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Yakima Basin Water Supply - May Forecast Released

YAKIMA, Wash. - The Bureau of Reclamation's May 2016 Total Water Supply Available (TWSA) forecast for the Yakima Basin indicates a full water supply for senior water rights during the 2015 irrigation season, but an estimated 85 percent supply for junior (proratable) water rights.

"The warm temperatures and lack of precipitation in April deteriorated the water supply enough to cause the 85% prorationing to the proratable users," said Chuck Garner, Yakima Project River Operations supervisor.

Reclamation will provide water supply forecasts early each month through July. Specific water delivery levels will not be determined until later in the year after reservoir storage begins to decline.

The May TWSA forecast is based on flows, precipitation, snowpack, and reservoir storage as of May 1, along with estimates of future precipitation and river flows. Other future weather conditions that determine the timing of the run-off and the demand for water are also critical in determining stream flows, prorationing, and the extent to which the reservoirs fill.

"April was warm and dry. In fact, April precipitation was the lowest on record and the "natural" runoff was the highest in the last 35 years. The warm and dry combination left the snow pack on May 1st well below average. On the bright side all the reservoirs are expected to fill and we still do have some snow pack to provide for stream flows going forward." Garner said. "The snowmelt timing, the summer weather, and the irrigation demands are still important unknown factors that can influence streamflow levels and the carry-over storage at the end of the season."

In the event that spring precipitation and runoff are unfavorable, the water supply available for junior users could decline. Since long term weather conditions are largely unpredictable, Garner recommends that efficient water use be a key objective of the irrigators in the Yakima Basin so that all may have an adequate supply this season.

For more information, visit our website at <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/hydromet/yakima>

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