

## Klamath

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"I don't think there are any of us who are insulated from this," he said. "Everybody is going to feel the effects, even businesses on Main Street."

### A Canal shut down

The Klamath Project encompasses roughly 315 square miles of farmland straddling Southern Oregon and Northern California. The market value of agricultural products sold in Klamath, Modoc and Siskiyou counties totaled nearly a half-billion dollars in 2017, according to the latest USDA Census of Agriculture.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the Bureau of Reclamation is required to operate the Project so that it will not threaten the survival of endangered fish, including suckers in Upper Klamath Lake and coho salmon in the lower Klamath River.

Lost River and shortnose suckers are central to the cul-

ture and identity of the Klamath Tribes, while salmon are revered by tribes and anglers alike downstream.

With the region suffering through extreme drought, Reclamation says there is not anywhere near enough water to satisfy its ESA obligations. The agency initially allocated 33,000 acre-feet of water to the Project in April, less than 8% of normal demand.

By May, the situation had only grown more dire. Reclamation took the dramatic step of mixing water for the A Canal, leaving the majority of the Project high and dry.

Paul Simmons, executive director of the KWUA, which represents 1,200 family farms and ranches in the basin, said 2021 will be an "extraordinarily awful" year for local agriculture.

Looking ahead into the summer, Simmons said he expects domestic wells will dry up due to a lack of recharge in the A Canal system. Dust storms will be an issue from blowing topsoil in barren fields, and farms



"I'm going to feel pretty accomplished if I'm still in business in 2022," said Paul Crawford as he looks over his farm near Malin in the Klamath Basin.

Holly Dilleuth/For the Capital Press

will be lost — some of which normally employ 100-200 people seasonally.

"Many of those jobs are going to be nonexistent or lost," Simmons said. "The businesses that provide agriculture with tractors and seed have lost revenue. All of those people do business with retail business in all these little towns, so it just echoes all the way through."

### Buyer's market for cattle

Luther and Candy Horsley inherited their cattle opera-

tion in Midland, Ore., from Luther's dad. They have been through their fair share of bad droughts and worst-case water scenarios, including 2001 when water was shut off, but nothing like this year.

The herd has been downsized over the years. This year, they are down to 57 cows and will have to sell more than half of them because of the drought conditions.

Having to sell off many of their cows is both an economic and emotional loss for the cou-

ple. Farming runs in Luther's blood.

"In 2001, we sold them incrementally and we'll do that again this year," he said.

"A cow's not a complex being. I mean, she wants to eat, drink and raise her baby. If we can't provide that for her, you've got to let somebody else do it."

Luther said it's a buyer's market in the cattle industry, because so many herds are being liquidated. He anticipates having to sell in the next couple of months.

"If we make it a month, I'll be pretty happy," he said.

In order to have a more positive future for farming in the Klamath Basin, Luther said growers need certainty when it comes to irrigation water. Stakeholders had signed the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement in 2010 to settle water rights and usage, though Congress failed to pass legislation enacting the agreement by the Jan. 1, 2016 deadline.

"What the community needs

is some kind of balance," Luther said. "Lawsuits are flying ... We need to get out of that and try and find some solution, because I don't think you really win in courts too much."

### Making tough decisions

Paul Crawford, who grows alfalfa, orchard grass and small grains near Malin, said he is farming just 40% of his normal acreage this year, focusing on ground that he can irrigate with wells. The rest, which was already planted in hay and winter wheat, will be left dry.

"I'm going to feel pretty accomplished if I'm still in business in 2022," Crawford said. "As a small family farm, we have fairly tight margins to begin with ... Now I'm going to produce 40% of what I've already invested in."

Crawford said he typically spends up to 80% of his annual expenses before cutting his first hay crop in June, months before he will see any return on investment.

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## Drought

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Horrell added that the dry conditions could cause "widespread and severe damage" to a number of sectors and industries, including agriculture and livestock, natural resources, and tourism.

For farmers, the tight water supply reduces the number of acres on which they can plant crops, leaving them less revenue at the end of the year. A drought declaration allows farmers to receive funds through their crop insurance plans.

Precisely how much is available varies based on the farmer and his or her situation, said Rob Rastovich, a Deschutes County rancher. Rastovich said he attempted to apply for government assistance last year but did not qualify. But the amount of money wasn't much, he added — less than \$5,000. That sum was a fraction of the amount he had to spend to buy hay for his cows. Rastovich said he doesn't have crop insurance.

"It's very expensive. Not many people I know pay for it," said Rastovich.

As farmers work to conserve water, the irrigation districts themselves are also at risk of running out of their annual allotment of water. Last year, Arnold Irrigation District was forced to shut off its water to customers in mid-August due to the low flows.

Last month, commissioners from Jefferson County requested a drought declaration for their county. Brown has yet to confirm the drought status.

