

## Drought

## Boise water allowance rises 78 percent

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — The 2015 water season has improved significantly for farmers in Southwestern Idaho who receive irrigation supplies from the Boise Project Board of Control.

BPBC has raised its 2015 water allotment to 2.95 acre-feet, up significantly from the 1.65 acre-foot allotment it set on April 16.

The project delivers water

to five irrigation districts and 165,000 acres on the Boise River system.

In anticipation of a tight water season, Meridian farmer Drew Eggers, who grows high-water crops such as mint and corn, began pumping from a well in April and purchased water from another landowner on a 1-year lease.

“You spend more money on production costs but it’s something that has to be done,” he said of those mea-

sures. “Water is a link in the chain you have to make sure doesn’t get broken.”

Eggers said the allotment increase has improved his water situation significantly.

“One point six five acre-feet of water won’t raise a crop,” he said. “Now that the allotment is up to (2.95) acre-feet, that kind of relieves some of the pressure and I think we can make it work.”

BPBC Manager Tim Page said a series of May rainstorms helped improve the

Boise system significantly. Conservative use of water in April and May by farmers who anticipated a tight water year also helped, he said.

The rains enabled the project to operate from natural river flows rather than turn to water stored in reservoirs, he said.

“It’s a combination of two or three things that helped us get where we’re at,” Page said.

Pioneer Irrigation District, which receives water from

the Boise River system, is running as normal, with no restrictions, said superintendent Mark Zirschky.

The district was able to operate from natural river flows until the third week of June in 2014 and Pioneer expects that to happen again this year in large part because of the May rains, he said.

“I’m a little surprised (natural flows) held up as good as they did, which has enabled us to get this far this year,” he said. “The rains offset demand

and helped the reservoirs a little bit also.”

Irrigation water in the Boise valley normally flows until the first part of October and the Pioneer board of directors has decided to run the system as normal unless things change significantly, Zirschky said.

“Right now, we don’t see a need to reduce deliveries,” he said. But, he added, “If things really start to go south, then (we might) tail things back a bit.”

## Obama announces another \$110M for drought relief

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

President Obama handed the West another \$110 million in drought relief on June 12, including a promise of \$72 million in crop insurance savings over the next two years for struggling farmers.

Through its Risk Management Agency, the USDA will expand a program that allows farmers to exclude the exceptionally bad production years resulting from drought from the calculation of their crop insurance coverage, providing an estimated \$30 million in additional relief in fiscal 2016 and \$42 million in the following year, according to federal officials.

As part of a sweeping aid package for parched Western states, the Labor Department will give as much as \$18 million to provide jobs for displaced California workers while the USDA Food and Nutrition Service will help set up 760 community meal sites in the Central Valley.

Obama announced the aid package as he and top administration officials were holding a teleconference with Western governors, including California Gov. Jerry Brown and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

“The goal of the briefing was to provide an update to our leaders in the Western United States about the outlook for drought and wildfire in the coming summer season and to talk about ways the federal government is working to partner with states in the West on the challenges they’re currently facing,” White House senior adviser Brian Deese told reporters in a conference call after the president’s meeting.

“Obviously we are focused on and concerned



In this photo taken Monday, May 18, 2015, irrigation pipes sit along a dried irrigation canal on a field farmed by Gino Celli near Stockton, Calif. Last week the administration announced additional aid to drought-stricken farmers.

about the impact of the drought for economic and social conditions across the United States,” he said. “But with the very dry conditions, the outlook for wildfire season is very acute through the West in the summer months.”

Administration leaders took the opportunity to tout a provision in Obama’s budget proposal that aims to protect forest management in the federal wildfire disaster budget.

The provision is similar to legislation by Reps. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., that would force the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies to use contingency money rather than dipping into the forest management account when firefighting costs balloon beyond appropriated levels.

“In the House and Senate, we have a growing coalition of Republicans and Democrats from across the country who recognize that the dynamic (of raiding forest management funds) is self-defeating,” Deese said. “We’re optimistic that we can make some progress.”

The latest aid package adds to the \$190 million the federal government has already devoted to drought relief this year and the anticipated \$1.2 billion in USDA assistance to livestock producers facing grazing losses.

Administration officials say they’ve been coordinating with state and local agencies to respond as 35 percent of the West is facing severe or exceptional drought.

Starting in July, the National Dislocated Work-

er Grant will provide jobs with public and nonprofit agencies for about 1,000 displaced workers for six months. The employees will work on such projects as improving water efficiency and reducing wildfire risk, according to a news release.

Other states with disaster declarations because of drought will also be able to apply for this aid, the release explains. The grants will stabilize the economies of drought-affected regions at a critical time, said Portia Wu, the assistant secretary of labor for employment and training.

“These are temporary positions ... to conduct drought-related relief work,” Wu said. “These grants can provide much needed assistance to get people who’ve lost jobs because of the drought back to work.”

The meals program comes after a similar effort last summer provided meals to low-income children at 725 sites throughout the Central Valley. The USDA will work with faith-based and community groups to set up the meal sites.

In other aid, the Bureau of Reclamation is providing \$6.5 million to projects that improve water management over the next two years. The money will combine with local matching funds to total nearly \$30 million to help alleviate the impacts of the drought.

USDA Rural Development will also provide at least \$7 million to address the drought-related needs of water utilities, and the Interior Department is setting aside \$10 million for 10 wildland fire-resilient landscape projects.

## Owyhee Irrigation District increases its water allotment

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — The Owyhee Irrigation District has increased its 2015 water allotment to 1.6 acre-feet and the bleak irrigation situation facing farmers who get their water from the district has improved ever so slightly.

