

Some irrigators offer to stay dry



Jill Aho Javier Chavez, Tulelake ranch manager for Sierra Cascade Nursery, overlooks a sandy field the nursery volunteered to idle this year. A grain cover crop that the nursery would have harvested will be left unirrigated.

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Sierra Cascade Nursery wants to be a good neighbor. The nursery won't be irrigating more than 500 acres of land this year, and expects nothing in return.

Sierra Cascade Nursery was among a few irrigators who offered to idle land through the Klamath Water and Power Agency Water User Mitigation Program without payment. Tulelake Ranch Manager Javier Chavez said the nursery will use well water to irrigate its main crop, strawberry root stock and forego watering grain cover crops in its other fields.

"There're a lot of farmers that are neighbors in our neck of the woods that might quite possibly not have any water going on their land," Chavez said. "It sounds a little strange for a business to forego growing a crop when we do have the water, but we always want to have good neighbors and keep a good political atmosphere around us."

Demand to be high

With predicted water deliveries from Upper Klamath Lake at 150,000 acre-feet and approximately 136,000 acre-feet of groundwater pumping contracted, demand for water is predicted to exceed available water by as much as 140,000 acre-feet, said KWAPA Executive Director Hollie Cannon.

KWAPA is predicting between 50,000 and 70,000 acres of land in the Klamath Reclamation Project will need to be idled this year.

After distributing nearly all funding for the groundwater and land idling programs, KWAPA has identified about one-third of the land that will need to be left un-irrigated this year, Cannon said.

Cannon said he estimated each acre of land would require two acre-feet of water.

"That varies by crop and soil type," he said.

KWAPA plans to offer contracts for 18,000 acres of land accepted to the land idling program. Landowners were asked to submit proposals that included how much they would need to be paid to keep the land idle through the irrigation season.

"The land was selected based on the cheapest first," Cannon said. "We had bids from \$0, donations basically, to outrageous price-per-acre bids."

The Shasta View and Malin Irrigation districts are both included in the idling program in their entirety. The districts, which agreed to idle 4,636 acres and 3,443 acres, respectively, bid \$220 per acre. The two districts are close to the end of the irrigation canal system, Cannon said.

"This is a very desirable area to idle," Cannon said. "It's in very sandy soil with high water consumption. It's also near the end of a canal where it's tough to keep flows to them. It's also an allotment of water we absolutely know is going to be saved."

The districts have records of the water usage within their boundaries, Cannon said, providing KWAPA with a clear picture of water savings.

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