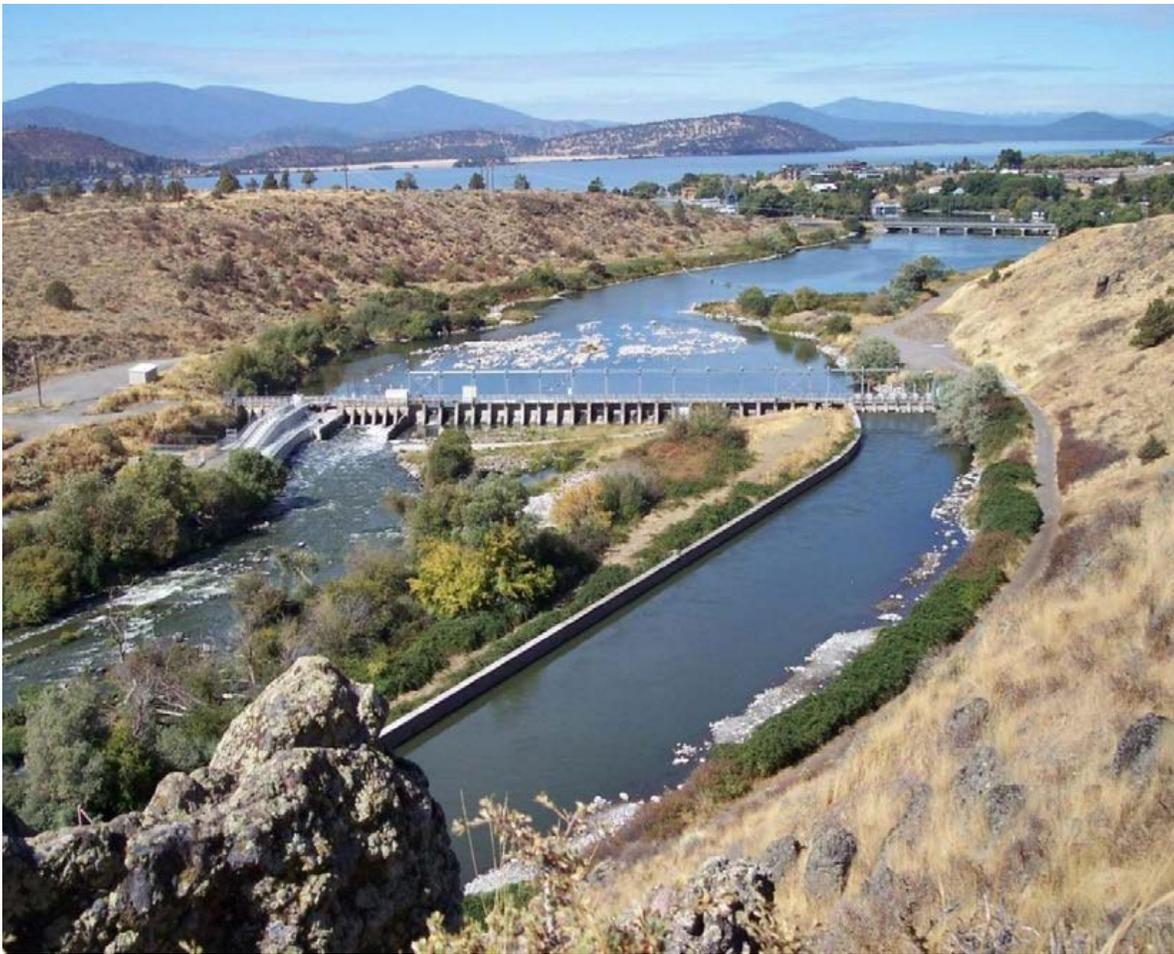




— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

2026 Annual Operations Plan

Klamath Project, Oregon-California
Interior Region 10, California-Great Basin



Mission Statements

The Department of the Interior (DOI) conserves and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people, provides scientific and other information about natural resources and natural hazards to address societal challenges and create opportunities for the American people, and honors the Nation's trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities to help them prosper.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Introduction

The Klamath Project (Project) delivers water for irrigation and related purposes to approximately 230,000 acres in southern Oregon and northern California. This 2026 Operations Plan (Plan) describes Project operations that are anticipated to occur during the 2026 hydrologic water year, which includes winter operations as well as those during the spring-summer irrigation season (March 1 to November 30), based upon projected hydrologic conditions. The plan balances water supply for agricultural use, environmental flows, Tribal trust responsibilities, and refuge deliveries. The Plan is consistent with the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) 2024 Biological Opinions issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on October 28, 2024 and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on November 15, 2024; collectively, the Services' BiOps.

