

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

STATE OF OREGON, COUNTY OF JACKSON

IN THE MATTER OF DECLARATION OF)
LOCAL DISASTER AND REQUEST TO)
DECLARE A STATE DROUGHT EMERGENCY)
FOR JACKSON COUNTY, OREGON)

ORDER NO. 61-15

WHEREAS, on this 13th day of May, 2015, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners finds that Jackson County agricultural and livestock industries, and related economy, are suffering widespread and severe economic damage, potential injuries and loss of property resulting from extreme weather conditions within the County; and

WHEREAS, annual water supplies available for irrigators and ranchers within Jackson County are a function of both available water storage in the Rogue and Applegate Rivers and in various reservoirs (Willow, Howard Prairie, Hyatt, Emigrant, Agate, Fish, and Four Mile Lakes), and the estimated seasonal inflow from winter snow pack. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has estimated that in this water year, October 1, 2014, through April 28, 2015, the Rogue Basin is at 13 percent of total average snowpack and 89 percent of total average precipitation. As of April 28, 2015, storage for the reservoirs was below average and many at or below 50 percent of capacity; and

WHEREAS, eight long-term snowpack monitoring sites in the basin have set new record low levels for snow water equivalent, including four snow courses on Mt. Ashland that have been measured continuously for over 40 years. Two of these sites were measured with no snow for the first time on record. As of April 1, 2015, the USDA reports that stream flow forecasts decreased significantly from the month prior, and water users in the basin should prepare for limited supplies this summer; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County (Medford Irrigation and Rogue Valley Irrigation Districts) stands to lose approximately 15,600 acre feet of water from Four Mile Lake due to the 2013 Klamath Basin adjudication. Jackson County has relied upon this water for the past 100 years, but has junior rights to the Klamath Basin. This would have a dramatic impact on approximately 20,000 acres of land. The water is used for more than just irrigation; it provides municipal and industrial water to Rogue Valley users and the increased in-stream flows used to move the water improves stream quality. It is unclear if and when water will be required to be released to the Klamath Basin. This potential loss of water would have a large impact on the Rogue Basin; and

WHEREAS, Jackson County has approximately 40,000 acres of irrigation district lands, irrigated in part from stored water. Many irrigation districts may be forced to curtail water sources later this summer. In addition to irrigation district lands, there are approximately 170,000 acres of irrigated lands that have individual water rights that will be affected by low reservoir and stream-flow levels; and

WHEREAS, many farmers, ranchers, and vineyards rely solely upon natural water sources, which are not augmented by local reservoirs, and these natural tributaries to the Rogue and Applegate Rivers are in extreme jeopardy of drying, as they rely upon annual snowpack to run; and

WHEREAS, local water experts proclaim that this the lowest snowpack of record in Jackson County; and

WHEREAS, the extended weather forecast for Jackson County projects higher than normal temperatures, and below average precipitation; and

WHEREAS, the above conditions result in loss of economic stability, pasture shortages, decrease in feed production, shortened growing season, and decreased water supplies for Jackson County agricultural, vineyard and livestock producers. In addition, this multi-year cumulative drought has resulted in decreased fuel moisture and early onset fire danger; and

WHEREAS, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners determines that extraordinary measures must be taken to alleviate suffering of people and livestock and to protect or mitigate economic loss, and to be responsive to the threat of wildfires.

The Board of County Commissioners of Jackson County hereby proclaims:

1. A local disaster is declared within Jackson County.
2. The Drought Annex of the Jackson County Emergency Operations Plan has been implemented.
3. Pursuant to ORS 401.165, the Board finds that appropriate response is beyond the capability of Jackson County and is declaring a state of emergency for the purpose of assessment, evaluation, and acquiring the ability to provide appropriate available resources.
4. **Request:** The Honorable Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon, declare a Drought Emergency for all of Jackson County under the provisions of ORS 401.165 due to severe and continuing drought conditions beginning at this time and continuing for an unknown period of time; and direct the Oregon Department of Water Resources to make available in Jackson County: Temporary Transfers of Water Rights, and Emergency Water Use Permits, and Use of Existing Right Option/Agreement, and Grant Preference of Use to Water Rights for Human Consumption; and other federal and state drought assistance and programs as needed.
5. This proclamation shall take effect immediately from and after its issuance.

DATED this 13th day of May, 2015, at Medford, Oregon.

JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Absent
Doug Breidenthal, Chair

Colleen Roberts
Colleen Roberts, Commissioner

Rick Dyer
Rick Dyer, Commissioner