



Media Release

Lake Mendocino water levels trigger curtailments for all water rights in Upper Russian River

Curtailments likely for Lower Russian River within a week

August 2, 2021

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SACRAMENTO – With California experiencing a historic drought amid worsening climate change impacts, the state is responding urgently to address acute water supply shortfalls in affected areas. Water in Lake Mendocino is below minimum storage levels and dropping at an alarming rate, threatening supplies for drinking water and endangered fisheries.

In response, the State Water Resources Control Board issued curtailment orders today to all 861 water right holders in the Upper Russian River. The orders make it illegal to draw or divert water from the Upper Russian River, except as needed to ensure human health and safety.

The State Water Board also released an analysis of the Lower Russian River demonstrating that approximately 222 right holders need to be curtailed to meet demands on the river. The board anticipates issuing orders to these right holders next week.

To maintain flows in the Upper Russian River, water is released from Lake Mendocino, a reservoir north of Ukiah. The supplemental water protects multiple fish species and municipal and agricultural uses, and during drought, accounts for all the water in the river. Currently, about 200 acre-feet is released from the lake into the river each day, enough to meet the needs of 400 households per year.

“The lake is declining much faster than anticipated,” said Erik Ekdahl, Deputy Director for the Division of Water Rights. “If the depletions continue at this rate, the 20,000 acre-feet, end-of-season minimum storage level could be reached almost six weeks ahead of schedule. The lake could be entirely empty by the end of the year, putting both people and wildlife in harm’s way.”

On April 21, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a drought emergency for Mendocino and Sonoma Counties and called on the board to modify reservoir releases, limit diversions and curtail water diversions as needed in response to worsening conditions.



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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Since then he has twice expanded the declaration, which now includes 50 of the state's 58 counties.

On May 26, as conditions continued to deteriorate, the board sent letters to 930 water right holders in the Upper Russian River, informing them that water is unavailable for their water right, and notified those with more senior rights that an emergency drought regulation was being drafted that could affect their diversions. The board's adoption of the regulation on June 15 authorized curtailments in the Upper Russian River if Lake Mendocino didn't maintain minimum storage requirements, and in the Lower Russian River if flows were not enough to satisfy all water rights claims.

For more information on the curtailments, notices of water unavailability, water use methodology tools and related topics, please visit the board's [Drought Information & Updates](#) webpage.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use for current and future generations.