

### Contact Information

Brian Gailey, *Director of Marketing & Public Affairs*,  
541-883-6100 Office • 541-810-3133 Cell • [brian@kwua.org](mailto:brian@kwua.org)

Moss Driscoll, *Director of Water Policy*  
541-883-6100 Office • 541-891-8836 Cell • [moss@kwua.org](mailto:moss@kwua.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Klamath Project Districts Preparing for Water, Will Help with Dam Removal

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. – With Upper Klamath Lake quickly approaching full pool, there are growing concerns about the potential for flood releases at Link River Dam in the coming weeks. Klamath Project irrigation districts are preparing their systems to move water, which will help mitigate complications downriver with unsafe dam removal worksites.

This water movement includes filling portions of Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges - placing water on wetlands and landscapes that have been void of water for several years.

A decision to begin moving water is anticipated next week after district managers meet with representatives from tribal governments and federal agencies.

Last fall, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) required districts to leave extra water in Upper Klamath Lake. Throughout winter, Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA) and its members have been identifying the potential for a full pool situation, and opportunities that would exist if that were to occur.

For several weeks, KWUA and its member districts have been concerned with the management of water levels in Upper Klamath Lake, given this year's unique operational considerations.

In response to overall concerns, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service arranged a meeting this past week to discuss the issue among stakeholders. While no decision was reached regarding water movement, the group agreed to meet again next week with representatives from the Yurok and Karuk Tribes.

During the meeting, irrigation representatives learned that a 45-foot section of a vent pipe in the low-level outlet tunnel at Iron Gate Dam failed in January. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) did not receive notice of this incident until February 26 and reported it publicly on March 11.

During this same period, Reclamation has organized releases from Upper Klamath Lake to address the unanticipated flow capacity constraints encountered by the low-level outlet tunnel at Iron Gate Dam.

“We continue to urge the Bureau of Reclamation to take caution and be forward-looking with water levels in Upper Klamath Lake given dam removal,” stated Brad Kirby, manager of Tulelake Irrigation District. “Similarly, given what we have observed in the media, our concerns about fish health, and sediment in the river, we urge Reclamation to work closely with tribal governments to manage flows given river stakeholder concerns.”

District Managers currently anticipate an on-time start to the irrigation season. However, given the various complicating factors, it is still too early to know how much of the overall water supply will be available to the Klamath Project.

Despite good water flows today with the potential of flood issues soon, early projections for the summer are for below-average inflows to Upper Klamath Lake. This would limit, if not eliminate, the amount of water refuges could receive during the hottest parts of the year.

Flooding portions of the refuges now when water is in surplus will help with the deconstruction of dams downriver, assist migratory wildlife today, and help prevent the grasshopper infestation from repeating as it did in the summer of 2023. Given these unanticipated, out-of-priority deliveries, KWUA and the districts will explore water-sharing arrangements with the refuges this summer.

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#### **About Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA)**

Since 1953, the KWUA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation representing the interests of Klamath Project farmers and ranchers. KWUA members include rural and suburban irrigation districts, public agencies, and private individuals who operate on both sides of the California/Oregon border. These entities and individuals typically hold water delivery contracts with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The Project is home to over 1,200 family farms and ranches; KWUA's member districts deliver irrigation water to over 170,000 acres of some of the most incredibly productive farmland in the Western United States.

KWUA's mission is to preserve and enhance the viability of irrigated agriculture for our membership in the Klamath Basin for the benefit of current and future generations.

KWUA is governed by an eleven-member Board of Directors representing Project districts. The Association employs an Executive Director and staff to execute policy decisions.