

# Drought conditions lead to reduced irrigation in basin

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Mount Shasta, Calif. - Severe drought conditions in the Klamath Basin have led Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazaar to announce last week that the Bureau of Reclamation will cut water deliveries to irrigators by 30-40 percent.

Under the provisions of the recent mandate, the Bureau must first ensure that the water levels in Upper Klamath Lake and the flows in the Klamath River meet minimal requirements to allow for the survival of sucker fish and coho salmon, which are both protected under the Endangered Species Act.

## **A call for the KBRA**

The situation has prompted numerous stakeholder groups, both irrigators and tribes alike, to note that under the recently signed Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, the situation would have been different.

"The KBRA and the KHSA would have given the farmers significantly more water," said Donna Boyd of California Trout, one of the stakeholder groups that recently signed on to these agreements.

Boyd said that the situation, while unfortunate, emphasizes the urgency of implementing the new management strategies. "Under the KBRA, water would have been held back (and saved for a later date)."

(Though both the KBRA and the KHSA have been signed by several stakeholders, including federal and state governments, as well as agriculture and tribal interests, the legislation has yet to be passed by Congress.)

"People are not outwardly angry, but there is a lot of anxiousness in the air and frustration," Greg Addington, Director of the Klamath Water Users Association, recently told the SF Chronicle.

## **'Real time' management**

According to Karuk Tribe spokesperson Craig Tucker, "The current management plan prescribes winter flows in the river without considering weather events in real time. In a dry winter like this one, the result is that flows are held steady even in the face of deteriorating hydrologic conditions. Under Real Time Management, flows would have been pared back to better reflect the weather conditions in real time. This approach would have allowed resource managers to provide more water to the river in the spring

when fish need it most, left more water in Upper Klamath Lake for suckers, and more management flexibility in meeting irrigation needs.”

“We basically ran up a water deficit this winter gambling that a late season storm would bail us out, but the rains never came. Implementation of the Klamath Restoration Agreement would provide a more sound approach to water management,” added Leaf Hillman, Director of the Karuk Natural Resources Department.

### **Federal relief available**

In an effort to provide economic relief, The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service announced that drought-impacted farmers in the Klamath Project will be eligible to apply for two million dollars of special drought-related funding under its Environmental Quality Incentives Program, one million which would go to Oregon farmers and one million for California farmers.

According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the water releases will begin once Upper Klamath lake reaches a level protective of endangered suckers and is expected to remain above that level for the remainder of the irrigation season. They expect that irrigation releases will be available sometime in May.

“The Department of the Interior still realizes that this year’s estimated limited water releases will be very difficult on farmers and ranchers in the basin. In light of this, we have been communicating with the USDA to identify those programs that can also provide additional relief. The Department understands that in a tight water year such as 2010 no one is kept whole,” said the Bureau of Reclamation Press release. “It is our desire, however, working with our federal partners, to provide as much relief as possible to those who are feeling the most impacts from this current drought.”

### **Protecting fish and flows**

For Klamath tribes, the need to address in-river flow issues in an effort to protect endangered fish populations is paramount.

“We have always been fishermen. The absence of these fish diminishes us as a people, and we will never stop working to bring them back” said Tribal Councilman Jeff Mitchell. “Our ancestors and the United States agreed that these fish would be protected forever through the Treaty of 1864, but things turned out differently, and so for many years we have searched for the best pathway to restore our fisheries.”

According to Mitchell, that pathway is the KBRA and its companion, the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement, which calls for the removal of four dams along the river.

“We’re all neighbors here, and in the recent past issues like this pushed us apart. This time around, we need to pull our communities together and find a way to survive

the present so that we can realize the better future that will be delivered by the settlement agreements,” said Mitchell.

Tribes are offering to support disaster relief measures to help farm families through the season. “Hopefully, we can get the Klamath Restoration Agreements enacted by congress this year and avoid a crisis like this in the future. Until then, Tribal and fishing communities will need to support our neighbors in farming and ranching as they brace for a year of economic hardship,” said Karuk representative Leaf Hillman.

### **Info updates**

Additional information regarding the forecasted release is available at the US Bureau of Reclamation website ([usbr.gov/mp/kbao/conditions.html](http://usbr.gov/mp/kbao/conditions.html)). The Bureau will continue to update the Klamath Project website ([usbr.gov/mp/kbao/](http://usbr.gov/mp/kbao/)) with the most current information regarding lake levels and estimated inflows.

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