



# Media Release

## **Dry weather prompts restrictions for some junior water right holders on the Scott River**

### ***Current low flows threaten survival of coho salmon***

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**SACRAMENTO** – With dry conditions resulting in low flows and threatening the survival of coho salmon, the State Water Board today sent [notices of water](#) unavailability to 110 junior water right holders in the Scott River basin in Siskiyou County, urging them to stop diverting.

The Scott River is an important Klamath River tributary for spawning and rearing coho and serves as critical habitat for Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. Low flow conditions this year are threatening the survival of coho fry emerging from gravel and juvenile coho that rely on robust seasonal flows to reach suitable summer rearing habitat. Temporarily halting diversions will leave more water instream and improve habitat and migratory conditions for salmon and steelhead in the Scott River and its tributaries.

“While there is an adequate supply of water in the watershed in wetter years, episodes of dry conditions are far more common,” said Jule Rizzardo, Assistant Deputy Director for Enforcement/Division of Water Rights. “Unfortunately, this is a year when water flows are insufficient to meet human demand and protect our endangered salmon population. Further action might be necessary, but at this point, the notices only affect a small percentage of right holders.”

Under California law, a water right holder can use surface water for beneficial purposes such as agriculture, municipal supply, recreation and protection and enhancement of the environment. Water use restrictions generally are determined by seniority and the type of water right. In times of shortage, those with more junior rights may be required to stop diverting from rivers and streams before restrictions are imposed on more senior water right holders. (In this instance, the restrictions apply to those whose junior rights were [adjudicated in 1980](#)).

Although only 148 of the 803 water rights in the Scott River watershed are affected, the Scott Valley Irrigation District, which is the largest right holder in the basin, is being



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asked to stop diverting. Right holders under a water unavailability directive nonetheless can still access their water previously stored in reservoirs. If that option is unavailable, they will have to find alternative sources such as groundwater or purchased water.

Today's action follows an assessment of the inflow projections, along with forecasts for future precipitation. The notices are likely to remain in effect until winter rains restore flows. Conditions will be closely monitored and junior right holders will be updated if flows improve and water becomes available. Similar directives were sent during California's [historic drought in 2013-17](#).

Those who illegally divert when there is insufficient water under their priority of right are subject to potential enforcement actions, including fines of up to \$500 per day.

The State Water Board is encouraging diverters to collaborate on voluntary agreements that help local communities adapt to water shortages, prevent impacts to other legal water right users, and are beneficial to fish and wildlife.

More information about [water rights](#) is available on the board 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 water resource allocation and efficient use for current and future generations.

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