

Irrigators could get more water from lake

Upper Klamath Lake has more water than projected at this time

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Klamath Reclamation Project irrigators could receive an additional 35,000 acre-feet of water from Upper Klamath Lake.

Because of low lake levels, project irrigators were expected to receive as much as 150,000 acre-feet of water, about 30 to 40 percent of what was made available in previous years.

But the lake's water level is higher than projected for this time of year, officials said Friday. The unexpected higher level is due to cool spring temperatures and reduced irrigation throughout the Klamath Basin.

"This additional water is good news," said Ken Salazar, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, in a press release. "But the Department of the Interior will intensify our efforts on behalf of all stakeholders because the Klamath Project is still receiving less than 50 percent of its historical average."

Low lake levels this spring combined with below average precipitation and inflows led the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to limit how much water would be available for irrigation on the Project.

As of July 1, the lake had a surface water elevation of 4,141.37 feet above sea level. The target elevation for the end of June is 4,140.60 feet.

Only three irrigation districts —Klamath, Tulelake and Van Brimmer Ditch Co. — are receiving irrigation water from the lake. Other districts are using groundwater and idling land.

Dave Solem, manager of Klamath Irrigation District, said the district was notified Friday of the possibility of additional irrigation water. The district's directors will meet next week to discuss the impact.

Solem said several factors would be considered, including the impact of groundwater pumping.

"It can make a difference, there's no questions about that," he said.

Belinda Stewart, outreach and program director for Klamath Water Users Association, said the news is welcome, but some irrigators will still go without.

"This additional 35,000 acre-feet will help but it won't meet all the demand," she said.

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