

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

Karuk Tribe Department of Natural Resources

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KLAMATH RESERVOIRS PLAGUED BY TOXIC ALGAL BLOOM CAUSED BY DAMS

Public urged to avoid contact with reservoirs this Holiday weekend

Happy Camp, CA – In what has become an annual ritual, the Karuk Tribe and state water quality officials are posting the Klamath Reservoirs with recreational health advisories to avoid contact with the water due to blooms of the toxic algae *Microcystis aeruginosa*.

“We know folks want to get outside and get one more weekend of summer in but we strongly urge everyone to avoid Iron Gate and Copco Reservoirs – they are a public health danger,” said Susan Fricke, Water Quality Program Manager for the Karuk Tribe.

The lower four Klamath dams trap nutrients in warm shallow reservoirs creating an ideal breeding ground for Harmful Algal Blooms.

Microcystis aeruginosa secretes microcystin, a liver toxin and known tumor promoter. Exposure can cause eye irritation, skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea and cold or flu-like symptoms. Liver failure, nerve damage and death have occurred in rare situations where large amounts of cyanobacteria laden water were directly ingested. More information about human health impacts from Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) can be found [here](#).

In response to the recurring blooms, state agencies formed a Blue Green Algae (BGA) Work Group. The BGA Work Group recently published a [guidance document](#) for local health officials dealing with Harmful Algal Blooms.

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

Toxic algal blooms (also referred to as harmful algal blooms or HABs) occur in the summer through fall as the shallow, nutrient rich water trapped behind the dams heats up and thus provides an optimal environment for the Harmful Algal Bloom to develop. For years, down river Tribes, fishermen, and conservation groups have called for the removal of the dams. Removing the dams is key to restoring runs of salmon that are in dramatic decline and to reducing the frequency and intensity of toxic algal blooms on the river.

The blooms typically occur at the same time downstream tribes are holding annual World

Renewal Ceremonies and engaging in subsistence fishing. Currently Tribal fishermen are in the water for many hours a day to provide food for their family and communities and for use in traditional ceremonies. The ceremonies and subsistence fishing are location and timing specific based on centuries' old traditions. They cannot be moved to another place or season when the water quality is safe. With blooms upstream, this puts tribal communities at a risk of exposure to the microcystin toxin.

According to Karuk Department of Natural Resources Director Bill Tripp, "The only remedy to this problem is dam removal. It's one of the many reasons we need dam owner Warren Buffett to engage with us to keep the dam removal process on track."

The 2016 Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement calls for removal of the lower four Klamath Dams. Dam removal would dramatically improve water quality and ameliorate the toxic algal blooms. The dams slated for removal provide no irrigation or drinking water diversions; however, they greatly complicate efforts to balance water uses in the basin.

"Dam removal will rid the river of toxic algae and dramatically improve fisheries. Recovering salmon runs will make it much easier to resolve water allocation disputes with the farm community," asserts Tripp.

The [Klamath River Renewal Corporation](#) was formed by a coalition of Klamath basin stakeholders, including dam owner PacifiCorp, to remove the dams pursuant to the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement. Currently, the agreement is in limbo after a July order from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) directed PacifiCorp to remain involved with the dam removal process as opposed to a clean break from the Klamath as proposed. FERC argued that it was not in the public interest for the utility to contribute financially to the project and then be relieved from all responsibility for the dam removal process. In response, PacifiCorp initiated a termination clause in the dam removal agreement. Other groups that signed on to the agreement, including tribes, the States of California and Oregon, conservation groups and commercial fishermen, are actively working to engage PacifiCorp to understand the company's specific concerns so that they can be resolved and dam removal can proceed.

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Editors' notes:

See for more information on the toxic algae blooms see the California Water Quality Monitoring Council's [Harmful Algae Blooms web portal](#).

All advisories are published on the California Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Portal Report Map at: https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/where/freshwater_events.html

Also Klamath specific ones should be at <http://kbmp.net/maps-data/blue-green-algae-tracker>.

Download pictures [here](#) (credit Stormy Staats/Klamath Salmon Media Collaborative)

Download video [here](#) (credit Karuk Tribe)