



KLAMATH TRIBES OF OREGON PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - September 12, 2018

For more information contact:

Don Gentry, Klamath Tribal Chairman, (541) 892-1433, don.gentry@klamathtribes.com

Roberta Frost, Klamath Tribal Secretary, (541) 783-2219 ext. 170, roberta.frost@klamathtribes.com

CLEAN WATER PROGRESS MUST COME BEFORE ALLOCATION TALKS SAY KLAMATH TRIBES

Chiloquin, OR – The Klamath Tribes today announced that due to the dire status of endangered C’waam and Koptu fish in Upper Klamath Lake, there is currently no flexibility to even consider water allocation negotiations until significant progress is made on improving water quality. The lake this summer once again experienced toxic algae blooms that pose health hazards for the public and create harmful conditions for the fish.

“In what can only be described as a giant step backwards, the federal government recently pulled funding for critical water quality research that could help us understand how to make the lake safer for people, fish, birds and other wildlife,” said Klamath Tribal Chairman Don Gentry.

The Tribes point to a recent decision by U.S. Department of Interior Sec. Ryan Zinke’s to withhold from the Klamath Tribes almost \$500,000 in already allocated funding for water quality research in Upper Klamath Lake.

In a September 5th [letter](#) to Sec. Zinke Oregon’s U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden stated “Any progress on water challenges in the Klamath Basin, either in the short or long term, will be contingent on the willingness of stakeholders to trust one another. The decision to reprogram these funds at the eleventh hour has the appearance of an overtly political decision that will undermine efforts to reach a long-term solution in the Klamath Basin.”

Progress to reduce nutrients flowing into the lake has been hampered due to a lack of funding and staffing for enforcement and to support voluntary actions. At the same time The Klamath Tribes are encouraged with the growing partnership and increased commitments by state government and local landowners to address the problem. The Tribes have been working with Oregon Dept. of Agriculture, Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality and local landowners to reduce nutrients flowing into the lake.

“The Tribes believe that the declining health of the lake and surrounding ecosystem is a community issue, one that can be solved with local collaboration to the benefit of all,” said Gentry. “We stand ready for further collaboration with our Basin neighbors but do not see a way forward to even begin discussions with our tribal membership about water allocation agreements until we see measurable

progress towards clean water and harvestable levels of C̣waam and Koptu. There is a basic level of trust needed that is just not there right now as it was in the recent past when the Tribes and a broad range of Basin stakeholder supported the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA), which Congress failed to approve, and the Upper Klamath Basin Comprehensive Agreement (UKBCA).”

Once the most important food-fish in the Upper Klamath Lake region, C̣waam and Koptu were available by the thousands as a mainstay of the Klamath Tribes’ diet, and were also an important non-tribal recreation fishery. In 1986 the Tribes voluntarily suspended fishing, a treaty right, and harvest just two fish every year for ceremonial purposes. They were listed on the Endangered Species List by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1988.

The collapse of C̣waam and Koptu fisheries has marched virtually in lock-step with the declining health of Upper Klamath Lake, the largest body of freshwater west of the Rocky Mountains. Once a major destination for boating, birding, wildlife watching, paddling, and fishing, people now avoid the lake from late Spring into Fall in most years due to severe algae blooms that not only kill fish, but prompt Oregon officials to regularly post [health advisories](#) warning against contact with toxins in lake water.

For more information visit www.klamathtribes.org

###