

Canal-clearing job requires precise backhoe maneuvering

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

CASHMERE, Wash. — It's not a job for the faint of heart, but you wouldn't know that watching Russell Gilmore and Andy Sanders.

Every year about this time, they operate a backhoe and dump truck along a narrow canal road that runs 100 to 400 feet above the floor of the Wenatchee Valley and the town of Cashmere.

They're removing rocks and mud from a 12-mile segment of Wenatchee Reclamation District's Highline Canal. Rocks fall into the canal off steep hillsides when snow melts. This year, there were fewer rocks than usual because there wasn't much snow.

The backhoe is eight feet wide and there are places the canal road is no wider, although most of the time there's a couple of feet to spare on either side.

"It's quite the drop. I don't want to go over. I probably wouldn't survive," Gilmore said, noting there are a few spots that makes him nervous. He's done the job for



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Russell Gilmore backs a dump truck up to a backhoe run by Andy Sanders to clean rocks out of Highline Canal 100 feet or more above Cashmere, Wash., March 19.

27 years.

He's adept at backing the dump truck along the narrow road by keeping just an eagle eye on the driver door mirror.

Sanders runs the backhoe, scooping rocks out of the 10-foot-wide canal and dumping them in the bed of the truck.

Gilmore uses a rope tied to the side of the truck to scramble down into the five-foot-deep canal bed with a shovel. He scoops rocks and

mud that the backhoe bucket misses and tosses them in.

The canal road isn't open to the public. Some people who try to drive it find they don't like it, Gilmore said. "It takes them forever."

The canal dates back to 1902 and carries water from the Wenatchee River at Dryden some 34 miles down valley, through Wenatchee and in a pipe across the 1908 Columbia River bridge to East Wenatchee.



Early Spring Spraying

Region's irrigation districts begin water deliveries

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Tree fruit growers throughout Central Washington are scrambling to spray trees to control pests and diseases sooner than usual because of an early spring warm-up.

It's more of a logistical nuisance than a problem for some orchardists to have to rely on wells to fill their spray tanks until the irrigation districts begin delivering water.

Tree fruit bud development is 14 to 17 days ahead of normal throughout the region because of warm weather, said Tim Smith, Washington State University tree fruit specialist emeritus in Wenatchee. Apricot trees were blooming March 14 in Wenatchee and full bloom of Red Delicious apples may beat the record of April 11 set in 1934, Smith said.

"Mites, scale and powdery mildew are the big things in apples right now," he said, adding that scale and mites in cherries and pear psylla in pears were also being watched.

The main concern with an early spring is a longer period of potential frost or freeze damage from a sudden dip in temperatures. It also means

farmers in the Columbia Basin probably will take irrigation water as soon as they can, said John O'Callaghan, manager of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Irrigation Project in Ephrata.

The project is the largest water reclamation project in the U.S., serving three large irrigation districts and 680,000 acres from Coulee City south 110 miles to near Pasco. There are 331 miles of main canals and 1,339 miles of laterals. The project is on normal start-up schedule, O'Callaghan said.

Water was released into the southern district on March 2, Quincy district on March 18 and the east district on March 23, he said. It's about two weeks from those dates before farmers can get water, he said.

"In cold, wet years, no one wants it right away," he said. "I suspect guys will be more aggressive this year."

Growers pay a base assessment and extra at the end of the season if they've used extra, he said.

The project averages 2.6 million acre-feet of irrigation water annually, pumped from the Columbia River's Lake Roosevelt behind Grand Coulee Dam, through Banks Lake and into the canal system. The lowest usage was 2.2 million acre-feet in 1997 because of heavy snows and rains. Highest usage was 2.9 million acre-feet in 2014. It was a dry year

and there was more double cropping, he said.

The Roza Irrigation District serves 1,700 growers on 72,000 acres of the Lower Yakima Valley. It began charging its canals March 16, which is normal, and started delivering water to growers about March 23, said Scott Revell, the manager.

The Roza is usually one of the first districts affected by drought and has shut down early because of it. The weather in the next two months will determine the severity of this year's drought, Revell said.

Some growers planning to replace orchards in the next year or two are saying they may remove them this season if the drought is bad, he said. Some orchards have been converted to hops because of strong hop prices, he said.

The Wenatchee Reclamation District is on track to begin charging its system April 6, one day ahead of last year, said Rick Smith, superintendent.

The Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District, serving part of East Wenatchee, Brays Landing north of Orondo and Howard Flat near Chelan, may have water available April 1, about 10 days early, said Michael Miller, district manager. Early warm weather allowed early completion of winter maintenance but there's still good soil moisture right now, he said.

