

You are not Alone

S. Craig Tucker, Ph.D.
Klamath Campaign Coordinator
Karuk Tribe

Sometimes I wonder why it's so difficult. I mean, removing antiquated dams so salmon can spawn, using fire to manage the forest, and passing on the last few ancient trees to our children all sound like no-brainers to me. But it takes a monumental effort to make these obvious ideas a reality. If you are involved in these or any other restoration efforts, you already know that this kind of fight can wear you down quickly. So it's important to look around for inspiration and for a better understanding for how the fight in your own back yard fits into global efforts to protect the environment and live sustainably.

Our struggle to restore the Klamath River Basin is monumental, but there are many similar struggles around the globe. Not surprisingly, many of these struggles are led by indigenous people who are being disproportionately affected by decisions made by governments and/or corporations intent on privatizing the world's water and energy supply. In other words, the struggle to Bring the Salmon Home has sister struggles around the globe.

According to the World Commission on Dams, "large dams have forced some 40–80 million people from their homes in the past six decades. Indigenous, tribal, and peasant communities have been particularly hard hit. These legions of dam refugees have, in the great majority of cases, been economically, culturally and psychologically devastated."

Does this story sound familiar?

The Commission goes on to state that, "those displaced by reservoirs are only the most visible victims of large dams. Millions more have lost land and homes to the canals, irrigation schemes, roads, power lines and industrial developments that accompany dams. Many more have lost access to clean water, food sources and other natural resources in the dammed area. Millions have suffered from the diseases that dams and large irrigation projects bring."

Sounds very familiar.

Recently, two colleagues of mine, Ron Reed and Regina Chicazola, attended the Goldman Environmental Awards Dinner. Ron and Regina have both been engaged for years in various struggles to protect the Klamath Basin. They came home re-energized and inspired by the event. One of the award winners was Chinese activist Yu Xiaogang who spent years creating groundbreaking watershed management programs while researching and documenting the socioeconomic impact of dams on Chinese communities. His reports are considered a primary reason that the central government paid additional restitution to villagers displaced by existing dams and now considers social impact assessments for major dam developments.

“After Yu spoke I realized that’s the same struggle we have and his work is similar to what I’m trying to do!” Ron later explained.

I began paying more attention to what other river advocates around the globe were up to about four years ago when I became friends with a staffer at International Rivers Network (IRN). IRN sponsors the annual Day of Action Against Dams and for Rivers, Water and Life. I began using that day (March 14) as an excuse to organize a protest or rally highlighting a campaign I was working on (Auburn Dam in ’03, Trinity River ROD in ’04, Klamath Dams in ’05). This year over 96 events were held in 32 countries to protest destructive river development and celebrate healthy rivers and communities. Clearly we are not alone in our struggle.

Although it is startling how many struggles, many of them desperate, that people around the globe face to protect their water and fisheries, I take comfort in the fact. There are folks just like me, just like *us*, learning how to organize, lobby politicians, pitch stories to the media and stage direct actions to protect their resources. With the advent of the internet we are slowly starting to connect our personal struggle to world wide movements. The solidarity the world witnesses every time the World Trade Organization tries to meet is testament to that. These movements are starting to rack up political victories too. In South America, three nations have elected leftist leaders (two of which are Indigenous) to protect the public commons from American and European corporations. A similar movement is possible here too.

I guess my point is, don’t let yourself feel overwhelmed. Saving the world is a big job and no one can do it alone. But, it is your responsibility to find that one thing, that one campaign, that one task, that you can sink your teeth into and chew to bits. Rest assured that you have other like minded people working on a similar effort somewhere else in the world doing their part, chewing something to bits.