

# Water



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The Yakima River flows along state Highway 225 north of Benton City, Wash., after flowing through the Yakima Valley and about 20 miles from its confluence with the Columbia River. This was March 26 when it was fairly full. Irrigation districts are curtailing water deliveries in an effort to preserve their water supplies.

## Irrigation district shuts down temporarily to save water

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — With a shrinking water forecast and millions of dollars in crops at stake, one of the largest irrigation districts in Washington's Yakima Valley will stop water deliveries to farmers for at least two weeks and buy water from a neighboring district that has senior water rights.

The 72,000-acre Roza Irrigation District will stop delivering water to its 1,700 customers for 14 days, and possibly longer, in an effort to save water for later in the growing season.



Revell

At the same time, the neighboring Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District has agreed to lease 5,000 acre-feet of water to the Roza district this summer. Sunnyside farmers will receive \$500 for every acre they don't irrigate.

The districts' boards took the actions May 5, one day after the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation reduced its estimate of summer water supply for junior water right holders in the Yakima Basin to 47 percent of normal due to drought.

Most farmers in the Yakima Valley will be impacted by the drought to varying degrees, the district managers said. Loss of production and costs of coping with the drought will be in the "tens of millions of dollars and maybe into the hundreds," said Scott Revell, manager of the Roza Irrigation District in Sunnyside.

"Low elevation snow in the mountains is gone and the 47 percent scenario is based on 100 percent of average precipitation for the rest of the season," Revell said.

But precipitation is below average so the water forecast will keep dropping, he said.

"Right now we are using 38 percent of normal as our planning basis," Revell said.

In the drought of 2005, the USBR Yakima Basin forecast dropped to 34 percent of normal and the district shut down early for 23 days, he said. It had similar shutdowns during droughts in 2001 and 1994.

The Roza, a junior water right district, serves the expanse of farmland from Selah to Benton City. Normally, it's entitled to 375,000 acre-feet of water and uses about 300,000 in a season. This year, farmers are hoping for half that.

There are about 110 emergency drought wells in the Yakima Basin with 90 percent of them in the Roza, Revell said. The state Department of Ecology is awaiting legislative funding to authorize their use, he said, adding he does not know the total acreage they serve.

The district cut its usage to 25 percent of normal on April 20. It will stop diverting water from Yakima River above Selah at 7 a.m. May 11. It will take about four days for irrigators to use all the water in the district's 95 miles of mainstem canal and 350 miles of laterals.

To the extent possible, gravity lines and pump tubes from laterals to farms are to remain full to speed restart.

The canals leak too much to hold water during the shutdown so they will be dewatered and river water won't be diverted again until May 26 or perhaps June 1, Revell said. The board will meet May 22 to determine when the system will be reactivated. It

largely depends on how hot the weather gets and if there is rain, he said.

Some cherry growers and blueberry, hay, mint and corn growers want the shutdown minimized while hop, grape, apple and pear growers prefer a longer shutdown to save more water for July through September, Revell said.

"Some of the larger blueberry growers grow other things like hops, grapes and tree fruit. They want water later for those," he said.

Many apple growers have ponds they can use for a partial irrigation in the middle of the shutdown and "in a perfect world we will get a rain or two. It always seems to rain around cherry harvest," he said.

Chances of rain are better in May and June than in July and August.

"Hay guys are asking for one good cutting. Some of them are selling water to hop and apple growers within the district and will forgo first-cutting," he said.

The Roza began delivering water to growers in mid-March and reduced allocations from 7.1 gallons per minute to 1.8 on April 20 in hopes of saving water for later.

Every day the system is shut down about 800 acre-feet of water is saved, Revell said. Customers favor the shutdown 2 to 1, he said.

The shutdown also shuts off water to Terrace Heights Irrigation District, which serves about 200 acres east of Yakima.

The goal is to have water available as far into September as possible.

There may be a slight bump of half a gallon per minute or so for about 10 days at the restart, otherwise deliveries will resume at 1.8 gallons per minute, he said.

Jim Trull, manager of Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District, said its customers have until May 18 to sign up to allow their water to be leased to the Roza district for \$500 per acre for the season.

Roza is budgeting \$1.2 million for 5,000 acre-feet with hopes of having half reimbursed by the state.

