

## **2026/2027 Crooked River Release Schedule – 06/16/2026**

Reclamation's operation of the Crooked River Project (Project) is guided by the original Project Authority(s) and the Crooked River Collaborative Water Security and Jobs Act of 2014 (CRA) as well as by provisions provided in Reclamation's Biological Assessment (BA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) subsequent 2020 Biological Opinion (BiOp) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS – NOAA Fisheries) 2022 BiOp. The CRA requires Reclamation to consult with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service (Services) to develop an annual release schedule for the stored uncontracted water and the City of Prineville's groundwater mitigation storage account (CoP) in Prineville Reservoir. In addition, relevant Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPMs) and Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) in the Services' BiOp include several actions that Reclamation must also consider when developing the annual release schedule for the uncontracted and CoP storage accounts.

The 2026 water year's day of allocation for Prineville Reservoir was determined by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to be April 17, 2026. Reclamation received the final flow recommendation for the stored uncontracted water and the CoP account from the USFWS and NMFS on June 8, 2026 (attached).

In 2026, Prineville Reservoir filled to 72 percent capacity of 106,526 acre-feet. After subtracting estimated reservoir losses (including sedimentation, evaporation, and seepage) proportionally across all storage accounts, the total allocated uncontracted storage was 19,331 acre-feet and the total allocated storage for the CoP account was 4,830 acre-feet.

### **Release Schedule**

Reclamation's 2026/2027 A.R. Bowman Dam Release Schedule is consistent with the Services' 2026/2027 recommendations:

- Reclamation will aim to maintain at least 10-20 cfs at the CAPO gage through the end of irrigation season (approximately October 15, 2026). This will be through a combination of NUID storage releases, City of Prineville groundwater mitigation account releases (until exhausted), and uncontracted water (after CoP account storage is exhausted).
- After the irrigation season, Reclamation will release approximately 50 cfs from uncontracted storage from approximately October 16, 2026 to April 15, 2027.
- In cooperation with the Services and OID, Reclamation will support and help to coordinate pulse flow releases during the 2026/2027 season that are beneficial, logistically possible, and will not interfere with essential project operations.

### **Protocols and Caveats**

As in years past, Reclamation will make efforts, within the confines of legal and logistical constraints, to meet the 2026/2027 flow schedule. Some variation is expected due to logistical constraints including, but not limited to, regulation gate precision, unexpected real-time diversionary changes, and typical gage accuracy/error. Reclamation reserves the discretion to make any necessary changes to flow rates from A.R. Bowman Dam to be consistent with required project operations such as releases for flood risk management.

Throughout the duration of these scheduled releases, the monthly Prineville Reservoir status call will be continued. When necessary, these calls will include discussions regarding releases and operations to assess potential hydrologic changes, etc. These situations may provide opportunities for changes in

winter flows or operations that could enhance short or long-term benefits to fish and wildlife resources and/or operations. The 2026/2027 release schedule may be modified in this way with consultation between Reclamation, the Services, and OID based on:

- Considerations for flows that benefit fish and wildlife that can also promote system flexibility and irrigation efficiency
- Changes in release schedule that have additional benefits for specific life stages of fish species that do not adversely affect operation of the facility
- Any emergency or necessary changes to the releases schedule to accommodate safe and appropriate operation of the facility

### **Attachments**

USFWS and NMFS Crooked River Act Recommendation for 2026 to 2027

“Crooked Flow Rec – updated considerations” email

Letter to OWRD: Request for Protection – City of Prineville Mitigation Water \_Secondary Instream Water Right – Application No. S-88402, Certificate No. 94149 – U. S. Bureau of Reclamation

## **USFWS and NMFS Crooked River Act Recommendation for 2026 to 2027**

This document provides the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Crooked River flow recommendation for 2026 to 2027, pursuant to the consultation requirement under Section 4 of the Crooked River Collaborative Water Security and Jobs Act of 2014 (CRA). The FWS and NMFS (collectively the Services) are submitting this proposed annual release schedule for the Uncontracted Storage account and the contracted City of Prineville Groundwater Mitigation account per the CRA. The CRA requires the US Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) consult with the Services to develop an annual release schedule that “...maximizes, to the maximum extent practicable, benefits to downstream fish and wildlife.”

