

Governor: 'It affects the fabric of the community'

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June 11, 2010



H&N photo by Andrew Mariman Gov. Ted Kulongoski meets with Dave Cacka, general manager of Malin Potato Cooperative, where workers were packing potatoes from last year's harvest.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski says he is working with the Oregon National Guard to have water provided to Malin-area residents whose domestic wells may be impacted by drought this summer.

The governor was in the Basin Thursday to see how a water shortage is impacting agriculture and the region's communities.

Recent wet weather has kept the region's hills green and helped farmers and ranchers to an extent.



But, Kulongoski said, it's early in the season and challenges are ahead.

"If it comes down to it, the National Guard can bring over water buffaloes for domestic water use," he said, referring to water storage tanks utilized by the military.

The Basin is facing its worst drought in years. Upper Klamath Lake is at historic lows, and precipitation and inflow to the lake are 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 is about a third of what typically is delivered to the Project annually. As a result, some irrigation districts are without any surface water resources.

Declines in aquifer

Phil Ward, director of the Oregon Water Resources Department, said the region's aquifer already is showing declines as irrigators use it more heavily this year.

Greg Addington, executive director of Klamath Water Users Association, said some domestic wells near Malin are experiencing problems as the groundwater level drops.

"I'm having to lower mine 40 feet," said Klamath County Commissioner John Elliott, who lives near the southern Klamath County community.

A similar situation occurred in 2001 when there was heavy groundwater use after water from the lake was cut off to irrigators, he said. That year, there was no support from the state to residents who had wells go dry.

Addington said his organization is looking for ways to help those impacted by groundwater use, including funding for deepening wells. Deeper wells would make groundwater more available, while lessening impact from heavy groundwater use around the region.

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