



Phone (541) 883-6100 ~ Fax (541) 883-8893 ~ 735 Commercial Street, Suite 3000 Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601

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Contact Information:

Paul Simmons
(541)883-6100

Lawsuits Will Challenge New Water Plan

Irrigation water users in the Klamath Project will challenge the new federal rules restricting irrigation water supply for the Project. The plan, adopted by federal agencies on April 2, will be in effect for five years, and includes new rules and limitations based on the Endangered Species Act.

“We’re disappointed this is necessary, but it’s just not enough water. We will lose rural communities,” said Klamath Water Users Association President Tricia Hill. “Even with this nice, wet winter it is doubtful we will have enough in 2019.”

Klamath Irrigation District has filed its lawsuit in federal district court in Oregon, and another will be filed jointly by Klamath Water Users Association, Klamath Drainage District, Shasta View Irrigation District, Tulelake Irrigation District, and individual farmers Rob Unruh and Ben DuVal. “The agencies have worked hard to get this done early, which is a benefit,” said DuVal. But a downside of that is that some things got overlooked. We intend to deal with the agencies and other parties constructively, but we have to protect our communities.”

The new limitations are based on protection for endangered suckers in Upper Klamath Lake and coho salmon in the Klamath River. “There has been a long history of this kind of approach, focusing on the Klamath Project because it is easy to regulate, and it’s not helping the species,” said KWUA Deputy General Mark Johnson. “That makes it even harder to see this.”

KWUA is a non-profit private corporation that has represented Klamath Reclamation Project farmers and ranchers in its current form since 1953. The Association’s membership includes rural and suburban irrigation districts, other public and private entities and individuals who operate on both sides of the California-Oregon border. These entities and individuals typically hold water delivery contracts with the United States Bureau of Reclamation. The Klamath Project is home to over 1200 family farms and ranches and encompasses over 170,000 acres.

KWUA is governed by an 11-member board of directors who are appointed from Klamath Project member districts.

All of the involved districts are KWUA board members, and are coordinating closely for the two cases.

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