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PRESS RELEASE

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2026 IRRIGATION SUPPLY WILL BE WOEFULLY SHORT OF NEED

Irrigation water supply for the Klamath Project (Project) this year will be woefully short of the needs of family farms and ranches, according to Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA).

Today, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) announced an initial supply figure of 221,000 acre-feet from Upper Klamath Lake. This is just over half of what is needed.

“It’s much less than what we want to hear, although realistically not less than what we expected at this time,” said KWUA Executive Director Elizabeth Nielsen. “The entire west is in a drought, with negligible snowpack remaining in the Klamath Basin. On top of that, we have an unworkable set of regulatory requirements that can’t be changed in time for this season.”

In an April 1, 2026 letter, KWUA and irrigation districts jointly informed Project water users of the likely shortfall, stating: “This will be yet another year when you, your family, and other farmers and ranchers will be required to make tough decisions to ensure the survival, rather than the prosperity, of generational family operations.”

KWUA Board President Scott Seus, who farms in the Tulelake area, stated that “we know too well how water shortage damages our farming operations, our neighbors in the regional economy, and the wildlife that shares our landscape.” He added, “at the same time, we can point to some things that can help and that give me hope.”

For example, Reclamation may have flexibility that will allow an increased amount of water to be announced later. “That would not solve all the problems, but could be a real help to some operations,” according to Mr. Seus.

The Klamath Project Drought Response Agency (DRA), a local agency comprised of irrigation districts, will operate programs “to stretch the limited supply” by offering growers an alternative to idle land for the entire season rather than conduct otherwise limited irrigation, explained Marc Staunton, DRA President and Project farmer. It is anticipated that Project irrigators will need to idle in excess of 40,000 acres during 2026. “We are very grateful to our Congressional delegation and Reclamation; thanks to their efforts, the DRA will have a robust program to help the entire basin through this drought,” added Mr. Staunton.

KWUA also characterized 2026 as a “bridge year,” noting that Reclamation has begun an Endangered Species Act (ESA) re-consultation process that will lead to a different regulatory

framework in future years.

“Right now, our drought problem is made worse by an ESA regulatory framework that was hurriedly adopted at the end of 2024,” said Mr. Seus. “The Administration has rightly recognized that framework is out of touch with the approach used elsewhere and needs to be corrected.”

Reclamation plans to complete the re-consultation process before the 2027 irrigation season.

Mrs. Nielsen added that while KWUA wishes that a revised framework was in place now, “it is important that the work be deliberate, durable, and defensible. We believe the federal agencies are doing the right thing, and they are doing it the right way.”

KWUA’s priority actions in the upcoming months will include sharing information and coordinating with local, state, and federal parties to get through the 2026 season, along with encouragement and cooperation to promote the prompt completion of the ESA re-consultation.

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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 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 its policies and priorities.