2026 Project Operations

Reclamation has had one year of operation under the 2024 BiOp which included moving the Klamath River compliance point to Keno Dam and the reconnection of Agency Lake/Barnes Ranch to Upper Klamath Lake (UKL). Reclamation is still evaluating the effect of these physical changes on the system, and whether they result in experiencing hydrologic conditions outside the scope analyzed by the Services in their respective BiOps.

Reclamation currently uses several water sources to meet irrigation demands within the Project, including live flow into and stored water from UKL, the Klamath River, Clear Lake Reservoir, Gerber Reservoir, and the Lost River. The 2026 Annual Operations Plan maximizes flexibility on managing these resources for water operations for Water Year 2026 in order to meet Endangered Species Act (ESA) goals of river flows and UKL elevations while increasing the chances of storing 350 TAF for agricultural purposes.

If Reclamation anticipates that operations will deviate or have deviated outside the results of the modeled ranges of the Proposed Action, Reclamation will immediately notify and confer with the Services to communicate the impact of operations on Reclamation's ability to operate in conformance with the BiOps, and to coordinate on the corrective actions by which Reclamation may continue to meet its commitment to protect ESA-listed species. This conversation will also include stakeholders engaged in the Klamath Basin Collaborative technical and management teams such as the Real Time Operations Calls. The method for estimating and providing water from these sources during the 2026 spring-summer irrigation season is discussed below.

Use of Forecasts

In terms of forecasts to be used for the 2026 operations, as per the 2024 BiOps, "Reclamation and the Services will evaluate the performance of the forecast combinations each year and decide

whether changes from the previous year should be made.” The April through September UKL inflow forecast and resultant project supply will be finalized in early April.

Upper Klamath Lake

At the beginning of the 2026 Water Year starting on October 1, 2025, Reclamation will use inflows to supply releases from Keno Dam to the Klamath River, help meet winter agricultural demand, and fill UKL. These will be based on the framework established in the 2024 BiOps. The Flexible Flow Account (FFA) volume will accumulate over the course of the winter, although the rate may be adjusted. Return flows not used by irrigators that offset UKL releases will be added to Deferred Project Supply.

Emphasis will be placed on maximizing stored water for irrigation by April 1. An Upper Klamath Lake elevation of 4143.16 ft is required under the new bathymetry to provide 350 TAF of storage for agricultural use above 4139.64 ft (A Project Supply threshold of 4139.64 ft ensures that the elevation in UKL remains above the lower limit analyzed in the 2024 BiOps.) If necessary, UKL will continue to be filled until June 1 consistent with the flood curve to provide 350 TAF Project Supply in storage.

In the event of drought conditions and if UKL does not achieve an elevation of 4143 ft by April 1, an initial Project Supply will be the difference between 4139.64 ft and the UKL elevation achieved on April 1. It may increase however, if UKL continues to fill until June 1 to provide 350 TAF Project Supply (including cumulative agricultural deliveries since March 1) from UKL. Once a full supply is available, UKL will be managed as prescribed in the 2024 BiOps.

In 2026, as per the 2024 BiOps, a maximum of 35 TAF can be accumulated in the Flexible Flow Account and 7 TAF will be reserved to provide for a boat dance flow in late August or early September. Based on existing agreements, the total available storage in UKL will be reduced by this amount and could result in a project supply less than 350 TAF if an elevation of approximately 4143 ft is not reached by April 1.

UKL typically continues to increase in storage until early April in dry years and early May in wet years. Assuming an elevation of at least 4143 ft is achieved, any water not released during flood operation that is stored in UKL between April 1 and May 15 will be made available for other project purposes including, but not limited to, river augmentation, refuge deliveries, retained in UKL to raise End of Season (EOS) elevations, and the boat dance flows.

EOS elevation in UKL will be targeted for 4139.50 ft if UKL completely fills and adequate inflows occur throughout the season. Otherwise, KBAO may operate down to 4137.16’ to provide the Project Supply, Keno Dam base flows, and 2026 boat dance flows. (Modeling for the 2024 BiOps analyzed elevations down to 4137.12 ft in drought years.)

Klamath River

The 2024 BiOp requires a volume of 251 TAF during the winter to meet Keno base flows from October 1 – March 31. Approximately 283 TAF is required to meet the base flows from April 1

– September 30 during the spring-summer irrigation season. The 2024 BiOp analyzed the April-September net inflow volumes for UKL. The 1991-2022 median (50% POE) was 363 TAF. The 70% POE value was 284 TAF. In other words, in 70% of the years analyzed, April-September net inflows provided enough volume to meet Keno base flows.

