

Officials revise strategy for California's largest reservoir

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State and federal officials said Tuesday that they're revising their strategy for releasing water from the California's largest reservoir for the coming long, hot summer to avoid killing off this year's run of endangered salmon.

The shift to hold back water from Shasta Lake north of Redding is meant to take advantage of what little cool water there is in the warming lake required for survival of spawning winter-run Chinook salmon.

This approach could require releasing more water from other reservoirs, officials said.

"The situation is grim for everyone and everything," said Chuck Bonham, director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. "The winter-run Chinook salmon may not survive losses in the Sacramento River similar to last year. At the same time, the situation is dire for California's urban water users and agricultural community."

Equipment that measures temperatures of water in Shasta Lake is to blame for having to revise the plan, said David Murillo, regional director for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. A thermometer that officials use to measure the lake temperatures provided inaccurate readings, officials said.

This year is especially challenging, water officials said, because this summer is expected to be hotter than last year's and there is less water in the state to go around.

The migrating salmon spawn in the California river, swim back to the ocean and then return upriver to lay their eggs in a three-year cycle, said Will Stelle, West Coast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries.

"The last two years have been a catastrophic fall," Stelle said. "We don't want to repeat it."