

Committee on Resources

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Congressman Wally Herger

Opening Statement Klamath Basin Field Hearing

"The Endangered Species Act 30 years later: The Klamath Project"

July 17th, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take a moment to read a very brief letter from a young man named "Blake Bettendorf." He's from Tulelake.

4-12-01

Dear Congressman Herger,

I have farmed all my life. I want to do it more than 8 years. I love crops and fields. Please help us! People count on us. The stores do too. So they really need us.

2 grade, Your friend,

Blake

Blake was 8 years old when he wrote this letter to me in the wake of the tragic 2001 water shut off. He's probably 11 today.

.....

Mr. Chairman, Blake is the poster child for what is at stake here. This young man is the face of agriculture in the Klamath Basin. His future - and the future of every man and woman in this community - hangs in the balance. This is why we will continue to fight. I want Blake to grow up knowing he has a future in this community.

While farmers have received water each year since the shutoff, and while they were vindicated by the National Research Council's report, this community remains at risk. Therein lies our most important message: Nothing has changed. Water deliveries are tenuous . . . agriculture continues to face demands for water devoid of any scientific basis . . . lenders are skittish . . . families have left. These people are living day to day. They cannot continue like this. We need certainty.

We will hear today from respected scientists that this tragedy should never have happened. The NRC said, "there is insufficient scientific or technical justification" for high lake and reservoir levels. In other words, the "science" from 2001 is fundamentally wrong. Yet, it continues to drive decision making. That must end. The Biological Opinions must be changed to reflect the best science. And farmers need firm assurances that they will be involved.

The "water bank" must be done away with. It was supposed to be an interim solution as storage is developed and this best science incorporated. Instead, it has placed additional demands on farmers and instituted more land idling. Mr. Chairman, this "water bank" is harming agriculture.

We need to be vigorously pursuing water storage opportunities. Congress passed legislation in 2000 directing the Bureau to do just that. Here we are today, however, nearly four years later, and I have not heard word one to indicate positive movement forward. We need the Committee's help to get the Bureau "off the dime" and push these critical storage studies forward with the urgency they demand.

As we reflect back on and hear testimony today about the tragedy of 2001 and the lingering economic effects, let me repeat this critical message -- the reason why we're here: despite some positive developments, Nothing has changed. Much remains to be done.

We urgently need the committee's help, using the "fresh air" the NRC report provides, to take the positive steps that will create water supply certainty and restore a stable economic future for Blake and this community.

Thank you.