The dry ground and exposed fields in Jefferson County have set the stage for dust storms that blow away topsoil and make driving hazardous.

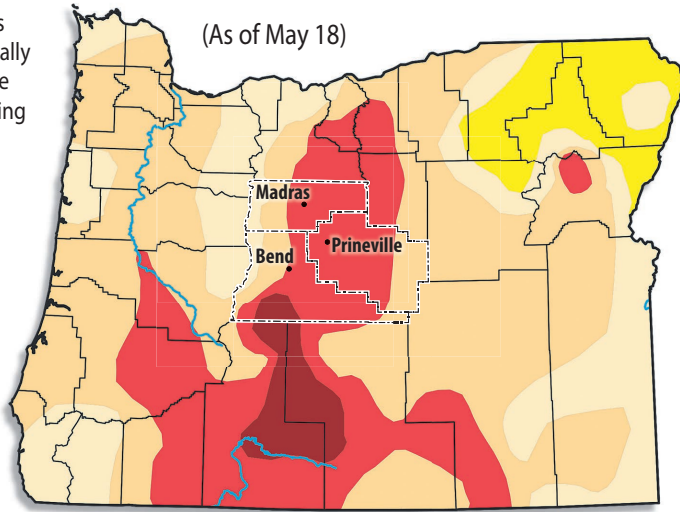
## Drought conditions in Oregon

Drought conditions exist across much of Oregon but are especially severe in Central Oregon, where Deschutes County is experiencing its driest spring in 127 years.

### Legend

- Abnormally dry
- Moderate drought
- Severe drought
- Extreme drought
- Exceptional drought

Source: National Drought Mitigation Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Alan Kenaga/For The Bulletin



*"I do think a drought declaration is warranted. Our reservoirs are really empty and the snowpack is melting off very quickly without increasing the flow in creeks and the river much."*

— Phil Chang, Deschutes County commissioner

"Soil blowing off the land is more than a hardship for farmers," said Gail Snyder, founder of Coalition for the Deschutes, a nonprofit that brings together conservationists, farmers and others to protect the Deschutes River. "It is a bad situation for all of us. The dust bowl of the 1930s was not an aberration that will never happen again."

Phil Chang, one of three county commissioners, said in an email that he plans to vote to request the governor declare a drought.

"I do think a drought declaration is warranted," said Chang. "Our reservoirs are really empty, and the snowpack is melting off very quickly without increasing the flow in creeks and the river much."

Chang, a career resource manager, said multiple years of low groundwater recharge are resulting in "very thirsty ground" which is absorbing snowmelt without much discharge from springs to creeks and rivers.

Larry O'Neill, State Climatologist at Oregon State University, said drought conditions in Deschutes County are worse now compared to a year ago, when much of the county was in a state of severe drought.

Deschutes County is in the midst of its driest March to April period on record, spanning 127 years, he added. The past two years have been the second-driest two-year stretch during that time. The only drier period occurred in 1932, during the Dust Bowl era.

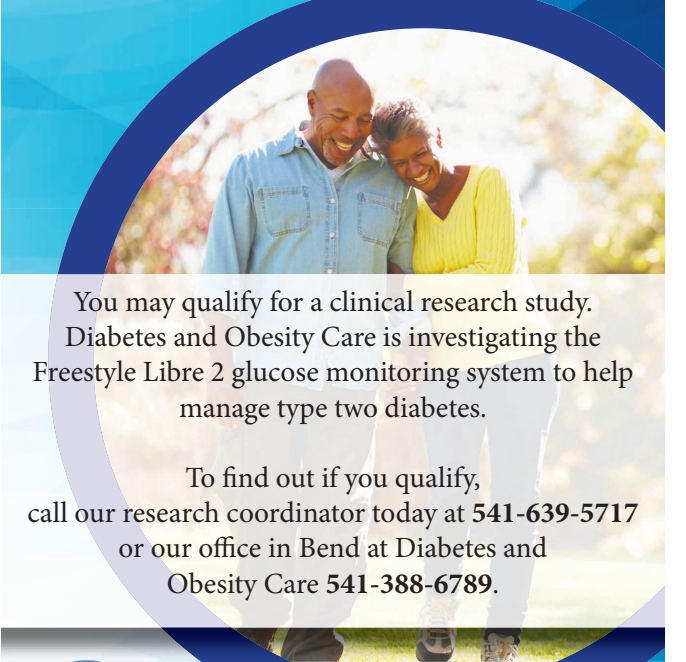
"This drought in Central Oregon is not just about the

short-term deficits, but is a product of an extremely dry last three wet seasons," said O'Neill. "This drought is shaping up to be one of the worst ever for Central Oregon."

Reporter: 541-617-7818, mkohn@bendbulletin.com

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