

# Trump administration withdraws support letter of Klamath Dam removal

Damon Arthur, Redding Record Searchlight | May 23, 2019



In this Aug. 21, 2009 file photo, water trickles over Copco No. 1 Dam on the Klamath River outside Hornbrook, California. The dam is one of four slated for removal under a Klamath River Renewal Corp. proposal. (Photo: Jeff Barnard/AP file photo)

The U.S. Department of the Interior has withdrawn its support for a proposal to remove four dams on the Klamath River near the California-Oregon border.

Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt wrote a letter last week to the secretary of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission asking her to rescind a previous Interior secretary's letter in support of the Klamath River project.

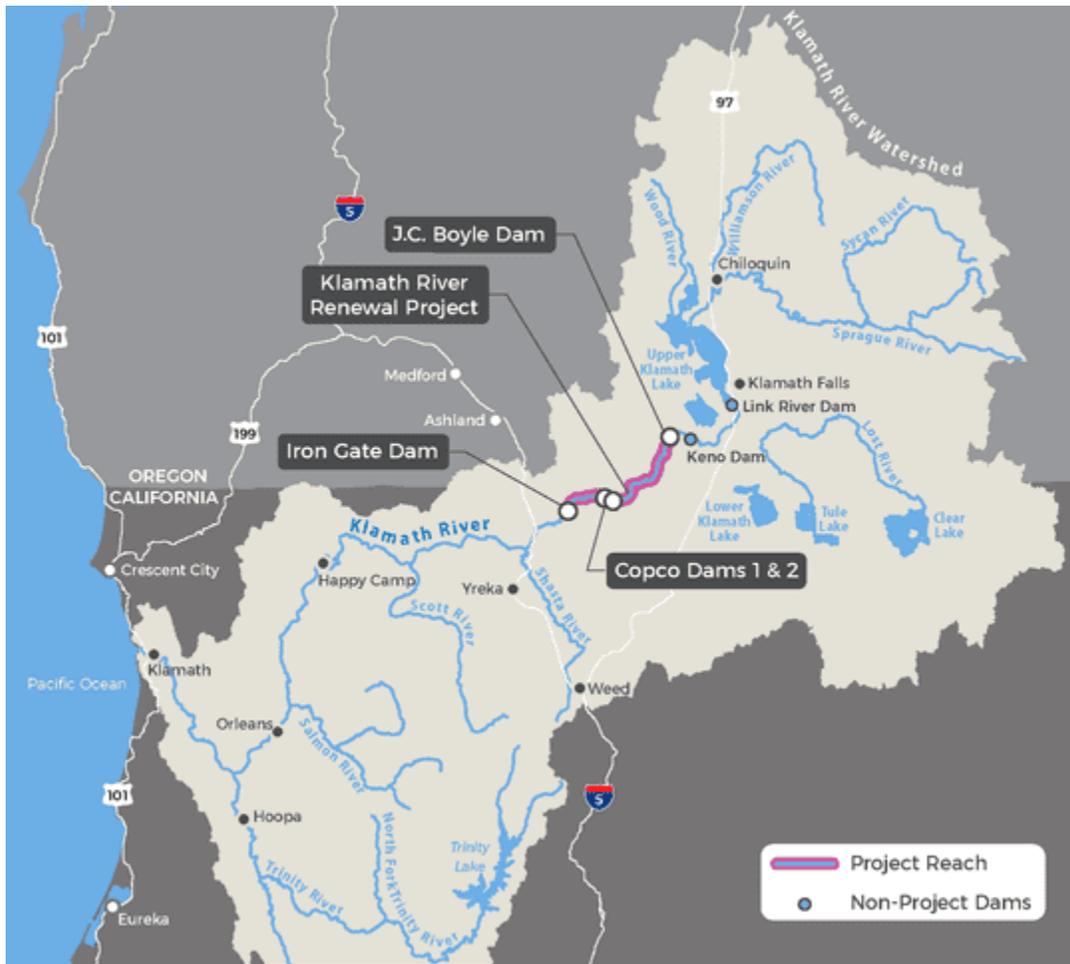
"Accordingly I hereby withdraw the 2016 letter as unnecessary to the current proceedings before FERC," Bernhardt wrote.

The letter will have "zero" effect on the proposal to remove the dams on the Klamath River, said Matt Cox, a spokesman for the Klamath River Renewal Corp., the agency overseeing the dam removal.

"We continue to move forward," Cox said.

The corporation has filed applications with the energy commission to "de-license" the dams so they can be removed, he said. He said the timeline for removing the dams is dependent on the commission's approval.

Under the proposal submitted to the commission, the corporation plans to remove four dams: J.C. Boyle, Copco No. 1, Copco No. 2 and Iron Gate. Three of the dams are in Siskiyou County and one, the J.C. Boyle Dam, is in southern Oregon.



**This map of the Klamath Basin shows the four dams that will be removed under the Klamath River Renewal Corp's. proposal. (Photo: Klamath River Renewal Corp.)**

FERC and a separate independent board of consultants still has [sic] to approve the plans.

Alan Mikkelsen, an Interior Department spokesman, issued a statement saying the agency is neutral on the dam removal.

"We have consistently emphasized that Interior has no position, nor any decision point in regards to dam removal," Mikkelsen said.

The corporation says removing the dams will improve water quality, revive fisheries in the river, create local jobs, [and] boost tourism and recreation. Project supporters say the dams have devastated the salmon that once thrived in the river.

But not everyone is a fan of removing the dams.

U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, said he was glad to see Bernhardt withdraw support for the project.

LaMalfa said in a news release he told Bernhardt before he was confirmed as secretary by the Senate that he wanted him to retract the Interior Department's support for the dam removal, which had been written during the Obama Administration.

"This course-reversal by Interior is a big victory for those fighting this misguided dam removal and a positive development for Northern California. We need to support new and existing water infrastructure projects, not tear them down," LaMalfa said.

He also noted that local officials, including those in Siskiyou County and Klamath County, in Oregon, have both opposed removing the dams.

Support for removing the dams came from former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, who wrote a letter in October 2016 to Kimberly D. Rose, secretary for the energy commission.

"This letter and enclosures are being filed in support of those applications, which I respectfully ask the commission to approve," Jewell wrote.

"The recommendation and determination I am making today are not entered into lightly. Rather, I do so in reliance on the most comprehensive and robust analysis of dam removal ever undertaken," she wrote.

The dam removal will cost just under \$400 million, according to the corporation's 2,300-page definite plan. The report is available online at [www.klamathrenewal.org/definite-plan/](http://www.klamathrenewal.org/definite-plan/)



**The Klamath River Renewal Corp. is seeking approval to remove four dams on the Klamath River in Siskiyou County, including Irongate Dam. (Photo: Damon Arthur/Record Searchlight)**

The plan outlines the process of drawing down the reservoirs, disassembling the dams and restoring and replanting with vegetation the former areas that were inundated by the dams.

However, Siskiyou County officials believe taking out the dams will harm the local economy and hurt the environment.

In a 2017 letter to the State Water Resources Control Board, Siskiyou supervisors said the effects of releasing 20 million to 30 million cubic yards of sediment from behind the dams has not been adequately evaluated.

"Other issues include the potential for catastrophic floods, either during dam removal activities, or thereafter; and property value loss in the areas around Iron Gate and Copco Dams, which Siskiyou County estimates would be several million dollars," the letter says.

PacifiCorp, which owns the dams, has signed off on the plan to remove the dams.