In addition to the Services’ obligation under the CRA, the FWS and NMFS concluded their Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (DBHCP) development and approval process on December 31, 2020, and October 18, 2022, respectively, and issued Incidental Take Permits<sup>1,2</sup> to the City of Prineville and eight Central Oregon irrigation districts (collectively the Permittees). The DBHCP was designed to work with the CRA, and we have considered the applicable elements of the DBHCP while drafting our CRA recommendation.

Reclamation has determined that the Day of Allocation for Prineville Reservoir occurred on April 17th, 2026.<sup>3</sup> After accounting for sedimentation and reservoir losses resulting from evaporation and seepage, Reclamation concluded that the total active capacity in Prineville Reservoir for 2026 was 100,878 acre-feet (af). Accordingly, Reclamation adjusts all storage accounts pro rata resulting in a total volume of 19,331 af of uncontracted storage and 4,830 af of Prineville groundwater mitigation storage, for a total storage volume of 24,161 af for fish and wildlife purposes.

### **USFWS and NMFS 2026 to 2027 Instream Flow Recommendation**

For the 2026-2027 irrigation and storage season, the Services consider that the following recommendation most effectively achieves the CRA’s goal of maximizing, to the maximum extent practicable, the benefits to downstream fish and wildlife. We recommend that Reclamation maintain a flow of approximately 80 cfs as measured at the CAPO gauge near the City of Prineville through mid-May to maintain habitat supporting Steelhead redds that have been observed from spawning primarily in the valley reach throughout March and April. Then, due to record low winter precipitation and resulting low uncontracted storage volumes, we recommend reducing uncontracted releases to 0 cfs and utilizing the Prineville mitigation storage account adaptively to maintain a minimum of 20 cfs at the CAPO gage until irrigation ends (historically on or about October 15). After irrigation season, we recommend maintaining approximately 50 cfs at CAPO during the storage season (roughly October 16 through April 14). We recognize that the recommended flow volumes and timing may slightly change as the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/project/deschutes-river-basin-habitat-conservation-plan>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/habitat-conservation/habitat-conservation-plans-west-coast>

<sup>3</sup> Final 2026 storage allocation table is available at:

<https://www.usbr.gov/pn/cao/projects/PrinevilleResStorage/PrinevilleResStorage.html>

irrigation/storage season progresses, and the Services may recommend in-season adjustments per Reclamation's weekly schedule for storage releases.

### **Irrigation Season**

Reclamation has been releasing approximately 80 cfs since the 2025-26 storage season. These flows have supported record levels of Steelhead spawning as observed by ODFW throughout March and April. Based on incubation timing and warm water temperatures, it's estimated that the majority of these Steelhead fry will have hatched by mid-May (Jerry George, pers. coms). As such, during the early irrigation season the Services recommend Crooked River instream flow to be maintained at 80 cfs through May 13. After May 13, the Services recommend that no uncontracted fish and wildlife flow (0 cfs) be released until the end of the irrigation release season, approximately October 15, 2026.

A minimum release of 10 cfs must be maintained from the reservoir for the benefit of downstream fish as required by Section 4 of the Crooked River Project authorization, Act of August 6, 1956 (70 Stat. 1058; 73 Stat. 554; 78 Stat. 954), as amended by the Crooked River Collaborative Water Security and Jobs Act of 2014 (Pub. Law 113-244, 128 stat. 2864, Dec. 18, 2014). While the Act provides a legal minimum flow standard, it is not based on contemporary science and was established prior to the development of instream flow modeling for fish habitat.

In the event that the irrigation season ends early or reduced diversion rates by NUID or OID are expected, and in recognition that a 10 cfs minimum flow is not adequate to sustain various fish and wildlife habitat needs on the Crooked River, the Services recommend that the Prineville mitigation account be released to maintain a minimum of 20 cfs (measured at the CAPO gage) during the irrigation season when NUID and OID are not diverting.

### **Storage Season**

The Services recommend that 50 cfs be released from Bowman Dam from the end of irrigation season, approximately mid-October, through the entire storage season, to benefit fish and wildlife. The Services recommend using the uncontracted account to maintain this flow of 50 cfs at CAPO from October 16, 2026 until the start of the 2027 irrigation season on or about April 15, 2027.

