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# TRINITY RIVER

**THREAT:** Excessive water withdrawals, inadequate temperature protection

**STATES:** California

**AT RISK:** Tribal fishing and water rights, clean drinking water, fish and wildlife

## SUMMARY

The Trinity River—the largest tributary of the Klamath—plays a vital role for salmon, steelhead and green sturgeon. The Trinity, known as Hun’ to the Hoopa Tribe, who have resided on its banks for millennia, holds remarkable value to wildlife and people. The Hoopa Valley and Yurok Tribes have been stewarding and defending the river for generations, fighting for Tribal rights and environmental justice for the people and the waters. The Trinity is threatened from excessive water diversions, new water demands, and the effects of drought and climate change. Governor Newsom and Interior Secretary Haaland must take action to ensure protection of the Trinity River and to support Tribal Nations and their federally reserved fishing rights, culture, and livelihoods.

AARON MARTIN, YUOK TRIBE

## THE RIVER

The Trinity River of northwestern California is the largest tributary of the Klamath River. The river begins in the Trinity Alps and Scott Mountains, then flows 165 miles through the Klamath Mountains and Coast Ranges, until it finally meets the Klamath River where the Hoopa and Yurok Reservations intersect.

The Trinity River flows through the Hoopa Valley Reservation and is the lifeblood of the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Yurok Tribe, and Nor El Muk Band of Wintu Indians. The Hoopa Tribe maintains fishing rights and relies on the river for their drinking water, ceremonies and their main food source—salmon. The Hoopa Valley and Yurok Tribes’ stewardship of the Trinity River goes beyond activism and advocacy. As guardians of the Trinity, members of the Tribes have pushed relentlessly for decades to ensure the health of the river, defending the Trinity—from the courtroom to the White House—and ensuring the river could persist in the face of the threat posed by diversions.

The Trinity is a designated Wild and Scenic River, a source of clean, cold water for salmon and people downstream, and produces hydroelectricity at four locations as it is diverted into the Sacramento River for agricultural purposes. Coastal commercial fishermen also rely on Trinity River salmon as the Klamath Basin’s largest salmon spawning tributary.

## THE THREAT

The Trinity River is diverted into the Sacramento River for the Central Valley Water Project. Until a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed to restore the river in 2000, up to 90% of the river was diverted. The ROD—which allows up to 49% of river to stay in the watershed—provides no meaningful protections for cold water reservoir storage; State water right policies have not been updated to recognize Tribal rights



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## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
TRINITYRIVER2024](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/TRINITYRIVER2024)



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or provide adequate cold river temperatures. Consequently, Biological Opinions enacted during the Trump administration have led to reservoir depletion, rising river temperatures, and other environmental impacts that put threatened coho salmon and chinook salmon at risk. Currently the Tribes are also dealing with some of the lowest salmon returns in history and toxic algae outbreaks, which impacts their cultural use, food security, wellness and livelihoods. Additionally, commercial and recreational salmon fishing has been prohibited in recent years.

With the removal of the Klamath River dams, a watershed-wide

restoration effort has begun. The Trinity River—the main source of cold, clean water for the Lower Klamath River where over 65,000 adult salmon died in 2002—is critical to this restoration. A long-term plan for the Lower Klamath River specified that Trinity River water can be released to stop Klamath fish kills; however in drought years, diversions from Trinity Reservoir threaten the availability of this cold, clean water.

There are currently plans to issue new Biological Opinions for the Central Valley Water Project, and to build a new reservoir (Sites) and a tunnel under the Delta (Delta Conveyance) - all of which threaten the Trinity River. Some proposed alternatives for the Biological Opinion threaten to weaken the ROD instead of protecting reservoir storage and flows. The State Water Board is also planning to amend the Bay-Delta Plan using “Voluntary Agreements” that would use more Trinity River water to avoid decreasing diversions to water users.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Trinity River needs permanent protections from Central Valley water uses. To protect this vital and cherished river, the public may request the following actions:

- The State Water Board must ensure that the Trinity River is protected in the Sites Reservoir and Delta Tunnel water right orders.
- The U.S. Department of Interior must protect the Trinity River through the Biological Assessment and Environmental Impact Study while renegotiating Central Valley Project contracts, as well as any future reviews of the California Water Project. New environmental analyses should explore impacts of removing the Trinity River’s lower dam (Lewiston Dam).
- The State Water Board should protect the Trinity River through its Bay-Delta Planning phases, including updating Water Right Order 90-5 and Trinity River Basin Plan temperature requirements using current science to protect Trinity River fisheries from the impacts of excessive diversions, proposed Bay-Delta Voluntary Agreements, and climate change.
- Central Valley water users must phase out/reduce the use of Trinity River water and stop pushing for unsustainable permanent water contracts to the Westlands Water District, which is located almost 400 miles from the Trinity River.