

Water may be released May 15

30 to 40 percent of average will come from Upper Klamath

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Water releases for irrigators on the Klamath Reclamation Project could start as soon as May 15, but will be far below what is needed.

Only 150,000 acre-feet of water, or about 30 to 40 percent of typical releases, will come from Upper Klamath Lake, according to a press release from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The other two reservoirs that supply water to the project also will have minimized flows, with no water coming out of Clear Lake Reservoir.

“The whole west side of Langell Valley is at risk,” said Don Russell, manager of Horsefly Irrigation District.

Upper Klamath Lake is at low water levels, and precipitation and inflows into the lake have been below average.

The bureau announced similar projections for the irrigation season earlier this spring, saying water supplies would be limited because the bureau needed to maintain specific lake levels for suckers required by the Endangered Species Act. Lake levels also must be maintained at Clear Lake.

“Reclamation will work with the irrigation districts to monitor and continually evaluate lake elevations and provide periodic operations updates to the (U.S. Fish & Wildlife) Service, the (Klamath) Tribes and the state of Oregon,” said Sue Fry, Reclamation’s project area manager for the Klamath Basin, in an e-mail.

Dave Solem, manager for the Klamath Irrigation District, said he’d hoped water could have started going into the Project’s canals today to prepare for water deliveries next week, but the earliest that can happen now is early next week.

Upper Klamath Lake’s elevation is still below the minimum it needs to be for water to be released, and recent cold days have slowed the inflows into the lake, he said. The district also is developing its plan on how and where water will go in the district once it is in the canals.

“Internally, we have a pretty good idea of how it’s going to work, but we’re still working on it,” he said.

Horsefly draws the bulk of its water from Clear Lake and Gerber Reservoir, with some also coming from Big Springs near Bonanza. Without Clear Lake, the district will be short 4,200 acre-feet. It’s unclear how much will come from Gerber, which is expected to provide 85 percent of its normal releases.

Russell said that with the water he expects Horsefly Irrigation District to receive, only about 4,000 acres of the 10,000 in the district will receive enough water to properly irrigate. The district usually needs about 25,000 to 28,000 acre-feet of water per season, or about 2 to 2 ½ acre feet of water per acre.

“It’s hard to do anything with less than 2 acre-feet,” he said.

Frank Hammerich, manager for the Langell Valley Irrigation District, said he had requested the bureau release about 500 to 600 acre-feet of water from Clear Lake to provide water for the district's livestock, but the request was denied.

"They're going to let 39,200 acre-feet evaporate, but they won't give us 500 or 600 acre-feet," he said.

Without water from Clear Lake, Hammerich said about 7,300 acres of the district on the west side of Langell Valley will go dry, as it has been since water was shut off July 7 last year. The other 9,400 acres of the district could be kept whole with water from Gerber Reservoir and groundwater wells.

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