Klamath Watershed Partnership

Mission: To conserve, enhance and restore the natural resources of the Klamath Basin, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the regional economy and local communities

Making Energy Work for Rural Oregon

October 14, 2016
Energy and Water Savings Program - Klamath Watershed Partnership

Since May of 2015, Klamath Watershed Partnership has teamed with Sustainable Northwest under a contract with Energy Trust of Oregon to provide energy savings outreach and technical assistance to agricultural producers in the Klamath Basin.
Agricultural water use in the Upper Klamath Basin is limited by allocations for tribal treaty rights, commercial fisheries, recreational interests, and Endangered Species Act protections for salmon and suckerfish.
The Klamath Project was authorized in 1905 and developed by the Bureau of Reclamation to supply farmers with irrigation water and farmland in the Upper Klamath Basin. Canals, reservoirs, and dams were constructed to support the 225,000 acre water management project. In the early days of the project, The California Oregon Power Company (COPCO), now PacifiCorp, entered into a 50 year contract for the operation of the Link River Dam. In addition to power generation, the 50 year contract provided Klamath Project water users with a reduced power rate. The contract was extended another 40 years, expiring in 2006. The expiration of the PacifiCorp FERC license and contract ended 90 years of reduced power rates for Klamath Project Irrigators.

Since 2006, power rates have increased annually. With these rate increases, the average water pumping cost on the Klamath Project in 2014 was $45 per acre compared to an average power cost of $2.25 per acre prior to the power contracts expiration. These power rate increases have placed a financial hardship on Klamath Basin irrigators and jeopardize the sustainability of Klamath Basin agriculture.
The Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) and the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement (KHSA) were presented in 2010 to address multiple water, power, and environmental issues in the Klamath Basin. Within the KBRA, the “Power for Water Management Program” identified several options to provide affordable power to agricultural water users - the KBRA and KHSA have not been approved by Congress.

In addition, power rate increases impact wildlife through reduced flows to the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. Flows are delivered by irrigation canals and farm runoff associated with the Klamath Project; reductions in water use by Klamath Project farmers can result in reduced water deliveries to the refuge, a critical stop for migrating waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway.
The initial goals of the Energy and Water Savings Program were to establish a strong understanding of the options available, then to develop the programs to support community needs. This included an understanding of energy efficiency grants, Energy Trust of Oregon rebates, and the time needed to build relationships with professionals working on energy issues in the Klamath Basin. With support from Sustainable Northwest, Wy’East RC&D, Energy Trust of Oregon and other professionals in the area who understood the regional energy and water connection, this program would put Klamath Watershed Partnership in a position to lead agricultural energy and water efficiency improvements.

Outreach

Technical Assistance

On-farm evaluations
Conveyance systems – water piping and energy efficiency

Sustainable and efficiency improvements – solar, greenhouse, VFD, micro-hydro
Through outreach programs, landowner meetings, field evaluations, and promotion of Energy Trust of Oregon rebates we have established new contacts and provided support for a variety of agricultural producers in the Klamath Basin. Starting in the summer of 2015, KWP pursued 4 separate grants related to regional energy conservation. 2 of those grants were awarded to the organization (NRCS RCPP, OWEB Langell Valley), making more options available to landowners for completion of large-scale energy savings projects. Other joint grant agreements were pursued and awarded which creates additional opportunities for improving regional energy efficiency options. The initial support of SNW to KWP has generated over $120,000 of additional investment toward the Energy and Water Savings Program goals for the Klamath Basin.
Energy and Water Savings Program – Community participation, local government, and next steps.