

Karuk Tribe of California

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Toxic Algae Returns to PacifiCorp's Klamath Reservoirs in Time for Summer Holidays
Warren Buffett's dams poison local communities result in public health warnings

Siskiyou Co., CA – Water samples from Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs contain extremely high levels of the toxic blue-green algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* for the third consecutive year since monitoring began in 2005. *Microcystis aeruginosa* produces the toxin microcystin which is known to cause liver failure and promote tumor growth. Microcystin exposure can lead to organ failure and death.

The reservoirs are located on the Klamath River near the Oregon border between Ashland, OR and Yreka, CA. The dams are owned by PacifiCorp, a subsidiary of Buffett's Mid American Energy Holdings Company.

“Although Siskiyou County officials have the responsibility to inform and protect the public from exposure, it's not their fault these blooms are occurring. Warren Buffett's dams are to blame,” according Leaf Hillman, Vice Chair of the Karuk Tribe.

Recently officials from the California Water Quality Control Board and the Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment formed a Blue Green Algae (BGA) Work Group. The BGA Work Group recently published a document to provide guidance to local health officials dealing with toxic algae blooms. Samples taken recently from Klamath reservoirs contained cell counts approximately 100 times greater than the threshold at which the BGA Work Group's document recommends posting alerts to the public. (see http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/bluegreenalgae/docs/bga_volguidance.pdf)

According to the BGA Work Group Document, when the probability of adverse health affects are high, typical actions by local authorities includes “immediate action to control contact with scums including prohibition of swimming and other water contact activities.”

The blooms occur in the summer as the shallow, nutrient rich water trapped behind the dams heats up and thus provides an optimal environment for the algae to bloom. For years, down river Tribes, fishermen, and conservation groups have called for the removal of the dams to restore runs of salmon that are in dramatic decline and alleviate the toxic blooms.

In May Klamath River Keeper and other affected community members filed a public nuisance claim against PacifiCorp over the role the dams play in creating algae blooms and creating conditions lethal to salmon. Said Hillman, “PacifiCorp is destroying the most vital natural resource river and coastline communities have while poisoning us at the same time.” Lawyers for the plaintiffs include Robert Kennedy, Jr. of the National Water Keeper Alliance and Joseph Cotchett. Tribal and state governments are not plaintiffs in the suit.

Last May, Hillman and other Tribal leaders joined with conservation groups and fishermen to take their grievances straight to Buffett at Warranpalooza, the annual shareholders' meeting of Buffett's investment firm Berkshire Hathaway. Buffett declined to address the groups' appeal to remove the Klamath dams.

"In the end, PacifiCorp's investors and ratepayers will hold its management accountable. Not only is removing these toxic waste factories the moral thing to do, it's the economically sound decision as well," stated Hillman.

Hillman refers to the economic analysis performed by the California Energy Commission which concludes that PacifiCorp would save over \$100 million by removing the dams instead of meeting the terms of a new operational license.

Currently over two dozen Klamath Basin stakeholders are seeking to negotiate an agreement that would remove the dams as well as address issues of in stream flows and power needs of farmers.

"Everyone in the Klamath Basin is working on solutions to these problems. Its time for PacifiCorp to get real about removing these dams and stop exploiting Klamath communities and their own ratepayers," concluded Hillman.

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Editors' notes:

Pictures of the sampling sites, a copy of lab results, and previous press releases are available online at <http://www.karuk.us/press/press.php>

Link to CA Energy Commission economic study: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/klamath/>

Link to California Coastal Commission sediment study that concludes that dams can be removed safely: http://www.klamathwaterquality.com/CCC_KHP_Dams_Out_9_22_06.pdf