

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 21, 2023

Ms. Camille Touton  
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Commissioner Touton,

As the Bureau of Reclamation solicits input and interest in the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) under Section 50233 for "other basins experiencing comparable levels of long-term drought" to the Colorado River Basin for additional funding, we ask you to prioritize funding for projects in the Klamath, Deschutes, and Rogue River Basins in Oregon.

The Klamath, Deschutes, and Rogue River Basins are diverse and ecologically significant regions with significant cultural and economic importance to Tribes and rural communities. These special landscapes, like much of the West, have faced unprecedented challenges due to persistent drought and limited water availability which cannot meet all the in-stream and out-of-stream demands.

In the Klamath Basin, drought conditions have persisted for nearly a decade and are forecast to worsen over the next 30 to 50 years. Contributing factors to these conditions include, a general decline in spring snowpack, a reduction in the amount of precipitation falling as snow in the winter, and an earlier snowmelt runoff as compared to the mid and late 20th century. The scope and scale of this ongoing drought's impact on the already-strained people, economies, infrastructure, and wildlife of the Klamath Basin cannot be overstated.

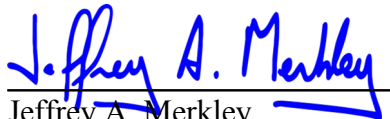
Similarly, the Deschutes River Basin has historically faced wet and dry periods due to its high desert climate. However, starting around the late 1990s, the dry periods become longer, more frequent, and severe, resulting in diminished aquifer recharge. Climate models also suggest that the Deschutes Basin will shift away from being reliant on snowpack to being primarily supported by rainfall. Due to the diminished recharge and the impacts of climate chaos, the Deschutes Basin has experienced persistent drought conditions for years. To address this, the communities of the Deschutes Basin have led the way with innovative watershed planning efforts that offer multiple shovel-ready multi-benefit projects to conserve water for wildlife and agricultural producers. In spite of these successes, more federal support is needed to respond to the ongoing drought conditions.

Additionally, the Rogue River Basin has also begun to experience more frequent and severe drought conditions due to below-average annual precipitation, leading to reduced water availability in rivers, reservoirs, and groundwater sources. Over the past two decades, the Governor of Oregon has issued nine drought declarations for some or all sections of the Rogue Basin. The basin included the 2015 and 2020 federal drought disaster declarations.

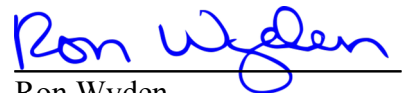
Reclamation should consider all options to address ongoing drought conditions in Oregon, including by providing support for projects that conserve water in-stream to benefit endangered or threatened species, increase irrigation efficiency or reduce consumptive water use, restore ecosystems or enhance wildlife habitat, and ensure more sustainable and predictable water deliveries. Each of these basins either has completed or is undertaking a comprehensive watershed planning process to identify key, priority projects that would generate multiple benefits to the environment, local community, and economy.

We greatly appreciate Reclamation's continued commitment to making investments that ensure water resources can continue to support the environment, agriculture, fisheries, and local economies here in Oregon. We look forward to working with your agency to continue combating climate chaos and ensure communities in Oregon, and across the West, have a sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator