

# Willamette Valley bracing for drought after record dry April

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

ST. PAUL, Ore. — A record dry April is accelerating drought conditions and hampering water storage throughout much of the typically rain soaked Willamette Valley.

Nearly all of Western Oregon received just 25% or less of normal precipitation last month, according to the West Wide Drought Tracker, making it the driest April on record in large portions of the region stretching from Portland to Eugene.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, meanwhile, is struggling to refill 13 Willamette Basin reservoirs in time for peak summer demand. As of May 4, the combined system was 64% full, setting the stage for a difficult water year.

“We collaborate with a lot of agencies, partners and stakeholders to try and balance all of the competing demands and comply with the law,” said Erik Petersen, project operations manager. “As we head into more marginal water years, it becomes increasingly difficult to satisfy everyone’s interests.”

The Willamette Valley Project, in particular, is designed to



**Brenda Frketich**

summer.

“If we don’t get precipitation that comes in the form of rain in February, March and April, we’re going to have a tough conservation season,” Petersen said.

Petersen said the Corps struck a deal with the National Marine Fisheries Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to hold back more water this spring, dropping below minimum required streamflows in the Willamette River near Albany and Salem to provide more water later in the summer when it’s needed.

Despite the looming deficits, irrigators anticipate they will still receive their full water allotments for the year.

Brent Stevenson, general manager of the Santiam Water Control District in Stayton, Ore., said that while officials are watching water

hold back water for flood control during the rainy spring and winter months. The water is then released downstream to augment flows for fish, wildlife and agriculture in the



Getty Images

**Nearly all of Western Oregon received just 25% or less of normal precipitation last month, according to the West Wide Drought Tracker, making it the driest April on record.**

levels in Detroit Lake, he does not expect much of an impact.

“The drought will change flows into Detroit, but typically unless it’s really severe, it doesn’t affect discharges,” Stevenson said. “We are at this point expecting normal deliveries.”

In addition to providing water for the city of Stayton, the district delivers irrigation water from the North Santiam River for about 17,000 acres of farmland.

The U.S. Drought Monitor now

shows most of the Willamette Valley in moderate to severe drought, which is affecting agriculture in other ways.

Tim Winn, who grows about 1,000 acres of grass seed and vegetable seed crops in rural Benton County, said that without rainfall to build up soil moisture he was forced to begin irrigating weeks ahead of schedule.

“We got started just in the nick of time before conditions became too stressful on the crop,” said

Winn, who is water committee chairman for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Last month, Winn said, he planted about 150 acres of vegetable seed crops in areas where he does not have access to irrigation. For those dryland fields, he said the plants barely have enough water to emerge from the ground.

“Wherever dryland farming takes place, it’s all a matter of timing and luck when it comes to how each year pans out with regards to enough soil moisture,” Winn said.

Brenda Frketich, who grows grass seed, vegetable seed and hazelnuts on her family’s farm near St. Paul, Ore., said she also relies on April showers that typically provide a much-needed shot of ground moisture.

“For us this year, everything we can irrigate, we are irrigating,” she said. “It’s definitely on the earlier side, compared to years past.”

It is still too early to say if grass seed yields or quality will be reduced, Frketich said. But she would certainly welcome any rain to help the grass seed crop.

“We’re definitely behind compared to a normal year,” Frketich said.

# Wildfire season will arrive early in much of West

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

Wildfire forecasters say early summer-like conditions in much of the West will likely set the stage for a busy peak season.



**Nick Nauslar**

“We have had a pretty dry spring in the Pacific Northwest, especially on the east side, so drought has increased across a good portion of the region,” National Interagency Fire Center meteorologist Nick Nauslar said in an interview. “With that, fuels are drying, and at times we’ve seen fuel conditions more indicative of what you would see in June or July in the last few weeks.”

Drying fuels and expected above-normal temperatures mean central and eastern parts of the Northwest should see a fairly active summer fire season that starts early, he said.

NIFC in its National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for May through August said climate forecasts indicate conditions that are warmer and drier than normal are likely for much of the Plains and the West into summer.

“Drought is expected to persist if not worsen and



David Halterman/USFS

**Wildfire season will arrive early this year, forecasters predict.**

expand across the West and in the northern and southern Plains into summer,” the report said.

The risk of significant fires — those burning more acres than the median number — is above normal in several Western regions.

In much of the Northwest, fuel moisture dropped to unusually low levels but early snowmelt increased access for prescribed burning.

