

Karuk Tribe

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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WATER SHUT-OFF HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR KLAMATH AGREEMENTS *Fish and Farms would be better off today if the Klamath Restoration Agreements where already in place*

Orleans, CA – Today Secretary of Interior Salazaar addressed the current drought situation in the Klamath Basin by breaking the hard news to irrigators that water deliveries will be reduced to 30-40% of average. Before agricultural deliveries can be made, the Bureau of Reclamation must first ensure that the water level in Upper Klamath Lake and the flows in the Klamath River meet minimal requirements to allow for the survival of ESA listed suckers and coho salmon.

“It’s a difficult year for everyone. Even though irrigation deliveries are being dramatically cut, the water fish are getting only meets the minimal amount needed to avoid extinction. It’s barely enough water to keep the fishery on life support,” according to Leaf Hillman, Director of Karuk Natural Resources Department.

The current situation is due in large part to a lack of precipitation, but if fisheries managers had the flexibility to manage the system in the manner prescribed by the recently signed Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, more water would be available for fish in the crucial spring months ahead and more water would be available for agriculture as well.

The current management plan prescribes winter flows in the river without considering weather events in real time. In a dry winter like this one, the result is that flows are held steady even in the face of deteriorating hydrologic conditions. Under Real Time Management, flows would have been pared back to better reflect the weather conditions in real time. This approach would have allowed resource managers to provide more water to the river in the spring when fish need it most, left more water in Upper Klamath Lake for suckers, and more management flexibility in meeting irrigation needs.

According to Hillman, “We basically ran up a water deficit this winter gambling that a late season storm would bail us out, but the rains never came. Implementation of the Klamath Restoration Agreement would provide a more sound approach to water management.”

In addition, the Real Time Management Plan called for by the KBRA would restore some of the Klamath's natural hydrograph. This means river flows would be greater during storm events and less during dry periods. Current management calls for flat line flows out of Iron Gate Dam which is bad for fish. "Flat line flows contribute to the algae and fish disease problems on the Klamath by creating a stable environment for algae and disease carrying parasites to flourish. If we mimicked the river's natural flow pattern with normal flow variability, it would help these problems greatly," according to Karuk Senior Fisheries Biologist Toz Soto.

Tribes are offering to support disaster relief measures to help farm families through the season. "Hopefully, we can get the Klamath Restoration Agreements enacted by congress this year and avoid a crisis like this in the future. Until then, Tribal and fishing communities will need to support our neighbors in farming and ranching as they brace for a year of economic hardship," said Hillman.

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Editor's note: for more information including previous press releases, a technical memo describing how KBRA management would have helped address this year's drought, and much more, go to www.klamathrestoration.org