Irrigation ends in some Yakima tributaries

Capital Press

UNION GAP, Wash. -Irrigation water to orchards and hay fields in two Yakima River tributaries has been cut off by the state Department of Ecology because of low flow caused by drought.

Flows in Cowiche Creek, west of Yakima, and the Teanaway River, near Cle Elum, are so dire that 129 irrigators, with some of earliest pre-statehood water rights, must stop watering orchards, hay and alfalfa crops on some 2,153 acres, DOE announced.

"These are tributaries that have no reservoirs. They are strictly fed by snowpack or aquifer recharge," said Joye Redfield-Wilder, a DOE spokeswoman in Union Gap.

Insufficient winter snow, record-breaking heat in June and no measurable precipitation for 90 days as brought historic lows for this time of year, Redfield-Wilder said.

The Teanaway near Cle Elum was at 5.6 cubic feet per second on July 22 compared with the prior low of 6.8 cubic feet per second for that date. The Cowiche was at 1.9 cubic feet per second and had been under 1 cubic feet per second earlier in the month, DOE said.

"It's unlike anything we've seen before," said Stan Isley, Ecology's court-appointed stream patroller in the Teanaway River Basin.

For the first time this year, a stream patroller has been appointed on Cowiche Creek where traditionally water users have policed themselves. A neighbor with a senior right would call upstream neighbors with junior rights, asking them to stop using water.

Similar curtailments occurred in the mid-1980s, but

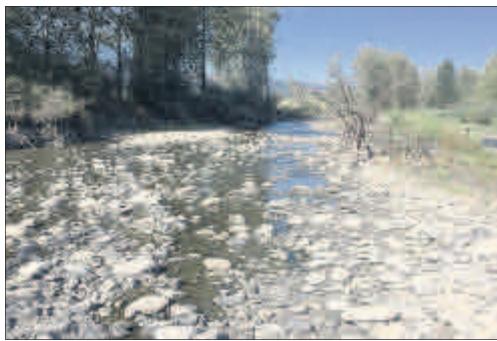
the Cowiche and Teanaway to later in the year and in an era when water works were far less efficient and more water was diverted than now, Isley

> "Even with modern efficiencies, there's not enough water to meet these senior water right holders or support the streams for fish," he

> Curtailed water rights date back to 1873 and without major rain the rest of the water rights on the Teanaway and Cowiche, dating to 1869, may be shut off soon, Redfield-Wilder said. That's probably unprecedented for this time of year, she said.

Orchards losing water this time of year likely would lose their crops. The Cowiche area is heavy in Red Delicious that isn't harvested until October.

C. James Lust, a Yakima attorney with cattle and hay fields in the Cowiche area,



Courtesy of Washington Department of Ecology

The Teanaway River near Cle Elum, Wash., on July 16 shows very little water.

said his family put its water rights into a trust two years ago in exchange from getting

its water from the Yakima Tieton Irrigation District. That's worked out well so

far, he said. A cutback would mean lighter or no cutting on his third-cutting, he said.

Washington ecology warns westside irrigators about pending shut off

Chehalis River's low flow triggers alert

By DON JENKINS Capital Press

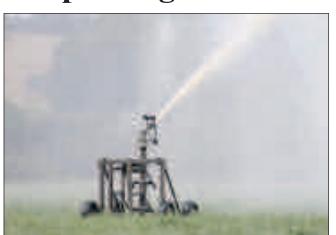
The Washington Department of Ecology has warned 91 irrigators in two southwest Washington counties that their water rights likely will be suspended because of low flows in the Chehalis River and tributaries.

DOE mailed letters July 21 to growers in Lewis and Grays Harbor counties who obtained water rights to the river after 1976. That year the state set minimum flows in the river to protect fish. Another 2,400 water right holders along the Chehalis River have older rights and are exempt from the cutoff.

The letters state that DOE will likely impose restrictions in the "near future." DOE spokesman Chase Gallagher said July 23 that cut-off notices are being prepared for each landowner. The department has not determined when they will be sent, he said.

In 2006, DOE issued cutoff notices to 73 Chehalis River irrigators because of low flows, but that wasn't until August.

Lewis County farmer Dave Fenn, who has a pre-1976 water right, said the river level



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Water shoots over a field July 24 near Chehalis in southwest Washington. Irrigators with rights obtained after 1976 to draw from the Chehalis River are likely to be shut off soon because of low river flows.

is a concern for even growers with senior rights.

"I've never seen the river this low, period," said Fenn, who's farmed in the area for 40 years.

Enough rain to drive the river up is the only thing that can stop or lift the restrictions.

