

# Klamath farmers will see fraction of water needs

By Jeff Bernard, [The Associated Press](#)

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An irrigation canal on the Klamath Reclamation Project near Klamath Falls waits for water this past March. According to the operations plan released Thursday by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, water deliveries will be slashed because of drought and considerations for protected fish.

GRANTS PASS -- An operations plan released Thursday for a drought-stressed federal irrigation project in the [upper Klamath Basin](#) offered no new hope for farmers struggling to find water for their crops.

The [U.S. Bureau of Reclamation](#) said farmers on the 200,000 acres irrigated by the Klamath Reclamation Project can expect 30 percent to 40 percent of normal deliveries this summer.

The deliveries would start by May 15 -- six weeks late.

The cutbacks were triggered by drought and [Endangered Species Act](#) requirements involving protected fish.

Federal grants are paying for extra well water and for farmers to leave land dry, but about a third of the project area is still looking for water or money. Many farmers have gone outside the project to rent land with wells.

Farmer Rob Unruh in Malin said the irrigation districts he relies on inside the project will be dry this year after officials agreed to land-idling payments, so he will use well water to irrigate his potatoes.

Klamath Project water that would be available will probably be too little and come too late to save his grain, he said.

"We probably won't take any project water this year," he said.

The Lower Klamath, Tule Lake and Clear Lake national wildlife refuges, which rely on water that has already been used by farmers, will have little water to flood marshes for up to 2 million migrating and nesting birds, manager Ron Cole said.

"Come fall, we will be at probably about 20 percent of what we want to have wet," he said from refuge headquarters outside Tulelake, Calif.

In 2001, farmers faced with irrigation cutbacks confronted federal agents, forced open irrigation headgates and rallied to change the Endangered Species Act. Now, people have been working in a spirit of cooperation.

That spirit came from a two-part agreement signed this year calling for removal of four dams on the Klamath River to help salmon and for steps to give farmers better assurances of water in dry years. The agreements have yet to be ratified or funded by Congress.

Merrill fertilizer dealer Bob Gasser, a leader of the 2001 protests, would not count out protests later this summer, when farmers see their alfalfa and pasture turning brown.

"Yes, there is a drought," he said. "Inflows (to reservoirs) are down. The main reason for this is the fact that we had a judge that said ship all the water down the river and we are the fall guys."

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