

By Vickie Aldous  
Mail Tribune

Water managers are warning farmers and others who rely on irrigation in Jackson County to brace for low water supplies that could cut the growing season short.

Located east of Ashland, three reservoirs that are key for irrigation are at historically low levels.

Emigrant Lake was 15% full, Hyatt Lake was 14% full and Howard Prairie Lake was 8% full as of Monday, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Those low water levels will impact irrigation districts and their customers, as well as people who enjoy recreating at the lakes and visiting county parks on their shores.

"It may likely be the shortest growing season on record. We've never seen reservoir levels this low since 1961 when the system was built," Jackson County Roads and Parks Director John Vial said Tuesday during a briefing with Jackson County commissioners.

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The low water levels may come as a surprise to those who haven't visited the lakes lately.

The Rogue Valley has seen a fairly rainy winter with snow in the mountains.

The amount of water in the snowpack was 87% of normal in the Rogue and Umpqua basins, and precipitation stood at 84% of normal in the basins as of March 1, said Shavon Haynes, Oregon Water Resources Department watermaster for the Medford area.

But the areas that feed into Emigrant Lake, Hyatt Lake and Howard Prairie Lake in southeastern Jackson County aren't benefiting as much from that precipitation.

"The southeastern portion of the county is suffering more from lack of snowmelt, stream flow and water storage," Haynes said.

Even with a shortened irrigation season in 2020, water in the lakes has been dwindling away.

Usually in October, the three lakes combined