



Media Release

State Water Board approves emergency curtailment regulation for Scott and Shasta Rivers

Measures would maintain minimum flows to protect fish

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SACRAMENTO – With climate change-induced drought causing critical low flows in the Scott and Shasta Rivers and threatening the survival of multiple fish species, the State Water Resources Control Board today approved an emergency curtailment regulation that includes measures to help maintain minimum flows to protect fish, ensure supplies for human health and livestock needs, and encourage voluntary efforts that may be used in lieu of curtailments.

The regulation must be approved by the Office of Administrative Law and filed with the Secretary of State before curtailment orders can be issued.

Altogether, there are more than 3,500 water rights in the watersheds. Given increased conservation efforts and an unpredictable hydrology, the number of right holders who may be curtailed is yet to be determined.

[The Scott and Shasta Rivers](#) in Siskiyou County are tributaries to the Klamath River and supply water for agriculture, domestic users, the environment, fire protection, municipalities, tribal nations and recreation. The watersheds are also important nurseries for the threatened coho, culturally significant Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. For a second consecutive year, dry conditions are endangering coho fry, or baby coho emerging from gravel, and juvenile coho that rely on seasonal flows to reach a suitable summer rearing habitat.

Temporarily halting diversions will leave more water instream to meet minimum human health and safety and livestock needs and improve habitat and migratory conditions for imperiled coho salmon. It will also protect steelhead trout, a federal Fish Species of Concern, and fall-run Chinook salmon that provide a valuable resource for commercial, tribal, and recreational fisheries.

“As crucial tributaries to the Klamath, the Scott and Shasta Rivers provide the best options to improve conditions this year in the watershed,” said E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair of the State Water Board. “There are no quick, easy fixes here. Along with threatened fish species, tribes, farms, ranchers and towns are facing unprecedented conditions due to a second year of dry conditions. We need to work together to address these challenges and maintain momentum on long-term solutions as we confront the harsh realities of the ongoing climate crisis.”

Today’s action is the latest in a series of moves undertaken statewide as California responds to severe drought conditions that may persist into a third year. On May 10, Governor Gavin Newsom expanded an earlier drought proclamation to cover the Klamath River watershed, which includes the Scott and Shasta Rivers in Siskiyou County. The proclamation directs the State Water Board and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to evaluate minimum instream flows and other actions to protect salmon, steelhead, and other native fish and work with water users and other parties on voluntary measures to implement those actions. To the extent voluntary actions are insufficient, the proclamation instructs the board, in coordination with CDFW, to consider emergency measures to establish minimum drought instream flows.

The proclamation was expanded July 8 to cover 50 of the state’s 58 counties, and the Governor has asked all Californians to voluntarily reduce their water usage by 15%.

On June 15, the board received a letter from CDFW that emphasized the critical importance of providing flows for coho and Chinook salmon during the drought and recommended emergency minimum instream flows for the Scott and Shasta Rivers for the next 12 months.

In response, staff released an informal draft emergency regulation on July 16, presented an overview of the draft at a July 20 meeting, and solicited comment through July 23. After receiving more than 100 comment letters, staff [revised the proposed regulation](#) to include increased flexibility for voluntary approaches to local solutions, the ability of the CDFW and the National Marine Fisheries Service to update minimum instream flows if lower flows will protect fisheries, and an exception for water use associated with reforestation efforts.

More information about [drought response in the Scott and Shasta River watersheds](#) can be found on the board’s website.

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 resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.