



George Pläven/Capital Press
A portion of the 60-mile Lost River, which feeds Tule Lake, is dry because of drought in the Klamath Basin.

THE BIG DRY

Drought, water shutoff 'tear at fabric' of Klamath Basin

By **GEORGE PLAUVEN**
Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — County roads stretch for miles past mostly dry, barren fields near Tulelake, Calif., where Cody Dodson farms alfalfa and grain with his stepfather, Frank Prosser.

In May, Dodson learned the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation would shut off water to the Klamath Project, a sprawling irrigation system that serves 200,000 acres of farmland in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

The decision was prompted by what is now classified as an "exceptional" drought gripping the region. Federal regulators allotted no water for irrigators in 2021 so they could have enough to protect endangered sucker fish in Upper Klamath Lake and still provide enough in-stream flows for salmon and steelhead in the lower Klamath River.

The result has been disastrous for more than 1,200 growers like Dodson, who are paying more to pump what little groundwater is available to produce a fraction of their normal crops.

"My plan is to make it one more year," Dodson said. "That's all I can do."



George Pläven/Capital Press

Cody Dodson, left, and John Prosser. "My plan is to make it one more year," Dodson said. "That's all I can do."

Similar stories are unfolding across the basin, where farmers and ranchers ask the question: How much longer can they stay in business?

According to the latest USDA Census of Agriculture, the combined market value of agricultural production in Klamath, Siskiyou and Modoc counties was \$498 million in 2017. This year, it's likely to be a fraction of that.

Meanwhile, populations of Lost River and short-nose suckers — known by the Klamath Tribes as C'waam and Koptu — continue their precipitous decline. The species, endemic to Upper Klamath Lake, are central to the tribes' culture and way of life.

While the USDA recently provided \$15 million in drought relief for the Klamath Basin, the drought and the water shutoff pose an existential threat for communities that depend on water for their economic, social and cultural livelihoods.

The *Capital Press* spoke with irrigators and a tribal leader to learn about how this year has impacted them personally, and what the future may hold, given the ongoing drought and water shutoff.

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Judge rejects challenge to B2H transmission line

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

A federal judge has rejected arguments by opponents of a 300-mile transmission line in Eastern Oregon who sought to stop the project for allegedly violating environmental laws.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon has determined the U.S. Bureau of Land Management approved a right-of-way across public land for the project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Lands Policy Management Act.

The transmission line's opponents are "evaluating the opinion and assessing their next steps" regarding an appeal, and the project is also being challenged before Oregon's Energy Facility Siting Council, said David

Becker, attorney for the plaintiffs.

The Stop B2H Coalition and other plaintiffs filed a complaint in 2019 claiming the transmission line between Boardman, Ore., and the Hemingway substation in Idaho should have been more closely scrutinized for impacts to the greater sage grouse and other factors.

The proposal has also stirred controversy for taking farmland out of production and disrupting agricultural practices, such as aerial pesticide spraying.

The lawsuit argued that BLM should have updated its environmental analysis of the project — known as a final environmental impact statement or FEIS — with new information about sage grouse populations, which

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EO Media Group File
A crew works on a transmission line tower outside Boardman, Ore. A federal judge has rejected a lawsuit seeking to invalidate the government's right-of-way for the Boardman-to-Hemingway transmission line across public land.

Tyson seeks to wrest control of feedlot from Agri Beef



Cody Easterday

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Tyson Fresh Meats has gone to court to forcibly acquire the Pasco, Wash., feedlot that bankrupt cattleman Cody Easterday sold to a major competitor last year after bilking Tyson out of \$233 million.

Tyson is offering \$25 million — \$9 million more than Agri Beef paid — for the cattle feeding operation known as North Lot. Tyson is asking a bankruptcy judge to void the sale to Agri Beef, arguing the deal shortchanged it

and other unpaid creditors.

"The \$16 million purchase price was woefully inadequate," Tyson claims in a complaint filed Monday in U.S. Bankruptcy Court for Eastern Washington.

The dispute leaves final ownership of the feedlot uncertain. Agri Beef President Matt Buyers said in a court filing that the Idaho-based company bought the feedlot in good faith in an arm's length transaction.

Easterday, 50, pleaded guilty in March to defrauding Tyson out of \$233 million and another company out of \$11 million by billing them for cattle he

never actually bought or fed. Easterday delivered cattle to Tyson's processing plant in Pasco.

In a plea deal with federal prosecutors, Easterday agreed to pay restitution. He is scheduled to be sentenced Oct. 5 on one count of wire fraud.

Several Easterday farms in the Columbia Basin have been sold through bankruptcy court for \$209 million to Farmland Reserve Inc., owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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