### **Smolt Outmigration and Adult Migration Flow Enhancement**

The Services determine what smolt outmigration or supplemental instream flows will maximize benefits to steelhead, bull trout, spring Chinook, and other native fish species in the Crooked River after consulting and coordinating with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the Pelton Round Butte Project Fish Committee. In the event that additional precipitation occurs and water becomes available, flows could either be supplemented to increase storage season flows and/or provide water to perform "pulse flows" to assist spring Chinook and steelhead smolts migrating out of the Crooked River system in the Spring of 2027. It may also be possible to release additional

flow during the adult spring Chinook migration and spawning season (Feb – April 2027). The specific details of these releases will consider the best available real-time information on river conditions, smolt out-planting dates, and other habitat and climate conditions at the time. The Services and our partners will seek to educate the public regarding these flow changes using existing public outreach strategies.

### Flood Control Operations

If Reclamation conducts flood control operations during the 2026 to 2027 period addressed by this recommendation, the Services request that Reclamation cease all releases from uncontracted storage until flood control operations are concluded. This is because flood control releases will already be meeting the Services' recommended storage season instream flow for fish and wildlife. It is our understanding that there can be intermittent periods of flood control followed by a return to normal storage season operations. During these periods of normal storage season operations, we recommend that Reclamation release 50 cfs from uncontracted storage.

### **Rationale for USFWS/NMFS 2026 to 2027 Recommendation**

Our recommendation is based on the following rationale.

- 1) Record breaking low winter precipitation in the contributing basin for Bowman Reservoir resulted in low uncontracted storage volume (the uncontracted account has approximately forty percent of total uncontracted capacity) and the need to balance irrigation and storage season flows. This recommendation will provide spring Chinook, steelhead, redband trout habitat during the irrigation and storage seasons.
- 2) This recommendation will allow storage season flows to be maintained at 50 cfs, the minimum level necessary to maintain fish and wildlife, and will provide 73 and 74 percent of total juvenile steelhead and chinook rearing habitat, respectively. We anticipate that the storage season flows we have recommended will help prevent anchor ice formation, which results in significant fish mortality, and will also be suitable for foraging subadult and adult bull trout. During the winter storage season flows from Prineville Reservoir are needed to support fish species from Bowman Dam at RM 70 to the river's confluence with Lake Billy Chinook, since at this time of the water year there is no irrigation flow to augment fish and wildlife instream flows. During the storage season approximately 26 miles of the Crooked River from Bowman Dam to the confluences of Ochoco and McKay Creeks are almost entirely dependent on Prineville Reservoir fish and wildlife flows.
- 3) This recommendation will not provide uncontracted storage pulse flow releases for juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead habitat during the irrigation season but instead prioritizes and maximizes storage season flows and habitat. Additionally, this recommendation maintains minimum instream flows through the Prineville mitigation account during irrigation season in the event diversions are reduced or irrigation season ends early. The decrease in available and suitable habitat under low flow conditions could restrict diel or seasonal movement to important habitats, result in fish congregating in the

remaining pool habitats, cause increased stress and disease transmission, and could lead to the immediate or delayed mortality of a large portion of the native fish population. Extremely low flows will also expose cobble and gravel bars, reducing benthic macroinvertebrate production, an important forage base for Crooked River fishes, including rearing juvenile Chinook Salmon and steelhead. Releases from contracted storage accounts are anticipated to provide some level of instream flow during the April to October irrigation season. NUID's calls for Prineville Reservoir storage range from 22 cfs to over 70 cfs, which at some times during the irrigation season, will provide adequate irrigation season instream flows without releases from uncontracted storage and help maintain fish and wildlife in the Crooked River between Bowman Dam (RM 70) and NUID's pumps (RM 27). The flow between the NUID pumps and the beginning of significant spring inflow at Osborne Canyon (RM 8) will be supported by return flows, some spring inflow, and any undiverted irrigation releases. The Services recognize there will also be periods of low flow observed at the CAPO gauge in Prineville during the irrigation season. This may create conditions that are unfavorable for cold-water species such as steelhead, chinook, redband, and bull trout. However, we anticipate that these conditions will be temporary, and that NUID's periodic calls for reservoir storage releases will improve conditions. We will work with BOR adaptively manage recommendations for low flow conditions with supplemental water from the Prineville mitigation account when feasible.