GE wheat settlement excludes OSU

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press



Monsanto will give land grant universities in seven states \$50,000 each to settle a class action lawsuit. Oregon State University, whose weed scientist identified the GE wheat, will not share in the settlement.

Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Monsanto Co. will pay \$50,000 each to agricultural colleges in seven states as part of a settlement of class action lawsuits filed after the May 2013 discovery of genetically engineered wheat in Eastern Oregon.

The settlement contains no money for Oregon State University, however. It was OSU weed scientist Carol Mallory-Smith who confirmed the wheat found growing in the Eastern Oregon was "Roundup Ready," meaning it could withstand Monsanto's trademark herbicide. No GMO wheat has been approved for commercial use.

The discovery touched off an uproar that threatened Pacific Northwest soft white wheat exports to Asia, where it is used for noodles, cakes and crackers. Japan and South Korea temporarily suspended purchases as inspectors with the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS, attempted to trace the wheat to its origin. The investigation ended a year later without a definitive answer.

In the meantime, growers in multiple states filed suit against Monsanto, alleging they'd been harmed by the discovery even though in most cases they grow different wheat varieties and sell to different markets. The settlement announced March 18 involves wheat farmers in Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Monsanto said it would give \$50,000 to the agricultural school at the land grant university in each state. Growers and their attorneys will be reimbursed an undisclosed amount for a portion of the expenses and fees they incurred in the case, the company said in a news release.

In a prepared statement, Monsanto attorney Kyle McClain said, "Rather than paying the costs of protracted litigation, this agreement puts that money to work in research and development efforts for the wheat industry. Resolution in this manner is reasonable and in the best interest of all of the parties."

Oregon, Washington and Idaho growers were not participants in the suit, and are not parties to the settlement. Their claims were covered in a previous \$2.357 million settlement.

Oregon State University, a land grant university, did not receive compensation.

Dan Arp, dean of OSU's College of Agricultural Science, said the school had some "modest expenses" re-

lated to testing the GE wheat, but had not sought nor been offered compensation.

"We jumped in in our role as a land grant university, and we applied our knowledge and expertise," Arp said.

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STATEMENT OF NO ACCEPTANCE For The ECBID-USBR "Normative" Financing Proposal For the Delivery of Surface Water to the Odessa Subarea

TO: Mr. Estevan Lopez, Commissioner, USBR; Ms. Lorri Lee, PNWO Regional Director, USBR; Board of Directors, East Columbia Basin Irrigation District

As major land owners, along with our financial/technical representatives, working to build surface water distribution systems from the East Low Canal, for Systems North/South of I-90, we convey to the USBR and ECBID managers a **Statement of No Acceptance** for the District's "normative" financial proposal for surface water delivery from the Canal.

The financial strategy proposed by the District will lead to overall development time delays and increased costs, thus eroding the objective of transferring as much irrigated acreage as possible from groundwater to surface water; and diminishing the financial resources already allocated by Ecology-WA and the USBR to expedite source water conversions.

The District's financial strategy retains several flaws:

- The District's financial proposal does not "add acres," but distributes costs across all acres regardless of location to the ELC; increasing system(s) costs across more acres. The end effect is to discourage participating acres.
- Without accepting legally authorized state water spreading, total system costs cannot be overcome by "normative cost zoning" (everyone pays for everything). The configuration and normative cost scheme affects irrigators' willingness-to-pay and an ability to aggregate individual farm acreages at a sufficient level to pay for system(s) costs.
- The District's LID revenue bonding strategy, where the District is not obligated for the new system(s) debt, is: 1) unproven and speculative; 2) does not offer any annualized cost advantage, if attainable; and 3) does substantially increase total debt service.
- For System 1, the Participants' direct, private sector financing agreement is a proven tool to build large-scale irrigation systems; the pre-construction engineering is completed, and financing is secured. This is a turn-key project, where operational control is transferred to the District with construction completion; this model may be applied to all systems.
- By using the System 1 Participants' (and other systems) private capital as leverage, the Washington State legislative leadership is poised to allocate an additional \$20 million to complete Canal modifications below Lind Coulee. This funding will allow surface water access to be obtained by the System 5-6 Participants. But the legislators will not act without the USBR execution of the water service contract for System 1.

The System 1 Participants' economic model stands in stark contrast to the District's approach, where system configuration is determined by individual irrigators paying for their own marginal system costs; and where the System 1 Participants have **already secured \$40 million of financing** to initiate project construction, with USBR water service contract approval. Every effort should be made by the USBR-District-Ecology to allow the private sector to move forward with system(s) development, while the District focuses on direct canal modifications.