NIFC said significant fire potential is expected to increase to above average in June across central Oregon and into south-east Washington, and continue through August. Above-normal potential for significant fires is expected by August in southwest Oregon.

North-central Idaho and northwest Montana have adequate precipitation thanks to frequent, timely storms and cool weather that helped the area pre-

serve snowpack at middle elevations, the report said.

Northern California and Hawaii have above-normal potential for significant fires from June through August in most mid- and upper-elevation areas, NIFC said.

The fire potential is above normal in southern California in July and August, away from the deserts and the San Joaquin Valley.

In the northern Great Basin, NIFC expects above-normal fire potential to increase by July and August in parts of Idaho and Wyoming.

Despite cold fronts and some precipitation in April, severe to extreme drought continues over much of Nevada and parts of central Idaho, where winter precipitation was lower. Drought likely will persist through spring, with warm and dry weather to return to much of the Great Basin in May.

# KWUA motions to reopen lawsuit, resolve questions around Klamath operations

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — As the Klamath Basin braces for a historically dry year, the region’s water wars have once again spilled into court.

The Klamath Water Users Association filed a motion April 19 to reopen a lawsuit against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, seeking clarity on legal issues that may determine future irrigation water availability in the Klamath Project.

Last month, the bureau announced its lowest water allocation for Klamath Project farmers on record at 33,000 acre-feet, less than 8% of normal demand.

Paul Simmons, KWUA executive director, said there is nothing irrigators can do to change this year’s dire situation. Instead, the association is asking a federal judge to rule on future project operations, and what obligations the bureau has to protect several species of endangered fish.

“KWUA wants to establish sideboards that will control future years’ operations in a more reasonable way,” Simmons said.

The bureau is in charge of managing the project, which provides water for 230,000 acres of irrigated farmland in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the bureau must also consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

and National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure the project does not threaten the survival of endangered Lost River and shortnose suckers in Upper Klamath Lake, and threatened coho salmon in the lower Klamath River.

Every five years, the agencies issue what is known as a Biological Opinion, or BiOp, that includes a detailed operations plan for the project to comply with the ESA.

The most recent plan was issued in 2019. Not long after it was released, the Yurok Tribe in California, along with the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations and Institute for Fisheries Resources, sued, arguing greater protections were needed for fish.

Ultimately, the government agreed to go back and revise the BiOp and the case was suspended. A three-year interim plan was put in place in April 2020 that avoided a worst-case scenario for farms, according to the KWUA.

Now, the association wants Judge William Orrick to lift the suspension and bring the case back to court. A hearing is scheduled for May 26.

In its motion, KWUA claims the bureau is not adhering to the interim plan. Specifically, “augmentation flows” released in May 2020 for salmon downriver were not supposed to cause long-term harm to project farmers, but in fact have resulted in less water and delayed the 2021 irrigation season.

Moreover, the association claims the interim plan “simply does not work,” and the re-consultation process on a new BiOp is far behind schedule.

“It is the second extremely dry year under purported interim plan operations, revealing far too many round pegs for the square holes of the interim plan,” the motion states. “The parties do not need a plan for wet years; wet years are easy. The parties need a plan for dry years, and it is now glaring and apparent that there is no such functional plan.”

Simmons said the court should rule that, under the current interpretation of the ESA, the bureau has no legal right to curtail irrigation water that has already been contracted for project farmers to protect endangered fish.

The Trump administration previously affirmed that opinion in a 41-page reassessment of project operations, though that was later rescinded by new Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

“These documents were issued without government-to-government consultation with affected tribes and do not reflect the current administration’s goals for long-term water recovery and economic restoration in this region,” Haaland said.

While Simmons said he hopes they will soon be able to return to a federal courtroom, he emphasized litigation alone will not solve all the basin’s problems.

# USDA says relocated agencies will not move back to D.C.

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will not reverse the Trump administration’s relocation of two USDA agencies.

Vilsack is trying to minimize disruption and rebuild the workforce after USDA moved the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Economic Research Service to Kansas City, Mo., in 2019, an agency spokesman said.

“The secretary has been clear that some staff will be located in Kansas City, some will be in the Washington, D.C. area, and others — especially hard-to-fill positions — could be anywhere else around the country thanks to our embrace of remote work, which allows us to go to the talent,” Matt Herrick, a USDA spokesman, told the Capital Press. “Our staff has been through a difficult few years and the last thing we want to do is uproot families and lives all over again. Our priority now is rebuilding trust and morale, hiring unfilled



**Tom Vilsack**

positions, and reestablishing scientific integrity in our scientific and research agencies.”