"I'm afraid we may not have 5,000 acre-feet because it's late and the season is early. People have already planted," Trull said.

Those most likely to lease out their water are those who haven't yet planted corn or wheat or who can afford not to water pastures, he said.

SVID has senior water rights and 11,000 customers on 94,614 acres from just below Union Gap about 45 miles to just below Prosser. SVID began water deliveries April 1 and has reduced them from 7.5 gallons per minute to 5.7 gpm to save water.

Farther north in the Yakima Basin, the Kittitas Reclamation District, also a junior water right district, started water deliveries April 20 at 1.25 cubic feet per second per acre per 24 hours instead of a normal 2.25 cfs. Timothy growers will get one cutting instead of two. The KRD is the largest irrigation district in the valley, serving 60,000 acres.

Without water runoff from lower elevation snowpack, the irrigation districts are using water from the Yakima Basin's five mountain reservoirs earlier than normal.

Streamflows now are near what they usually are in June or early July, said Chuck Garner, Yakima Project river operations supervisor for USBR in Yakima.

# Oregon water fund rules proposed

## Regulations will lay out operations

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Oregon's water supply development fund is closer to becoming functional now that regulators have proposed rules for its operation that may be finalized in mid-June.

Meanwhile, state lawmakers are considering upping the fund's size from the already-approved \$10 million to \$16 million, along with a bevy of other water proposals.

The fund was created by the Oregon Legislature in 2013 but hasn't yet dispensed any money because irrigators, conservationists and others have been negotiating the environmental conditions that will apply to projects.

Storage projects must dedicate 25 percent of their water for in-stream uses under the law, which is intended to help fish.

They're also subject to "seasonally varying flow" restrictions that determine how much

water can be withdrawn outside the regular irrigation season without disrupting watershed function.

Details about "seasonally varying flow" requirements and other aspects of the fund's operation were hammered out by two task forces in 2014 and early 2015, with that information now being incorporated into proposed rules written by the Oregon Water Resources Department.

Under the rules, projects will be subject to increased scrutiny depending on their impact to streams and how much environmental data is available about the waterway.

The proposed rules were recently made available for public comment, with OWRD scheduled to hold five rule-making hearings around the state between May 18 and May 22. The Oregon Water Resources Commission is expected to consider adopting the regulations during its June 18-19 meeting.

During negotiations, irrigator groups were concerned that the environmental conditions associated with funding could be too onerous for project developers to apply for funds.

The complexity of the rules remains a concern for Sen. Chuck Thomsen, R-Hood River, who was involved in passing Senate Bill 839, which created the water supply development fund.

Environmental restrictions were necessary to get the legislation passed in a Democrat-controlled legislature, but it remains to be seen if projects will be able to meet the 25 percent in-stream use requirement and the "seasonally varying flow" conditions, he said.

"They just take the common sense out of it," Thomsen said.

The conditions placed on water projects will make them more expensive to build at a time when Oregon doesn't have enough reservoirs to store water when it is available, he said.

"We've relied on snow pack for so many years. If it's not

going to be there, we've got to have a back-up," Thomsen said.

At this point, it's important to simply get the water supply development fund up and running to assist projects that can work under the proposed rules, said JR Cook, director of the Northeast Oregon Water Association, who is trying to improve irrigation systems in the region and who participated in the negotiations.

Once the fund is operational with a track record, lawmakers can later make "tweaks" to ensure it functions better, Cook said.

"It requires baby steps," he said. "We can't fix it all at once." The Oregon Water Resources Department is persuading lawmakers to authorize \$50 million in bonds to pay for the state's integrated water resource strategy, which includes an additional \$6.25 million for the water supply development fund.

Of that proposal, \$30 million would be allocated for loans and roughly \$14 million for feasibility studies and other water funding projects.

