

Water and drought

Prayer meeting a chance to reflect

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The son of an employee of Tulelake Irrigation District. A ranch hand. Irrigators from Tulelake, Merrill and Malin.

They were among about two dozen people congregated at Merrill City Hall Thursday to attend a prayer meeting organized by Calvary Fellowship Lower Klamath in response to the water shortage in the Klamath Basin.

Attendees voiced their feelings and fears throughout the meeting, from anger at government officials for allowing such hardship to impact the region, to anxiety of the prospect of watching their neighbors suffer.

But there also was hope and relief, and several of those who attended said the event helped them process their emotions and prepare to move forward in the coming months.

“Keep on being grateful for what we have,” said Bryce Rutledge, who has 80 acres off I.O.O.F. Cemetery Road below Stukel Mountain.

With Upper Klamath Lake at historic lows and precipitation and inflow to the lake below normal levels, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has said it would provide only 150,000 acre-feet of water from the lake to irrigators on the Klamath Reclamation Project. That amount of water would only be about a third of what is typically delivered to the Project annually.

Pastor Gordon Aguiar said his church organized the prayer meeting to give those impacted by the water shortage an opportunity to voice their feeling, and find comfort and solace from their neighbors.

“It’s a good time to reach out to others,” said Sid Staunton, a potato farmer from Tulelake.

Concerns

The meeting included Bible readings, hymn singing and prayer in small groups.

Along with talking about how they were connected to the water shortage, those attending brought up a number of concerns. Tom Silbernagel and his wife have acreage in the Shasta View Irrigation District. He said they will be fine because they have a well that can provide the water they need, but they’ll still have to watch their neighbors go without this year.

“I’ve told my wife that sometimes the well seems like a curse,” he said.

Those attending said the biggest benefit was to talk about what is on their minds and realize that they need to place some faith in God’s hands to work the situation out.

Side Bars

Drought initiative deadline extended

The deadline to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Klamath Drought Initiative has been extended.

The last day to sign up is April 23, and the last day to plant is April 30, said district conservationist Evelyn Conrad. Conrad urges any producer considering signing up for the program to do so now.

The program is built on the assumption there will be no irrigation deliveries this year, Conrad said, and should water become available that will support a higher value crop, producers will be allowed to plant it.

There are 57 applications covering about 5,700 acres pending in Klamath County, Conrad said.

The program provides approximately \$80 an acre to plant crops. There is \$1 million in funding for Oregon and \$1 million for California farmers.

For more information, contact the Klamath County U.S. Department of Agriculture service center at 541-883-6932 ext. 118, or Tulelake service center at 530-667-4247 ext. 109.

Update from lawmakers

Legislature update: Oregon's U.S. senators asked for a drought declaration for the Klamath Basin on March 26. Democrats Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley sent a request to the U.S. secretaries of interior and agriculture seeking the federal drought declaration.

The declaration would open up a variety of potential aid resources to the area, including some that wouldn't require irrigators to plant a crop and experience a loss to receive it.

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski issued a state drought declaration for Klamath and its neighboring counties after visiting Klamath Falls last month. The action provides some forms of aid and speeds up the process for emergency groundwater permitting.

No-till drills available to rent

The Klamath Soil and Water Conservation District has two no-till drills available for rent.

The equipment can be used on soil that has stubble from last year's crop and for cover crops.

The drill rents for \$12 an acre with a \$100 delivery charge and minimum overall fee of \$150.

For more information call 541-883-6932 ext. 117.

Snow's effect yet to be realized

Snowpack and precipitation levels got another boost from snow falling on Sunday, but any sign of imminent improvement to water levels in Upper Klamath Lake have not been seen yet.

The region's snowpack was 81 percent of average as of Monday according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That's a boost from 77 percent of average on Saturday and 69 percent of average a week before.

Total precipitation since Oct. 1 also was up slightly, from 74 percent of average on Saturday to 75 percent of average.

Kevin Moore, spokesman for U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's area office, said how those figures will impact water resources is unknown. Future weather will determine how much will be lost to groundwater and other factors.

And the lake isn't filling any faster. The Williamson River inflows are still down significantly, Moore said.

"This number will have to experience a large prolonged increase to overcome the current deficit in the lake level," Moore said. "All precipitation is helpful, but any possible benefits will not be evident until later in the year."

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