During the winter, targeted releases above minimum baseflows from Keno will be adjusted to prioritize a UKL elevation of at least 4143 ft by April 1, making 350 TAF available for project deliveries, while minimizing flood concerns. The targeted releases will be calculated by adjusting the multiplier allowing for flow variability, while still accumulating a FFA as called for in the 2024 BiOp. At least some stored water in UKL will be needed in most years to meet base flows at Keno later in the summer. The size of the FFA will depend on the amount by which target flows are reduced. The downriver interests also have the option of not accumulating an FFA and relying on either flood releases or accretions downriver of Keno to supply a flushing flow.

Upon the start of the spring/summer irrigation season on April 1, Keno target flows will be based on observed net inflow and storage volumes in UKL coupled with the Normalized Wetness Index and the Natural Resources Conversation Service inflow forecasts but will not fall below base flows. Recognizing that later in the season (for example, by June in 2025), net inflows will be less than base flows, water will be released out of UKL storage to meet the Keno base flows. Flow variability downstream of Keno is provided by varying inflows from tributaries newly exposed by hydropower dam removal which depend on existing hydrologic conditions, rather than on artificially manipulating dam releases. After dam removal, the Klamath river has seen improvements in water quality such as temperature, dissolved oxygen, and reduced disease risks that may have benefitted listed species. The Incidental Take Statement was recently modified to help account for conditions changing from those envisioned under T&C1a.

If UKL enters flood control, stored water will be released from Link River Dam and may be released downriver through Keno Dam or used to supplement water in Tule Lake or Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge (TLNWR, LKNWR). If flood control provides an equivalent flow event to a pulse flow, stored FFA may be used for other purposes.

Project Supply is available for use within the Project from March 1 through November 30, except for private lands within Klamath Drainage District, where it is available from March 1 through September 30. There are no limitations on the rate at which Project Supply may be used, though such use may be constrained by applicable water right limitations under state law.

In addition to Project Supply, any water released from the Lost River Diversion Channel and Klamath Straits Drain into the Klamath River between March 1 and September 30 is available for diversion to the Project without counting against Project Supply. Reclamation will coordinate with districts within the Project regarding the use of and accounting for such releases and associated diversions.

Clear Lake Reservoir

The estimated water supply available from Clear Lake Reservoir is based on several factors, including current hydrologic conditions and projected inflows over the end of September minimum elevation analyzed in the FWS 2024 BiOp, as well as the rate and volume of irrigation releases and non-beneficial losses (e.g., evaporation and seepage). The estimated available water supply is tracked daily, with updates to Project water users occurring approximately every two weeks during the irrigation season or as needed.

The end of September minimum elevation in Clear Lake Reservoir analyzed under the FWS 2024 BiOp is 4,520.60 feet above sea level (USBR datum). Reclamation adds the April 1 stored volume above the September minimum, plus projected inflows, evaporation and seepage rates, to determine a useable volume for the irrigation season. If that volume exceeds 35 TAF Reclamation declares a full project supply. If not, the supply estimate is reduced to remain above the September minimum elevation. In either case, Reclamation monitors the volume remaining in the reservoir throughout the season to determine if any adjustments need to be made. Reclamation will coordinate with districts within the Project when additional water is available and needed from Clear Lake Reservoir to supplement the supply available from UKL and the Klamath River, consistent with Reclamation's existing contracts with water users.

Gerber Reservoir

Similar to Clear Lake Reservoir, the estimated Project water supply available from Gerber Reservoir is based on several factors, including current hydrologic conditions, projected inflows for April through September, the end of September minimum elevation analyzed under the FWS 2024 BiOp as well as the rate and volume of irrigation releases and non-beneficial losses (e.g., evaporation and seepage). The estimated available water supply is tracked daily, with updates to Project water users occurring approximately every two weeks during the irrigation season or as needed.

The end of September minimum elevation in Gerber Reservoir analyzed in the FWS 2024 BiOp is 4,798.10 feet above sea level (USBR datum). Reclamation adds the April 1 stored volume above the September minimum, plus projected inflows, evaporation and seepage rates, to determine a useable volume for the irrigation season. If that volume exceeds 35 TAF Reclamation declares a full project supply. If not, the supply estimate is reduced to remain above the September minimum elevation. In either case, Reclamation monitors the volume remaining in the reservoir throughout the season to determine if any adjustments need to be made. Reclamation will coordinate with districts within the Project when additional water is available and needed from Gerber Reservoir to supplement the supply available from UKL and the Klamath River, consistent with Reclamation's existing contracts with water users.

