



January 12, 2022

Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240-0001

Dear Commissioner Touton,

As the elected leaders of Klamath County, Oregon and Modoc County and Siskiyou County, California, we have the legal responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of our citizens. As of today, we face numerous overlapping threats including the loss of basic drinking water to over three hundred families and economic catastrophe due to the loss of irrigation water in our canals for our farms, not to mention the impacts to fish and wildlife at our neighboring federal wildlife refuges. We write to you for help in fulfilling our duty to our constituents in dealing with these serious health and safety issues, notwithstanding the useful discussions we are currently having with Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) staff.

We believe this crisis is analogous to fighting a wildfire. The health and safety of those laying in the path of the fire overrides “business as usual” management plans. These same, extraordinary conditions exist in the Basin today. Due to a historic drought and subsequent federal government decisions, hundreds of our counties’ residents – many of whom are disadvantaged, low-income, and/or minority citizens – are without the basic needs necessary for safe and healthy living in their homes. In order for us to successfully honor the oaths and obligations that we entered into upon taking office to protect our citizens from these imminent threats, the Bureau must successfully achieve its Klamath Basin Project operational goals now and over the long term.

As the Bureau respects our obligations to our constituents, we commit to be steadfast in support of the agency’s Klamath Basin Project management obligations on behalf of our people.

We recognize that the Bureau’s project management role and our roles, while different, are dependent on one another. We are greatly concerned that some project management decisions and agency actions have placed our citizens at risk in the past. It is our desire to work with you to help you include the basic needs of our communities in long-term management of the Project. Our immediate and sole focus now is to assist the Bureau in relieving the health and safety risks that our counties’ residents are facing on a daily basis.

To reiterate, in 2021, the Bureau provided zero water deliveries for wildlife refuges or Project agriculture. This action directly resulted in the failure of more than 300 domestic wells in Klamath County alone and that number is likely to be significantly higher when California’s dry wells are included. Consequently, these families were left without water for drinking, cooking, or basic sanitation. The temporary efforts to provide alternative water are insufficient and unsustainable.

In order to provide water deliveries to Project agriculture and wildlife refuges, water must pass through the canals that lay within the city limits of Klamath Falls, a city of more than 20,000 residents. The

unprecedented zero allocation and subsequent drying up of this critical delivery infrastructure, last used nearly two years ago, has degraded the canal so that there is the potential for canal failure or other system failure, posing a great risk to nearby residents and their property. A prudent conservative approach proposed to re-water the system is not being allowed under the current Project management.

To reiterate, it is nearly impossible for us to carry out our legally required mandates to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens if the Bureau does not provide water to the canal system, its primary federal statutory responsibility.

We appreciate the need for discussions to continue on the complicated issues surrounding the ongoing operations of the Project and the challenges facing the Bureau in attempting to satisfy the many competing concerns. The Counties wish to bring their perspective into that discussion in a productive manner as well. At this moment in time, however, we believe the health and safety crisis currently existing in the Project area supersedes all other issues, regardless of agency missions. Similar to a raging wildfire or other disaster threatening a community, government operations and elected officials that manage governmental responses must place human health and safety at the highest priority.


Again, we wish to commend your local and regional staff for their commitment to continue meeting with us regularly as we jointly address these shared concerns. Through this open dialogue, we have learned the Bureau is beginning the risk assessment for both the short and long term operation of the canal system. We have also learned the Bureau is in concurrence with the Klamath Irrigation District's position that it will take six weeks to re-water the canal system to minimize the short term risk of system failure. However, we need your help to explore the option of beginning the re-watering process six weeks earlier than the normal start date of April 1, rather than delaying water delivery by six weeks. This approach would be a win-win. It would not only avoid unnecessary delays in water delivery to the Basin's wildlife refuges and agriculture, but also have the extremely important benefit of speeding up the restoration of the dry domestic wells.

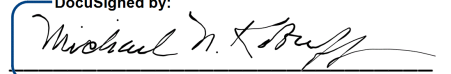
We therefore respectfully request that the Bureau coordinate actions with the Counties and with sister agencies of the federal government to help bring everyone to the table to discuss how to relieve the suffering of Klamath Basin area residents.

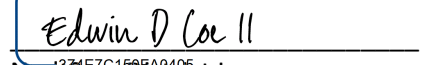
To this end we ask that the Bureau take steps now to begin the process of replenishing the dry wells across the Basin by diverting water to the canals at the earliest possible opportunity. This will begin to restore the aquifer that is the vital life blood of our constituents.

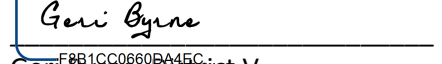
We look forward to receiving your prompt response and continued coordination with us.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Brandon A. Criss, District 1

Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors
DocuSigned by:

Michael N. Kobseff, District 3
Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors

DocuSigned by:

Ned Coe, District I
Modoc County Board of Supervisors

DocuSigned by:

Geri Byrne, District V
Modoc County Board of Supervisors

DocuSigned by:

Derrick DeGroot, Vice-Chair
Klamath County Commissioners

cc: Jeffrey Payne, Bureau of Reclamation
Lee Berget, Bureau of Reclamation