## Emergency negotiations aim to avert Idaho curtailment

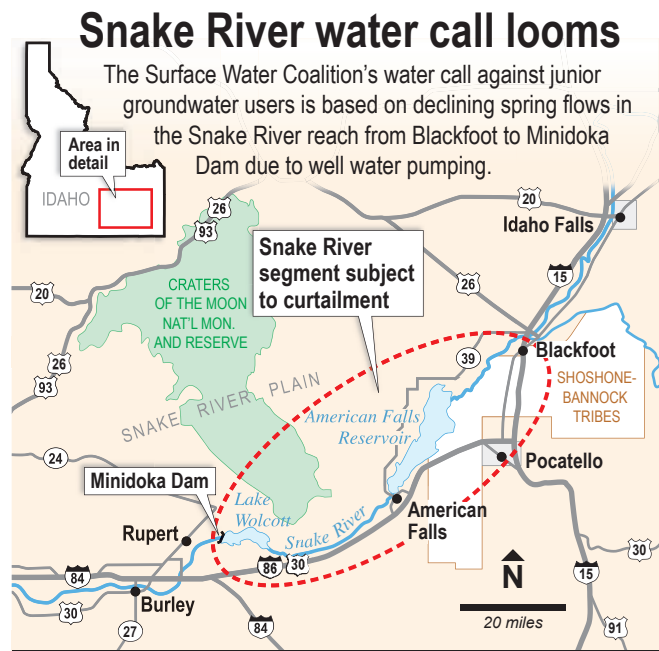
By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — Water managers say last-minute negotiations to avert curtailment of junior wells under the decade-old Surface Water Coalition delivery call could force longterm changes in farming practices for many Southern Idaho irrigators.

Groundwater irrigators subject to the call spanning the area from Jerome to Idaho Falls have fallen short in meeting a May 1 deadline to acquire 89,000 acre-feet of mitigation water — owed this season to Twin Falls Canal Co. and American Falls Reservoir District No. 2.

The coalition's canal companies say groundwater pumping has reduced spring flows into the Snake River from Blackfoot to the Minidoka Dam. Most surface rights predate groundwater rights and therefore receive priority under Idaho law.

Idaho Department of Wa-



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

ter Resources staff are evaluating materials submitted by Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, including evidence of the acquisition of some mitigation water, though it's well below the required amount, and documents on past actions to bolster aquifer levels.

IDWR Deputy Director Mat Weaver said the department will factor in those documents to determine a curtailment priority date, before sending curtailment notices to agricultural, municipal and industrial users early next week.

But groundwater and surface irrigators have also commenced emergency meetings, hoping to agree upon a longterm solution that averts the looming crisis this season while stabilizing aquifer levels into the future.

To facilitate a more open dialogue, both sides have excluded their attorneys from discussions. Weaver has assisted in the meetings to offer IDWR's technical expertise, but even IGWA Executive Director Lynn Tominaga has been left out.

That's fine with him. "This is the first time in 10 years that we've finally gotten the attorneys out of the way and the consultants out of the way, and we're actually sitting down and saying, 'What can we do?' instead of going to court," Tominaga said. "We're finally starting to sit down and talk about solutions, and that's always what we wanted to do, but we have attorneys and other folks get in the way."

## Calif. regulators approve unprecedented water cutbacks

By FENIT NIRAPPIL  
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California water regulators adopted sweeping, unprecedented restrictions Tuesday on how people, governments and businesses can use water amid the state's ongoing drought, hoping to push reluctant residents to deeper conservation.

The State Water Resources Control Board approved rules that force cities to limit watering on public property, encourage homeowners to let their lawns die and impose mandatory water-savings targets for the hundreds of local agencies and cities that supply water to California customers.

Gov. Jerry Brown sought the more stringent regulations, arguing that voluntary conservation efforts have so far not yielded the water savings needed amid a four-year drought. He ordered water agencies to cut urban water use by 25 percent from levels in 2013, the year before he declared a drought emergency.

"It is better to prepare now than face much more painful cuts should it not rain in the fall," board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus said Tuesday as the panel voted 5-0 to approve the new rules.

Although the rules are called mandatory, it's still unclear what punishment the state water board and local agencies will impose for those that don't meet the targets. Board officials said they expect dramatic water savings as soon as June and are willing to add restrictions and penalties for agencies that lag.

But the board lacks staff to oversee each of the hundreds of water agencies, which range dramatically in size and scope. Some local agencies that are tasked with achieving savings do not have the

resources to issue tickets to those who waste water, and many others have chosen not to do so.

Despite the dire warnings,

it's also still not clear that Californians have grasped the seriousness of the drought or the need for conservation. Data released by the board Tuesday

showed that Californians conserved little water in March, and local officials were not aggressive in cracking down on waste.

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