- 4) Our recommendation takes into consideration that releases of fish and wildlife flows from uncontracted storage are currently considered to be "live flow" under Oregon state law. This is because uncontracted storage releases do not have the protection of a secondary water right. As a result, they may be diverted by parties downstream of Bowman Dam, such as NUID, that may have unmet live flow diversion rights. Since these flows are vulnerable to diversion, particularly during the irrigation season, their benefits to fish and wildlife are maximized by retaining them for storage season release, or as carryover for the next water year.

## References

- Hardin, T. 1993. Crooked River Instream Flow Study. Summary Report. Prepared for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Report, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Hardin-Davis, Inc. Albany, Oregon.
- Hardin, T. 2001. Physical Habitat for Anadromous Species in the Crooked River below Bowman Dam. Prepared for U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Hardin-Davis, Inc. Corvallis, Oregon.
- Hardin, T. 2011. Modeling flow alternatives to balance fish, reservoir, and out-of-stream needs in the Crooked River below Prineville Reservoir. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Report. 14 pp
- Northwest Power and Conservation Council. 2005. Deschutes Subbasin Plan. In Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. Portland, Oregon. 668 pp.



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**Crooked Flow Rec - updated considerations**

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**From** Tai, Leah C <leah\_tai@fws.gov>

**Date** Mon 6/15/2026 9:14 PM

**To** Horner, Corinne L <chorner@usbr.gov>

Corrine,

Based on the high level of return flows and tributary flow contributions on the Crooked River supporting habitat below Prineville through to the Canyon reach, the Service recommends reducing use of Prineville Mitigation storage to 10 cfs, in the event NUID does not call for water this week, to save this stored water for anticipated lower flow conditions throughout the system in the late summer (Aug-Sept).

Please let me know if you'd like to discuss further. Thanks!

Leah



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
Bend Field Office  
1375 SE Wilson Avenue, Suite 100  
Bend, OR 97702-2607

IN REPLY REFER TO:

BFO-1400  
2.2.4.23

VIA ELECTRONIC, FEDEX AND/OR U.S. MAIL

Mr. William Nashem  
Watermaster  
Oregon Water Resources Department  
231 Scalehouse Loop, Suite 103  
Bend, OR 97702

Subject: Request for Protection – Secondary Instream Water Right – Application No., S-88402,  
Certificate No. 94149 – U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Dear Mr. Nashem:

The Bureau of Reclamation is the holder of Certificate No. 94149. Each calendar year Reclamation receives the entirety of the City of Prineville's mitigation water storage in Prineville Reservoir. The day of allocation for Prineville reservoir was April 17, 2026. Based on current interpretations and estimates of reservoir losses, 4,830 acre-feet of the total 5,100 acre-feet of the City of Pineville's mitigation water was allocated for release in 2026.

Reclamation intends to release the total allocated storage for the City of Prineville's mitigation water account during this calendar year (2026). Based on preliminary flow recommendations from the USFWS and NMSF, Reclamation is requesting the following amounts and durations of releases of the City of Prineville's mitigation water as follows: Reclamation intends to release approximately 10-20 cubic feet per second from the City of Prineville's mitigation water during the irrigation season when NUID is not diverting water.

Reclamation is requesting that OWRD protect these releases from diversion from A. R. Bowman Dam to Lake Billy Chinook as provided for by Certificate No. 94149's secondary (instream) water right.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. David Weidinger, Bend Field Office Manager, at (541) 408-8343.

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IDAHO, MONTANA\*, OREGON\*, WASHINGTON

\* PARTIAL

Sincerely,

**DAVID WEIDINGER** DAVID WEIDINGER  
2026.06.12 15:05:56 -07'00'

David Weidinger,  
Bend Field Office Manager.

cc:

Ms. Carolyn Sufit  
Oregon Water Resources Department  
231 Scalehouse Loop, Suite 103  
Bend, OR 97702

Mr. Dwight French  
725 Summer Street NE, Suite A  
Salem, OR 97301

Mr. Mike Kasberger  
City of Prineville  
387 NE 3rd Street  
Prineville, OR 97754