

## Water

# Water funding package passes Oregon Legislature

Umatilla, Morrow county project to benefit from bonds

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
EO Media Group

Oregon’s budget will include \$50 million for water development and efficiency projects in a funding package passed by the Legislature. That’s good news for northeast Oregon farmers trying to pump more irrigation water from the Columbia River to expand the region’s agricultural economy. Prior to his resignation in February, former Gov. John Kitzhaber called for \$51.6

million in a statewide water development account to help pay for new water supplies and restoration. Gov. Kate Brown also backed the request after her appointment. What the Legislature ultimately approved was \$20 million in lottery bonds and \$30 million in general obligation bonds to accomplish that goal. Part of the money could be used for pipes and infrastructure to pump additional Columbia River water onto farms between Hermiston

and Boardman, growing high-value crops such as potatoes and onions. The proposal, crafted by the Northeast Oregon Water Association, has taken months of careful negotiations to make sure they balance conservation interests. Now, state dollars are officially in place to move forward with the project’s first phase. “The Legislature has worked so hard on our region’s behalf, and on behalf of the state of Oregon to provide a pathway for sen-

sible, multi-beneficial water development efforts to move forward,” said Bob Levy, a longtime Hermiston farmer and secretary of NOWA. Out of more than 300 requests to the Capital Construction Committee, only 95 were recommended for funding, according to Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. With bipartisan support from Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, Hansell sent a letter March 9 to the committee’s co-chairs urging support for water development and, in particular, the NOWA proposal. While grants will be award-

ed competitively to projects throughout the state, Hansell said NOWA appears to have a substantial head start with the foundation they’ve already laid. “From the beginning of my time in the legislature, this has been a top priority of mine,” Hansell said. “Nothing comes close to the prospects for what additional, sustainable water development means for our local region’s economy.” If successful, future phases of the NOWA project could build out infrastructure even further and tab other work to fully mitigate impacts

to fish and wildlife habitat. Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, said funding in the form of general obligation bonds is the mechanism that will help get this and other water projects finally off the ground. “A lot of folks have worked hard on this,” Smith said. “It will be great for the region.” NOWA Chairman Craig Reeder, of Hale Farms, thanked Hansell and Dembrow for their support and ability to reach across the aisle. “When we saw the letter requesting the funding package, we thought we might have a chance,” Reeder said.

## Skagit County farmers get some water, but still far short

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

Some Skagit County farmers in two irrigation districts covering roughly 15,000 acres are facing a summer without water. The districts are southwest of Mount Vernon in northwest Washington and are at the end of the line before the Skagit River empties into Puget Sound. The districts’ rights to draw from the river have been interrupted in the drought. They have been able to obtain 4.8 million gallons a day from the city of Anacortes — up to 1,381 acre-feet by Sept. 30.

But it’s only about one third of the 12.5 million gallons a day the districts need, said Brandon Roozen, director of the Western Washington Agricultural Association, which represents both districts. “We’re just starting to toast right now,” he said Wednesday. “The reality is there will be reduced crops, and losses.” Farmers in the area grow high-value crops, such as potatoes and vegetable seeds. There also are dairies and nurseries in the districts. Anacortes, a city in Skagit County, has rights to draw 85 cubic feet per second from the river, but anticipates needing only 48 cubic feet per second to meet peak summer demands, according to city records. Roozen said he sought to obtain for the districts around-the-clock access to 19.5 cubic feet per second, the equivalent of 12.5 million gallons a day. The city agreed to lease

rights to 15 cubic feet per second, but limited withdrawals from the tide-influenced river to three hours before and after high tide, or approximately 12 hours a day, to keep water levels from dropping too low. Roozen said he’s grateful for what irrigators have obtained, but maintains farmers could draw more without harming fish. He said that most farmers in the two districts aren’t receiving water before the irrigation systems have to be shut down and only “a fraction” are getting water. The irrigation districts hope to obtain another 5 cubic feet per second from the Skagit Public Utility District, bringing the daily total to 6.3 million gallons — roughly half of what Roozen said farmers need. The Washington Department of Ecology approved the transfer of water rights from Anacortes. Roozen said he planned to contact Ecology about the transfer of water from the PUD, which has senior water rights. The Skagit Valley Herald reported Wednesday that PUD customers have questioned the utility’s decision to transfer water rights to farmers while property owners face restrictions on groundwater use. Roozen said the irrigation districts have no other options besides the PUD and Anacortes to obtain water. He said he planned to stay in touch with city and PUD officials as the summer progresses. “I will keep them aware of the current conditions,” he said. “That’s about the only thing I can do.”

