

Representative John T. Doolittle
Testimony before the
House Natural Resources Committee
July 31, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Mrs. McMorris-Rogers, thank you for the opportunity to present the committee with testimony on behalf of my constituents in the Klamath River Basin.

My greatest concern as I sit here today is that anything should interfere with the discussions by the 26 parties in the Klamath Basin Settlement Group who are mere months away from an historic agreement. Therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to highlight some of the progress that has been made since the water was shut off in April 2000, so that we may provide not concern, but, indeed, encouragement to those settlement parties as they approach the finish line.

Since 2002, the federal government has spent well over \$500 million dollars in the Klamath Watershed for habitat restoration, water quality improvement, and water conservation. Furthermore, as a result of the National Academy of Science's independently peer-reviewed report which told us that the operation of the Klamath Project was not the cause of the 2002 fish die-off, several initiatives are either underway or completed which, unlike shutting off the water, will benefit the wildlife, wetlands, and fish passage along the Klamath River. The initiatives include the completion of a fish screen at the main Project diversion, 370 partnership ecosystem restoration projects, and the removal of Chiloquin Dam to open up 95 percent of sucker fish habitat.

These conservation activities and the ongoing settlement negotiations are where Congress should be directing its resources. Instead, we are here today – in Washington as opposed to the Klamath River Basin itself – scavenging for evidence of wrongdoings regarding Klamath where none exists. An examination into wrongdoing was already conducted. In 2003, Senator John Kerry requested that the Department of Interior's Inspector General investigate whether White House political staff sought to influence the management of the water resources which led to the 2002 fish die-off. In his response, Inspector General Earl Devaney was explicit in answering "No. No White House political staff intervened." I wonder what about Mr. Devaney's findings this committee believes is inadequate in order to bring us here today to revisit that same question.

To be clear, we absolutely must ensure the science we base our decisions upon is accurate and sound; this is why we have Dr. Lewis' NAS report which followed the Fish and Wildlife Service's findings regarding the endangered species in the Klamath River Watershed. And if Congress should deem it necessary to investigate the integrity of those reviews on the basis of media reports, I could support that as well. But here we are, nearly four years after Senator Kerry asked the same question we are asking today, and we will soon be hearing the same answer Senator Kerry received, to wit; there was nothing improper behind the scientific findings at the Departments of Interior or Commerce.

So while I believe the issues facing the Klamath River Basin deserve the attention of this Congress, and while I would like to reiterate the request of Congressman Walden, Congressman Herger, and me in our June 29th letter inviting this committee to the basin, I would like to conclude my testimony by simply asking that this committee consider the fragile alliance of groups working toward a solution. With an agreement by all the relevant stakeholders just a few months away, and after all the conservation efforts and hundreds of millions of dollars spent by the federal government to improve the habitat conditions for the species in the watershed, I can only hope that this hearing may be conducted in that same constructive spirit, working toward achieving a permanent solution to the panoply of issues confronting stakeholders in the region.