON FISHERMEN INDICTED FOR DUMPING POLLUTANTS: Two Bellingham commercial fishermen were indicted this week by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for dumping waste and bilge five times into Blaine Harbor and ocean waters from 2011-2013, in violation of the Clean Water Act and the Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships. Bingham and Randall Fox allegedly purchased their fishing boat without a functioning bilge system, ran hoses out of the engine room and over the side of the boat, and pumped waste through the hoses into Blaine Harbor roughly every other day between July 2011 and May 2012. The two fishermen each face two maximum penalties of $250,000, one for each of the two federal laws they allegedly violated. Violation of the Clean Water Act also comes with a maximum three years in prison, and six years for violating the Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships.

For more information, see this 7 April Bellingham Herald article.

21:11/16. LAWSUIT ON EMERGENCY DELTA SALINITY BARRIER DEEMED MOOT: A lawsuit targeting a temporary 750-foot wide rock dam built in May 2015 and designed to prevent salinity intrusion in to the San Francisco Bay-Delta has been tossed out as moot. The barrier was removed November 16, 2015, and had been in place to prevent salty San Francisco Bay water from mixing with Delta-Estuary freshwater used to supply drinking water in California. That phenomenon occurs during years of low outflow from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, when freshwater cannot push back saltwater intrusion. Although replacing the salinity barrier is likely unnecessary in 2016, due to strong winter rainfall, replacement may be necessary in 2017.

The Center for the Environmental Science, Accuracy and Reliability (CESAR) had immediately sued the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) upon installation of the barrier, contending that it “was installed and operated in violation of the Endangered Species Act, and failed to prevent incidental take of Delta Smelt.” Delta smelt are critically endangered and protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

CESAR’s suit focused on the approval process for installation of the barrier. CESAR’s suit would have required DWR to use the standard consultation procedures into the future, given that continued use of the temporary barrier is reasonably foreseeable. In his ruling, U.S. Federal District Court Judge Lawrence O’Neill wrote, “DWR's evidence now demonstrates that emergency consultation procedures will not be utilized in 2016 and that DWR does not intend to use them in 2017 or beyond.”

For more information, see this 4 April Courthouse News Service article. Delta Smelt photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, public domain.

21:11/17. SACRAMENTO RIVER CLOSED TO FISHING TO PROTECT MIGRATING SALMON: For the next four months, 1 April – 31 July, the Sacramento River from Keswick Dam to the Highway 44 bridge will be closed to recreational fishing to help winter-run Chinook salmon spawn, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Officials with CDFW said that Keswick Dam blocks access to historic spawning areas, so the closure was needed to protect the salmon's spawning productivity.

For more information, see this 1 April KRCR TV article.
YOUR NEWS, COMMENTS, CORRECTIONS: Submit your news items, comments or any corrections to Editor at: tsloane@ifrfish.org, or call the IFR/PCFFA office with the news and a source at either: (415) 561-FISH (Southwest Office) or (541) 689-2000 (Northwest Office). If you have any trouble subscribing or unsubscribing, contact IFR/PCFFA directly at: tsloane@ifrfish.org. Sublegals is a weekly fisheries news bulletin service of Fishlink. “Fishlink” and “Sublegals” are registered trademarks of the Institute for Fisheries Resources. All rights to the use of these trademarks are reserved to IFR. All photos are by IFR unless otherwise accredited. This publication, however, may be freely reproduced and circulated without copyright restriction. Articles taken from Fishlink Sublegals may be freely reposted or reprinted with attribution to “Fishlink Sublegals.” If you are receiving this as a subscriber, please feel free to pass it on to your colleagues.

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