# Obama administration official backs increasing water in Yakima Basin

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

A federal official Tuesday indicated that the Obama administration supports helping fund a plan to increase water supplies in the Yakima Basin. The Department of Interior’s deputy assistant secretary for water and science, Tom Iseman, told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that the plan would cost \$900 million to \$1 billion over the next decade. Washington state, irrigation districts and the federal government are expected to share costs, though no financing plan has been set. “We’re looking at \$350 million to \$375 million, potentially, for the federal side,” Iseman said. “We face tremendous risks of drought. We need to make the investments now.”

The hearing on Capitol Hill was the first on S. 1694, which would authorize federal funding for water storage and fish passage projects at the basin’s reservoirs for the next 10 years. The total plan — crafted by irrigation districts, conservation groups, state and federal officials and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation — calls for spending \$4 billion over 30 years. The committee heard from only plan supporters, including Kittitas Reclamation District manager Urban Eberhart and state Agriculture Director Derek Sandison. The panelists presented a united front, saying the plan was a remarkable



Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., left, and chairman Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, take their seats for a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing. The Obama administration Tuesday announced its support for funding of the Yakima Basin Plan during a committee hearing. Cantwell last week introduced a bill to provide federal funding.

collaboration between farmers, environmentalists and the tribe in a water-short region. The absence of a dissenting voice was noted, skeptically, by the committee chairwoman, Alaska Republican Lisa Murkowski. “Who opposes this?” she asked. “It’s not possible we could be sitting here and having a discussion about fish and water and not have some opposition out there.” The question was largely left unanswered at the hearing. The Washington state chapter of the Sierra Club later issued a statement opposing the bill, which was introduced by Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash. The Sierra Club described some irrigation

projects in the plan as environmentally destructive and money-losers. American Rivers’ Columbia Basin director Michael Garrity, who participated in developing the plan, defended the irrigation projects. He told Murkowski that irrigators would pay their fair share by financing water projects. “The irrigators are taking on the risk themselves, rather than taxpayers,” he said. Washington lawmakers have declared the state will pay up to half the costs, but have made no commitment beyond \$30 million over the next two years. A state Treasurer’s Office report in December presented a list of financing options, including raising sales or

property taxes. Sandison, who until last month directed the state Department of Ecology’s Office of Columbia River, said the state needs federal help to increase water storage. He and Eberhart, also an Ellensburg farmer, stressed the importance of agriculture to the region. Phil Rigdon, superintendent of the Yakima Nation’s Department of Natural Resources, said the plan will protect salmon and the tribe’s treaty rights. The plan has been decades in the making and has been aided by federal support. The bill to extend federal participation comes as the region’s junior water right holders face drought-forced water shortages.

LEGAL

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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.  
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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](mailto: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

## Agency considers water prices to save in drought

By **FENIT NIRAPPIL**  
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California Gov. Jerry Brown called for an overhaul in water pricing as part of his sweeping drought order, and regulators on Wednesday will discuss how to best do that in light of legal questions over rates designed to encourage conservation. The State Water Re-

sources Control Board scheduled a workshop to discuss what the state’s role is in tinkering with local water rates to maximize water savings during the state’s historic four year dry spell. The board, acting on Brown’s April executive order, has already ordered communities to slash water use as much as 36 percent to extend supplies if the drought continues. The governor also

called on state agencies to direct private and public water suppliers to develop pricing mechanisms that could also include penalties and fees. The state generally stays out of local water prices, which vary widely across the state depending on the source of water and political pressure. “We have to maintain the solvency of water agencies, send strong price signals and maintain af-

fordability for low-income households,” said Max Gomborg, a senior scientist with the water board. Two-thirds of water districts use some form of tiered water pricing to encourage conservation by charging the heaviest users more. That tactic was thrown into question earlier this year after a court struck down punitive rates in the Orange County city of San Juan Capistrano.

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