



PRESS RELEASE

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FEDERAL AGENCIES RELEASE WATER FROM TRINITY RESERVOIR DESPITE MAKING CLAIMS OF “CALIFORNIA’S HISTORIC DROUGHT”

FRESNO, CA - The San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (Authority) along with Westlands Water District has filed a lawsuit in federal court to stop the Bureau of Reclamation from releasing Central Valley Project (CVP) water from the Trinity Division to the Klamath River.

Yesterday Reclamation announced the release of up to 88,000 acre-feet of CVP water from Trinity Reservoir in the hope of aiding returning non-listed Chinook salmon with the optimism of diminishing the effect of a naturally-occurring disease endemic known as “Ich” (pronounced “ick”) to the Klamath River system to which the Trinity River is connected. This action, which is outside of Reclamation's authorized place of use, is a repeat of a similar action taken last year with the intention to help avoid an outbreak which has only been documented to have occurred once in 2002. Since 2000, a significant supply of water has been set aside each year from the Trinity Reservoir for fishery protection purposes. Specifically, over the past four years, this has equated to more than 200,000 acre-feet of water lost which was literally flushed down the Lower Klamath River.

“As our state is faced with a water supply crisis affecting every sector of people, businesses, and communities, an action like this is unthinkable. This will cause irreparable damage to drought-stricken communities already facing water restrictions,” said Dan Nelson, executive director of the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority.

The CVP and State Water Project (SWP) provide water for more than 25 million Californians who depend upon a reliable water supply. In the 50 year history of the Projects, water deliveries have never been lower—the CVP is experiencing its second year of a zero water allocation and the SWP sits at a mere 20 percent water allocation.

Reclamation is once again choosing to ignore the harms of its actions through the issuance of a "Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact" (FONSI) that hasn't been properly analyzed. Further, Reclamation's decision to release 88,000 acre-feet of CVP water for the Klamath River is a sad irony given that Reclamation is currently unable to meet its legally-mandated obligations within the CVP and SWP.

"The hardworking people of the State of California have been directed by state and federal agencies to conserve water in the form of dying lawns, fewer showers, unplanted fields, trees uprooted or turning brown, and community wells drying up. Yet Reclamation, which has been unable to deliver any water to farmers, has decided to release tens of thousands of acre feet in an arbitrary manner that the courts have previously held to be unlawful." said Tom Birmingham, general manager of the Westlands Water District. "The fact that 88,000 acre-feet can be casually released without regard to the potential impacts on the environment, including at risk-species in the Sacramento River and the Delta, is a gross mismanagement of the state's water supplies. The action filed today is intended to compel Reclamation to comply with its mandatory duties," said Birmingham.

"During a time when we are experiencing the worst water management challenges in decades, when communities and agriculture throughout the state are suffering severe impacts that have negatively affected our economy, the labor force and the environment, the decision by the Bureau of Reclamation to repurpose precious Central Valley Project water resources to augment Klamath flows for non-endangered fish, an action that is of questionable benefit, is both irresponsible and incomprehensible. While the needs of cities, family farms, and endangered species that rely on CVP resources continue to go unmet, the reallocation of the Project's limited supply of water defies all logic," said Jeff Sutton, general manager of the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority, an organization that represents seventeen Sacramento Valley water districts that hold CVP water service contracts, that are also highly critical of the action being undertaken by the Bureau of Reclamation.

The water planned for release is enough to farm 31,000 acres of food, or to serve the domestic needs of more than 175,000 families for an entire year. The devastating effects of the drought will be felt for decades to come especially if arbitrary decisions like these continue.

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