KWUA Klamath Water Users Association

2312 South Sixth Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601
(541) 883-6100 Phone • (541) 883-8893 Fax
www.kwua.org

Contact Information
Elizabeth Nielsen, *Executive Director*
541-883-6100 Office • 530-722-7787 Cell • elizabeth@kwua.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 16, 2026

A New Day and A Path Forward for the Klamath Basin: Reclamation Outlines New Water Framework

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. - In a major step toward securing the future of the entire Klamath Basin, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has completed a reassessment of how the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is applied to the Klamath Project.

Following bipartisan federal legislation in early 2025 and updated guidance from the Department of the Interior, this reassessment takes a detailed look at over 150 water supply contracts and analyzes where Reclamation does and does not have discretion over water deliveries under existing contracts.

This is a necessary step to defining Reclamation's authority in the Klamath Project before Reclamation develops an operation plan to deliver water to farms and national wildlife refuges. Most importantly, it ensures water is managed to support farms, wildlife, refuges, and local communities while staying fully compliant with federal law.

"We are very grateful for the hard work by the Bureau of Reclamation and all of Secretary Burgum's team," said Klamath Water Users Association President Scott Seus.

This development aligns the approach to ESA consultation for Klamath Project operations with other well established federal water projects in the West, marking yet another step towards correcting the unpredictable supply of water that Project irrigators have been navigating for nearly 30 years.

KWUA and irrigators throughout the Project recognize the interconnected needs of agriculture, fish, wildlife, national wildlife refuges, and rural communities. We applaud Reclamation's efforts to provide greater transparency, stability, and predictability in the Basin.

By grounding Project operations in well-established legal frameworks used in other parts of the West, the reassessment helps reduce uncertainty and conflict, allowing stakeholders to focus on collaborative, long-term solutions instead of ongoing legal disputes.

"This reassessment is critical for the families who farm and ranch here. Stability determines whether we can plant crops, grow food, keep people employed, and pass our operations to the next generation," said Gary Derry, KWUA Board Member. "Reliable water supplies also support the wildlife refuges and waterfowl that depend on them, ensuring the Klamath Basin remains a healthy, vibrant landscape for agriculture, wildlife, and the communities that call it home."

KWUA Klamath Water Users Association

2312 South Sixth Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601
(541) 883-6100 Phone • (541) 883-8893 Fax
www.kwua.org

This milestone also reflects KWUA's ongoing dedication through consistent engagement with the Department of the Interior, including Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the National Marine Fisheries Service within the Department of Commerce, at the local, regional, and national levels. In addition to numerous meetings, KWUA made two trips to Washington, D.C., last year to meet with key leadership and ensure water users' perspectives were considered throughout the process.

"KWUA's and our consultants' continuous coordination at the policy level in Washington, D.C., combined with ongoing communication with agency staff who understand how the Project operates, has delivered real and tangible results," said Elizabeth Nielsen, Executive Director of KWUA. "We look forward to the next step: making these actions long-lasting through reconsultation for the Klamath Project."

In October 2025, Reclamation sent a letter to KWUA communicating its intent to reinitiate consultation under the ESA following the completion of this reassessment. Formal reconsultation with the fisheries services is expected soon.

Completing a robust and enduring ESA consultation is the final administrative step to ensure the Klamath Basin has a predictable, sustainable, and scientifically sound framework for water management that protects both agricultural and ecological interests.

Moving forward, KWUA remains committed to working with Reclamation, federal agencies, and local partners to implement the reassessment and forthcoming reconsultation. Now, more than ever in recent history, the Klamath Basin is positioned to achieve long-term stability, balance the needs of agriculture and wildlife, and ensure a bright future for our rural communities and economies.

###

About Klamath Water Users Association (KWUA)

Since 1953, the KWUA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation representing the interests of Klamath Project farmers and ranchers. KWUA members include rural and suburban irrigation districts, public agencies, and private individuals who operate on both sides of the California/Oregon border. These entities and individuals typically hold water delivery contracts with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The Project is home to over 1,200 family farms and ranches; KWUA's member districts deliver irrigation water to over 170,000 acres of some of the most incredibly productive farmland in the Western United States.

KWUA's mission is to preserve and enhance the viability of irrigated agriculture for our membership in the Klamath Basin for the benefit of current and future generations.

KWUA is governed by an eleven-member Board of Directors representing Project districts. The Association employs an Executive Director and staff to execute policy decisions.