Fifty Years of Restoration within the Klamath River Basin: A Perspective

by Felice Pace[i]

Contrary to the almost constant propaganda Klamath River Basin residents are fed, most of the *restoration* humans have done over the past 50 years within the Basin has not actually restored much. While restoration projects have played a part in preventing the extirpation/extinction of Klamath River Basin salmon and steelhead, those who know the Klamath's history know that abundant salmon and steelhead fisheries, which should be the heritage of all children born and raised in Klamath Country, have not been restored.

Certainly there have been many efforts that have been called restoration. Some of those efforts have been extraordinary and some have had a long-term positive impact. For example, efforts by the Karuk Tribe to restore Coho Salmon in Beaver and Horse Creeks have been excellent. But most of what has been called restoration, including the fish hatcheries, have only mitigated to a limited degree the factors and impacts which, for far too long, have limited the natural abundance of Klamath fisheries.

Above all else, fish need water. Because adequate flows have not been restored, abundant runs of salmon and steelhead have also not been restored.

The recent removal of four of the five dams that blocked the Klamath is a good step toward restoration. But removal of the dams has had no impact on river flows. In the Upper Klamath, Shasta and Scott River basins large amounts of river flows are removed for irrigation. And on the Shasta, there is no effort to force removal of Dwinnell Dam and Reservoir which blocks access to the Best Spring Chinook habitat in the entire Basin, thereby preventing the recovery of Spring Chinook basin-wide.

Another good step has been adoption by the California Water Board of Department of Fish and Wildlife minimum fish survival flow recommendations for the Shasta and Scott Rivers and a commitment by the Water Board to perform the studies needed to determine the flows these two major tributaries must have in order to really restore our fisheries. Real restoration, which is restoration to abundance, is not possible if our rivers are only allowed bare minimum survival flows.

It is thus clear that more needs to be done if real restoration is the goal. Below is a list of the additional items and actions I think are a priority:

- A flow assessment for the mainstem Klamath River using existing information and the State of California's Environmental Flow Framework (link). It is a disgrace that sych an assessment has not been done and that Klamath Basin Tribes, river and fishing organizations interests have not

- Accelerating the time line for completing restoration flow assessments for the Shasta and Scott Rivers.

- Funding to reduce water demand by purchasing irrigation water rights from willing sellers basin-wide and dedication the water purchased to streamflow.

- Legislation, a new Klamath Act, to mandate and authorize funding for the items above and to reestablish a Klamath Federal Advisory Committee representing all interests and empowered to advise the feds and states on water management and restoration plans and funding. It is impossible to over-stress the positive role that the Klamath Task Force, established by the Klamath Act, played in bringing all interests and agencies together, face-to-face, in an ongoing process.

It is clear to me that our state and local agencies will not deliver the items listed above unless they are mandated by federal and state legislation to do it. Restoration groups too vulnerable and dependent on government funding will not do it. Our federal tribes, rendered dependent on the funding provided to them by the US Bureau of Reclamation, are unlikely to do what is needed. That was clearly demonstrated by the Karuk Tribe not too long ago when they settled for money instead of following though on litigation that would have removed Dwinnell Dam and Reservoir from the Shasta River.

Between 1980 and 2002, such a mandate was provided by the Klamath Act (link). It is time for a new Klamath Act, mandating a new federal-state-local Klamath Restoration Initiative, including reducing irrigation water demand basin-wide. Real restoration requires new leadership; leadership with the courage to do what needs to be done. Who will step up and get the job done?

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[i] *Felice has been involved in Klamath River and California Water Issues since 1980. He was prominent in the Ancient Forest struggles of the 80s and 90s. Felice worked on water policy for the North Coast Stream Flow Coalition. He represented the North Group Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club on water issues for many years. Felice coordinates the Grazing Reform Project. He holds a BA in Economics and a MA in Education. Felice resides at Klamath Glen near the mouth of the Klamath River in far Northwest California.*