

Opening Statement – Ranking Member Bentz
“Klamath River Basin Conditions and Opportunities”
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
March 8, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for holding this hearing on Klamath River Basin Conditions and Opportunities. This is certainly a timely hearing following the roundtables that were held over the last couple of weeks. Any solution requires a definition of the problem. I think as we look at the Klamath, it is a long list of problems. I'll just mention a few, and I'm very happy my witness will go into more detail about the challenges facing the basin on the farming side of things.

First, when talking about the definition of the problem, the drought is of a proportion and duration that I don't think anyone was aware of, or feared, when many of the laws we're now dealing with were crafted. We're facing this drought across the Western US. There are some 70 million people suffering from drought. Last year was bad, and this year, sadly, will be worse. We have any number of laws, many of which are inadequate for the purposes they are now trying to serve. We've exhausted our groundwater resources, which were a fallback resource, to which we had access last year. Now, we know that hundreds of homes have lost their water and are consigned to a future of hauling in water in tanks.

There's also the unfortunate belief that the river somehow stands alone—that it is autonomous and doesn't need to be concerned about the communities alongside it, or the farmers and ranchers adjacent to it. The river is not a standalone thing. If it's going to be improved, it's going to need the resources of communities that can step in to help out. There's one other obvious problem. There is a sense of blame promoted by some people. They imply that due to climate change, this is somebody's fault, in that, the fish aren't doing well, and that that is the fault of farmers. That is not a positive approach to any of this.

Mr. Chair, I was happy to hear your remark on how it is time to work together. I couldn't agree more, but I just want to say the damage that will likely occur to the community of the Klamath Basin isn't just limited to Klamath Basin. I think the Klamath Basin is the tip of the spear of the whole Western United States. It is extraordinarily important that we get what we're doing here today right. By that, I mean: looking really carefully at how we're going to plan what we're going to do.

I'm looking forward to talking about the plan and, more to the point, where we're going to go with the plan, and what is that future vision. Not just for the river, but for the people, communities, forests, creatures, refuges, and two states. What is everyone trying to achieve? I know we're here today to talk about spending 162 million dollars. I strongly suggest we talk about having a plan so that the money isn't wasted, as may have been the case for the many other investments over the past twenty years.

Mr. Chair, my witness will call out in much more detail the incredible challenges facing the farming community. This is not to say that there aren't challenges facing the instream community. I'm sure your witnesses will call that out, but by the end of this meeting, I hope we can talk about how we are going to develop a plan and what the goals of this plan are.