Lost River

Natural runoff and return flows in the Lost River may be available intermittently for irrigation use within the Project during the spring-summer irrigation season. These diversions are not

included in the calculation of Project Supply from UKL and the Klamath River, as analyzed under the Services' 2024 Biological Opinions. As such, the availability of water from the Lost River is primarily constrained by physical conditions—including return flows, localized runoff, and operational timing—rather than by ESA-related limitations. Reclamation does not estimate the volume of Lost River supply in advance. Instead, Project water users may divert water from the Lost River as it becomes available, consistent with the terms of their respective contracts and applicable state water rights.

Other Operational Considerations

Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge Deliveries

Under the 2026 Annual Operations Plan, there is no water specifically set aside for maintaining elevations in Unit 2 or other units. However, water from Project Supply may be available for delivery to LKNWR—including Area K—when consistent with Reclamation's contractual and legal obligations.

In a wet year, if Reclamation enters flood control operations, the flood releases may be diverted to the refuges as well as being released through the Keno Dam to the Klamath River. In years of drought, Reclamation may acquire water for fish and wildlife purposes under Section 102 of Title I of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 (Pub. L. 102-250, 43 U.S.C. §2212). For 2026, Reclamation may pursue acquisition of up to 25 TAF for use within LKNWR and TLNWR. This water would be sourced from willing districts through conservation, efficiency, forbearance, or other operational means. The volume, timing, and rate of delivery will depend on district actions and will be managed by FWS in accordance with refuge management plans.

Outside of voluntary arrangements, Project Supply availability for LKNWR depends on in-season irrigation demands of other Project lands. Beginning in July, Reclamation will coordinate with FWS and Project water users to evaluate remaining irrigation needs. Any surplus Project Supply will be identified for potential diversion to LKNWR. This evaluation will be repeated monthly through November, and Reclamation may request FWS to cease diversions if needed to meet higher-priority obligations.

Water rights transferred to LKNWR under state law—such as those appurtenant to Agency Lake and Barnes Ranch—are separate from Project Supply and fall under FWS administrative discretion.

Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge Deliveries

Under the 2026 Annual Operations Plan, water from Upper Klamath Lake is available for delivery to TLNWR when consistent with Reclamation's contractual and legal obligations. Water from the Lost River system may also be used and is not restricted. The FWS Refuge staff would need to coordinate with Tulelake Irrigation District for this to happen.

In a wet year, if Reclamation enters flood control operations, the flood releases may be diverted to the refuges as well as being released through the Keno Dam to the Klamath River. In years of drought, Reclamation may acquire water for fish and wildlife purposes under Section 102 of Title I of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 (Pub. L. 102-250, 43 U.S.C. §2212). For 2026, Reclamation may pursue acquisition of up to 25 TAF for use within LKNWR and TLNWR. This water would be sourced from willing districts through conservation, efficiency, forbearance, or other operational means. The volume, timing, and rate of delivery will depend on district actions and will be managed by FWS in accordance with refuge management plans.

Outside of voluntary arrangements, Project Supply availability for TLNWR depends on in-season irrigation demands of other Project lands. Beginning in July, Reclamation will coordinate with FWS and Project water users to evaluate remaining irrigation needs. Any surplus Project Supply will be identified for potential diversion to LKNWR. This evaluation will be repeated monthly through November, and Reclamation may request FWS to cease diversions if needed to meet higher-priority obligations.

Voluntary Water Conservation

Reclamation encourages conservation efforts at all levels to extend available Project water supplies, especially during shortage years. These efforts include:

District-Level Initiatives

- Rotating water deliveries among irrigators
- De-watering unused laterals
- Minimizing tailwater losses

On-Farm Practices

- Planting less water-intensive crops
- Using high-efficiency irrigation systems (e.g., sprinklers, gated pipes)
- Employing deficit irrigation techniques

To support these efforts, Reclamation operates AgriMet stations throughout the Klamath Basin. These stations provide daily crop water use estimates based on site-specific weather data and crop growth stages. Updated evapotranspiration charts are available at:

<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/agrimet/agrimetmap/agrimap.html>

For more information, please visit <http://www.usbr.gov/mp/kbao/> and or contact David Felstul at (541) 880-2550 or dfelstul@usbr.gov.