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Operational Decisions Don't Hold Water

Klamath Falls, OR – Yesterday, the Klamath Irrigation District (KID) was forced to shut down the A Canal following the Bureau of Reclamation's notice that water was no longer available from Upper Klamath Lake for the month of May. The notice came while Reclamation's projections as of yesterday show UKL levels will be approximately 3,000 acre-feet above Biological Opinion thresholds. And in fact, with some small changes to Project operations, up to 5,500 acre-feet could be available to water starved irrigators.

"We're disappointed in Reclamation's operational decision," said Tyler Martin, KID Watermaster and Board Member for Klamath Water Users Association. "We've been working closely with the Bureau and the month-to-date precipitation suggests we will have sufficient inflows to track with NRCS forecasts currently utilized in the 2013 BiOp."

The shutoff comes while Reclamation is ramping down the court ordered dilution flows that resulted in 3,000 cubic feet per second in the Klamath River for 13 days, or roughly 50,000 acre-feet.

Dilution flows were triggered by Prevalence of Infection (POI) in the river and implementation of the flows began on May 8th.

"Ironically, POI and spore concentrations dropped prior to implementing the flows," said Scott White, KWUA Executive Director. "Then POI increased when the dilution flows began. Family farms and ranches have suffered this month for another failed experiment and continued mismanagement of the water."

KWUA and its member districts plan to continue crunching numbers in an effort to convince the Bureau of Reclamation they must look at all opportunities to manage water for contractors as they have done since 1905 in this Basin.

"I just don't get it. Since the inception of the Project, the Bureau has worked to deliver water to Project irrigators and refuges. They strived to meet the deeded promise of water in perpetuity. KWUA has been part of conversations and Project plans since 1956. Now more than ever, Klamath Water Users perspective is relevant." Said Scott Seus, a family farmer from Tulelake. "Now, new management and a lack of historical perspective have created a change of direction from within the Bureau's walls and left their patrons and our community high and dry."

It is uncertain whether any water will be available for the remainder of the month. Day one of the ramp down at Iron Gate Dam was mis-operated resulting in a loss of roughly 500 acre-feet and the Bureau of Reclamation has yet to commit to ramping down Link River to Biological Opinion minimums.

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