



FRIENDS OF THE SHASTA RIVER

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SHASTA RIVER AGAIN PUMPED DRY PENDING MINIMUM FLOW ORDER

State Agencies Move Slowly Despite Unprecedented Emergency Situation

Large Agricultural Interests Disregard Growing Concerns for the River--Days after Claiming “Voluntary” Restoration Measures Will Suffice

Yreka, CA – Irrigation pumping over the Fourth of July weekend culminated in drying up the Shasta River on Tuesday, July 6th (see photos below). Flow at the Yreka measuring gauge bottomed out at 3.51 cubic feet per second (cfs), a historic low that likely consisted of little more than treated outflow from the Yreka sewage plant located just upstream of the gauge on Yreka Creek.

This is another in a series of repeated dewatering events this summer that is putting the survival of already threatened and vulnerable Coho salmon, as well as other over-summering species such as Pacific Lamprey, at severe risk. It is also enormously harmful to the ecosystem supporting Chinook, Steelhead and other aquatic species.

This new dewatering also follows on the heels of a plea by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) asking the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to curtail agricultural water use through emergency minimum flow orders. This summer's series of historic low flow events, along with increasing public attention and concern, motivated this unprecedented attention by California's natural resource agencies and the pending order.

At a July 1st SWRCB meeting, held to gather public input, several irrigators and Siskiyou County Supervisor Brandon Criss opposed an emergency minimum flow order in favor of continuing a voluntary approach to agricultural water use. This new, unprecedented low flow event suggests that this voluntary approach is not working.

“While voluntary measures are attractive to many parties, the sum total of measures already implemented and proposed will not come close to being sufficient to ensure the survival, much less

recovery, of threatened Coho and other vulnerable species in the Shasta” noted retired CDFW biologist, Bill Chesney.

Bruce Shoemaker, a Shasta basin property owner and Friends of the Shasta River member, stated: “For far too long, State and Federal agencies responsible for protecting our public trust resources have stood by, seemingly paralyzed into inaction by the pretense that voluntary curtailments will bring the flows to the Shasta that fish need to survive and recover. We welcome CDFW’s long overdue recognition that minimum flow requirements must be established. But this is an emergency—enough is known about the severity of this crisis for the Water Board to act now--not two thirds of the way through this year’s irrigation season”.

Andy Marx, Friends of the Shasta River’s board president added, “This is another severe setback for the State and Federal agencies trying to avoid a fish extinction disaster. This incident deserves to be the last straw for a sole reliance on the voluntary approach and must lead to an immediate minimum flow order--at this point that’s the only thing that’s going to save the Shasta salmon”.

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Background:

The Shasta River flows from the base of Mount Shasta north to the Klamath River near Yreka, CA. While small in size, it is mighty in terms of its proven ability to produce wild salmon. Despite decades of use and abuse, the Shasta continues to annually produce between one third and half of the wild salmon in the Klamath Basin. In many years the numbers of wild salmon in the Klamath River determine how many salmon overall will be harvestable by fishermen from Monterey to the Columbia River. Salmon harvest management is predicated on protecting wild salmon stocks, not on how many hatchery fish are in the ocean. Coastal and tribal fisheries have collapsed as fish are dying in the river because of the sub-optimal conditions they face.

While this year’s drought is particularly acute, poorly regulated and excessive irrigation diversions occur every summer resulting in flow levels far below the emergency flow minimums recommended by CDFW this year. Low flows and consequent warmer waters have undoubtedly restricted cold water habitat required by threatened Coho, as well as other species, returning to and living in the Shasta.

Friends of the Shasta River is a grassroots group that was formed in November 2020 by concerned local citizens who live, work and recreate in the Shasta River basin. We support a sharing and better balance of Shasta River water resources for the benefit of fish, other wildlife and people. We are a non-profit organization registered with the State of California and have a pending application for recognition as a 501c3 tax exempt organization. For more info see www.shastariver.org

For a more detailed account of the earlier Shasta River dewatering event and information on how to help visit: <https://www.shastariver.org/about-us/>

See photos and captions below for further information.

PHOTOS



Shasta River Dewatered: This photo taken on Tuesday evening, July 6, 2021, near the Shasta River's mouth shows the dramatic impact of the near-total dewatering of the river. Aquatic organisms have been left high and dry. (*Credit: Friends of the Shasta River*).



Shasta River Dewatered – July 6, 2021: At the time when the flow at the mouth of the Shasta dropped on July 6th to 3.5 cubic feet per second (cfs), it was measured flowing at greater than 70 cfs 25 miles upstream. Between those two points are numerous irrigation pumps taking virtually all the river's water and flooding it onto grass pastures. This leaves nothing for the critically important ecosystem that sustains wild salmon and coastal and tribal communities. (*Credit: Friends of the Shasta River*).



Shasta River dewatered: July 6, 2021. Even in drought years the Shasta River has a high (150-200cfs) unimpaired summertime flow. Mount Shasta's glacial melt flows underground for decades before emerging at springs. These send cold clear water into the Shasta River all summer, during both cool, wet years and hot, dry ones. Excessive and unsustainable agricultural diversions take almost all of this spring water out of the river for irrigating relatively low-value crops such as alfalfa. (*Credit: Friends of the Shasta River*)