The new allotment for the 2015 season is up slightly from the previous level of 1.5 acre-feet. But it’s still below last year’s allotment of 1.7 acre-feet and well below the normal allotment of 4 acre-feet.

A two-week stretch of rainstorms added about 10,000 acre-feet to the Owyhee Reservoir system, said Jay Chamberlin, manager of the OID, which provides water for 1,800 farms and 118,000 acres of irrigated land in Eastern Oregon and part of Southwestern Idaho.

“Spread out amongst all the acres, that’s (not a lot) but we’re going to try to get them another tenth of a foot,” Chamberlin said.

The Owyhee Reservoir was dropping at a pace of about 2,000 acre-feet a day but fell only about 200 acre-feet a day during the stretch of rain storms, said OID board member Bruce Corn, a farmer.

Stream in-flows into the reservoir increased from 135 cubic feet per second to about 900 during part of that stretch, Corn said.

Farmers in the area are suffering through a fourth straight year of drought conditions and have left a lot of ground fallow and planted less water-intensive crops as a result.

While the rains didn’t turn things around, they have helped this year’s situation a little bit by enabling OID to provide farmers a tad bit more water, Corn said.

“That’s still only 40 percent of the normal allotment, but every little bit helps,” he said.

Chamberlin said the district hopes to keep the water flowing until the first part of August, which is the same time OID stopped delivering water last year. He said the rains may add a few days to the end of the season.

Nyssa farmer Craig Froerer hopes the rains allow the water to flow until close to September.

If the season is extended, that could make a big difference for some growers, said Froerer, who estimates last year’s tight water supply had about a \$1 million impact on his farm.

Froerer will be finished watering his short-term crops, like wheat and peas, by then, but the extra water would be especially important for his long-term crops, such as mint and asparagus.

“If we can last a little bit longer ... it will make a big difference to us,” he said.

The rains didn’t solve all the region’s water problems “and it was not a game-changer, but it may lengthen the season a little bit, which is very, very important,” Corn said. “It’s still a bit better than it would have been and it gives people a little hope.”

## Yakima Valley orchards losing to drought

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — Several growers are tearing out apple orchards in the Yakima Valley to save water for more profitable apple varieties as they cope with drought.

Tens of acres of apple trees have been torn out on Konnowac Pass between Moxee and Zillah, said Scott Revell, manager of the Roza Irrigation District.

It is not an Evans Fruit Co. orchard but is next to it, said Jeannette Evans, co-owner of the Evans Fruit in Cowiche. It belongs to

someone in Zillah and eventually will become hops, she said.

Several growers are cutting down marginal apple orchards to save water for higher-value orchards, said Cliff Plath, orchard manager of Washington Fruit & Produce Co., Yakima.

“We have orchard land fallow now that we are keeping fallow so we can use the water in other orchards,” Plath said. “In light of water management several years ago we switched a small percentage of our operation to wine grapes because they use less water.”

The Yakima Valley cherry



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The upper end of Keechelus Lake near Snoqualmie Pass on June 14, lower than normal because of early drawdown to feed drought-stricken Yakima Basin. The lake is at 61 percent of full.

crop has suffered from lack of water and heat, Evans said.

Colin Morrell, a Benton City grower, said his cherries were a size smaller than normal and more went for brining than fresh market because of less water. Pack-

outs were down 10 percent, he said.

Roza Irrigation District shut down water deliveries from May 11 to June 1 to save water for later in the season. Morrell said the re-start, while still of limited amount, helped get cherries

through 100-plus degree heat on June 9 and 10. He said some of his wine grapes have not developed full clusters because of lack of water and some of a neighbor’s apple trees “look weak and yellow.”

“I had what looked like a really nice cherry crop. I put in a wind machine to protect it and spent money on propane. I knew there was talk of drought, but I didn’t anticipate it being this bad. That’s where I made a tactical error thinking more about (spring) frost than drought,” Morrell said.

His biggest concern now, he said, is how early the Roza shuts down.

Right now, at 44 percent of normal water supply in the Yakima Basin, the Roza should make it to Sept. 22, Revell said. Normally, the district provides water to Oct. 20. Fall water is crucial for apples, pears, grapes and hops.

The Roza district is now up from 8,000 to 9,400 acre feet of court-approved water leases, Revell said. Another 257 acre feet from the Naches Selah Irrigation District is forthcoming and the Roza is capturing another 1,500 acre feet by pumping its own drainage back into the canal, he said.

## LEGAL

## PORT OF GRANDVIEW REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Port of Grandview invites proposals from persons or businesses interested in starting a business in the Ports Business Incubator Building located at 683 Wallace Way, Grandview, WA. The purpose of this RFP is to determine interest in locating and starting new businesses in the building. The type of business proposals selected will determine the interior construction required, rental rates and occupancy dates.

All proposals shall include:

- The type of business (manufacturing, wholesale or retail)
- The area required (sq. footage)
- Volumes of water and sewer necessary.
- Natural gas and power requirements
- Product(s) to be manufactured or created
- Specific building requirements
- Anticipated number of employees
- Names and contact information of principals
- Personal or business references.

Persons interested in viewing the building or having questions should contact: Jessica Hansen, Executive Director, Port of Grandview, 509-882-9975 or jessica@portofgrandview.org. Proposals in sealed envelopes marked “Incubator Proposal” should be postmarked not later than Tuesday, July 28, 2015 and addressed to: Port of Grandview, PO Box 392, Grandview, WA 98930 Legal-25-4-2/#4

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