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KWUA Expresses “Deep Disappointment” with 2024 Ag Water Announcement for the Klamath Project

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. - Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA) expressed deep disappointment with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's announcement of an agricultural water supply of 230,000 acre-feet this year. This amount, characterized as an “initial allocation,” is 35 percent less than the estimated need.

“Because of the way the internal distribution of water works, we are looking at family farms that will go without water for the fifth straight year,” said KWUA Executive Director Paul Simmons.

“Overall, water conditions in the Klamath Basin are favorable,” said Moss Driscoll, Director of Water Policy for KWUA. “It’s even better than last year, when the allocation was higher.”

“This winter, we have watched water be released to flush sediment in the Klamath River to mitigate impacts of dam removal. We have bent over backward to put water on our national wildlife refuges. Within a few weeks, Upper Klamath Lake will be completely full for the first time in seven years, and the snowpack is in good shape for this time of year. Yet we are looking at the fifth-worst allocation in the 120 years since the Klamath Project was authorized,” said Simmons.

Reclamation’s announcement leaves open the possibility to announce increases in the allocation at a later date.

“I can’t plan or finance a crop based on water that I don’t know about today,” said Rob Unruh, KWUA board member and third-generation family farmer in Shasta View Irrigation District. “I thought this would surely be the year when we did not have to watch fields dry up and blow away, but I guess not.”

The calculation of the initial allocation is based on an interim plan from 2020 that has not been followed in any year. “Water managers need to look out the window, not at old spreadsheets,” stated Simmons.

Reclamation also announced funding of \$8.5 million for the Klamath Project Drought Response Agency (DRA) in their letter. With the reduced agricultural allocation, more farms will need this program. With the additional demand, KWUA estimates at least a \$5.5 million dollar shortfall in

the program. “With this kind of allocation, we will need all that funding and more,” said DRA Board Member Unruh.

In past years, the DRA has signed contracts with producers who agree not to irrigate in exchange for compensation. This program frees up water for additional uses.

Reclamation also announced allocations of 35,000 acre-feet each from Clear Lake and Gerber Reservoir, which serve water from the Lost River system to two districts on the east side of the Klamath Project. That supply will not result in a significant shortage for those districts.

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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.