Felice Pace
28 Maple Road Klamath, Ca 95548 707-954-6588 unofelice@gmail.com

September 18, 2015

To the Triplicate editor:

When news spread that the Yurok Tribe was withdrawing from the KBRA Water Deal, a wave of hope spread among residents of the Lower Klamath River. Our hope was that Yurok leaders had finally recognized that the Water Deals are not in the interest of the River, Klamath Salmon or tribal members who depend on Klamath Salmon.

The Yurok Tribal Government's "withdrawal" now seems to be little more than a negotiating ploy; leaders will travel to Oregon next week to resume negotiations in an attempt to "regain" the "bargained for benefits" those leaders thought they had secured when they signed the KBRA. It is unknown whether the leaders are simply looking for funding guarantees or if they will insist on the springtime flushing flows which scientists tell us are needed to ameliorate the fish disease epidemic that results in only 8% of the salmon fry migrating down the Klamath River making it to the ocean.

Whatever the fate of ongoing negotiations, one lesson is clear from what has transpired since the KBRA was signed: Real power to secure real benefits for the River, Klamath Salmon and tribal members depends on the water rights a tribe has asserted. The failure of the Yurok Tribe to assert its inherent reserved right to Klamath River flows was and remains a colossal mistake. Until Yurok Tribal leaders recognizes that mistake and take clear action to secure those inherent water rights, the Tribe will remain in a weak position to negotiate for the River, Klamath Salmon and the related interests of its members.

Securing the Yurok Tribe's reserved right to Klamath River restoration flows may take a generation. But that is a short time in the life of a River. Let's hope Yurok leaders take the long view.

Felice Pace
on the Yurok Reservation at Klamath Glen California