Sonny Ramaswamy, a former NIFA director, was an outspoken critic of the original move.

“I absolutely, vehemently, positively agreed that that was the worst decision that was made,” he said. “Everything we built in one fell swoop was destroyed. It was all politically motivated, it was not based on science, it was not based on data.”

Ramaswamy is now president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in Redmond, Wash.

He praised Vilsack as “a responsible man ... never the kind who’s going to (have) a knee-jerk reaction.”

Ramaswamy agreed that it doesn’t make sense to immediately “yank” the relocated employees back to Washington,

D.C., noting many bought homes and are establishing their families in the new location.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated employees’ ability to work from home anywhere, Ramaswamy said.

Damage done by the move continues to reverberate, Ramaswamy said.

“The agencies continue to have significant challenges as a result of the relocation,” he said. “They’re not able to fill positions. ... They’re still struggling, they’re still limping along. It’s going to take several more years to get back to normalcy.”

“Recognizing the reality that the agency now operates in two cities, the ERS administrator should have the authority to determine which functional positions are best placed in Washington or Kansas City,” former ERS administrator Katherine Smith Evans said.

“Such authority will also help the ERS administrator to ensure a staff at least as diverse as the agency had pre-2020, which is

essential to serving well the needs of our country,” Smith Evans said.

Ramaswamy agreed, saying the leaders at NIFA and ERS can work with the Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics and determine where staff

members are needed.

“That would give some clarity and certainty to people,” he said. “Any decision that’s made has to be based on data, on evidence and on humanity.”

## LEGAL

### PURSUANT TO ORS CHAPTER 87

Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 05/10/2021. The sale will be held at 10:00am by  
COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2020 TOYOTA COROLLA 4DR  
VIN = 5YFHPRAE5LP027721  
Amount due on lien \$1,835.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
METLIFE

## LEGAL

### Notice of Public Hearing Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission

Proposed Budget  
As required by ORS 576.416, the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission (OSCC) will hold a public meeting for the purpose of receiving comments on the Commission’s proposed budget for the next fiscal year. Those who wish to attend can join via conference call.  
Date: May 26, 2021 Time: 10:00 am  
Zoom: Join Zoom Meeting  
https://zoom.us/j/97591861289  
Meeting ID: 975 9186 1289  
Call-in number: 1 253 215 8782  
Copies of the proposed budget are available at the commission office, 1827 NE 44th Ave, Suite 315, Portland, Oregon 97213.  
Any questions may be referred to the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission office at 503-274-5458.

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Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 05/10/2021. The sale will be held at 10:00am by  
COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2014 AUDI 7PQ 4DR  
VIN = JM1BM1W70G1281387  
Amount due on lien \$1,515.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
GLORIA EVE WOOD  
OREGON COMMUNITY CREDIT UNION

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Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 05/10/2021. The sale will be held at 10:00am by  
COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2014 AUDI 7PQ 4DR  
VIN = WAU2ZMAFC8EN134721  
Amount due on lien \$1,555.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
ELIZABETH SARA MITCHAM

## LEGAL

### STATE OF OREGON OREGON ALFALFA SEED COMMISSION

P.O. BOX 688 ONTARIO, OREGON 97914  
**NOTICE OF ALFALFA GROWERS COMMISSION HEARING PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING**  
TO: ALL OREGON ALFALFA SEED GROWERS

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held pursuant to ORS Chapter 604, Section 14, Oregon Laws 2003, on Wednesday May 19, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. at the Oregon Alfalfa Seed Commission Office, 168 Wellsprings Dr, Ontario, Oregon 97914.

The hearing will be upon a proposed budget for operation of the Oregon Alfalfa Seed Commission during the fiscal year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.

At these hearings, any producer of alfalfa has a right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for public inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the office of each county extension agent in Oregon.

Interested persons may comment on the proposed budget in writing to the Commission business office, address above. Comments to be received by May 17, 2021.

For further information, contact the Oregon Alfalfa Seed Commission business office; P.O. Box 688, Ontario, Oregon 97914, telephone 541-881-1335. TDD 503-986-4762.

Curt Sisson, Chairman  
Oregon Alfalfa Seed Commission  
April 17, 2021