The river dropped sharply in mid-May and since then has been below the minimum flows set in 1976. Until then, the river hadn't been seen by DOE as a potential problem. The area was not included in drought declarations issued by Gov. Jay Inslee in mid-March and mid-April. Inslee declared a statewide drought in mid-May.

The river Thursday at one location tracked by the U.S. Geological Survey was flowing at 333 cubic feet per second. The acceptable minimum flow for the last half of July is 460 cubic feet per second.

Shutting off junior water right holders will leave in the river 27 acre feet, or 5 cubic feet per second, according to DOE.

Lewis County Farm Bureau President Ron Averill said it's difficult to assess how much damage the cutoff will do to the county's agricultural industry.

"A lot of folks don't have water rights on the Chehalis River," he said. "In most years, it rains so much it doesn't make any difference."

Program aims to retain flood irrigation

By JOHN O'CONNELL Capital Press

MUD LAKE, IDAHO -A new USDA-funded water conservation program runs contrary to conventional wisdom, rewarding producers who retain flood-irrigation systems rather than installing modern, efficient pivots.

The Idaho Water Resource Board — the lead applicant on the grant — and its partners aim to preserve incidental aquifer recharge through seepage from flood irrigation, which is rapidly being phased out in favor of efficient sprinklers.

Other partners, including Ducks Unlimited and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, say flood irrigation provides critical habitat for water fowl in historic floodplains.

USDA's Natural Resourc-Conservation Service awarded the applicants \$1.1 million in Regional ConserCourtesy of Bob Anderl

White-faced ibis feed in Eastern Idaho. A new program, led by the Idaho Water Resource Board, aims to keep farm acres in flood irrigation for the benefit of water fowl, such as the white-faced ibis.

vation Partnership Program funds for water-conservation projects during the next two years. Roughly a third of the funds are available to increase the normal 50 percent Environmental Quality Incentives Program match to cover 65 percent of a producer's costs of improving flood-irrigation systems. The sign-up period is Aug. 1 through Sept. 18. Neeley Miller, senior water

resource planner with the Water Resource Board, said the applicants intend to apply for an additional grant to keep the program running for four years. "A lot of times, NRCS of-

fers incentives to put in pipes and sprinklers, but there haven't been incentives to maintain that more traditional flood-irrigation system," Miller said. Sal Palazzolo, Fish and

Game's private lands coordinator, said the program should benefit important game birds, such as ducks and geese, and species of concern, such as the white-faced ibis and Franklin's gull. Palazzolo said the project's goal is to protect flood irrigation on 16,000 acres. He said about 1,400 farms, comprising 345,000 acres, surrounding Mud Lake and Market Lake in Eastern Idaho and Camas National Wildlife Refuge in Hamer are eligible for the program.

Idaho irrigators OK'd for Water Board loans

By JOHN O'CONNELL Capital Press

BOISE, Idaho — The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved about \$4 million in low-interest loans toward separate projects to help southeast Idaho irrigators address pressing needs with their canal systems.

During its recent July meeting, the board approved a \$2.5 million loan at 3.5 percent interest for the Last Chance Canal Co. in Grace to replace a 16-foot-tall, wooden diversion dam on the Bear River with a concrete structure.

The company serves 147 shareholders who irrigate 29,000 acres of farmland.

Work on the dam will commence this fall, utilizing a cofferdam during construction.

"Their existing diversion structure on the Bear is an old, timber structure that is most definitely on its last legs," said Brian Patton, planning bureau chief with the Idaho Department of Water Resources. "I doubt that structure would last another winter."

Patton said the structure also diverts water to a small hydropower plant owned by PacifiCorp. He said the canal company and PacifiCorp are negotiating how to divide the project's cost.

The board also approved a \$1.4 million loan at 3.5 percent interest for St. John's Irrigating Company, located near Malad City, to replace a 7-mile section of open canal with a pressurized pipeline. The loan will provide matching funds for a

\$1 million grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

St. John's serves 3,500 acres of farmland in Oneida County. Ron Blaisdell, president

over the St. John's Irrigation Board and stockholders, said the improvement should reduce losses from a leaky stretch of canal by at least 16 percent, according to engineering esti-

Blaisdell said the project was first suggested in the late 1970s. A feasibility study was conducted, and the board voted on piping the stretch, but the vote failed because members were still paying off the 1967 construction of Daniel's Reservoir, and they didn't have sufficient grant funding, Blaisdell said.

During the past two seasons, Blaisdell said stockholders have received about 30 percent of their full water allocations.

"It's been tough for people who don't have wells to use,"

He said construction could begin as early as September 2016.

"We've got a lot to do before we can get to the laying of pipe," he said.

