

Drought

Kittitas hay losses in millions

Tree fruit also takes hit due to drought; U.S. Bureau provides a bit more water

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — Kittitas Valley hay growers are suffering millions of dollars in losses of second-cutting Timothy due to drought and will lose more next year because they won't have water this fall to seed next year's crop.

The Kittitas Reclamation District ran out of water Aug. 6, 2½ months ahead of normal. The district serves 60,000 acres of farmland in Kittitas Valley, about two-thirds of the irrigated acreage in Kittitas County.

The district has long known it would run out now. It kept full rations earlier in the season, when other districts cut back, in order to give growers a good first-cutting of Timothy, largely sacrificing second-cutting.

A few growers on the KRD are doing second-cutting now but it will be down 80 to 90 percent from normal, said Mike Hajny, vice president of Wesco International Inc., an Ellensburg hay exporter. Hajny estimates that loss at \$7.6 million, figuring 20,000 acres at 2 tons per acre and \$190 per ton.

Additionally, few growers will risk seeding new Timothy this fall for next year resulting in probably another \$2.6 million in losses, he said.

About 15 percent of the valley's Timothy fields are reseeded each year, Hajny said.

A few growers will reseed and hope for rain but rain is unlikely so fields needing reseeding will suffer in yield and quality next year and other grasses will move in, said Urban Eberhart, KRD manager and a hay and tree fruit grower.

The 15 percent reseeded each year provides the highest quality Timothy for export horse hay to Japan and Middle East that fetches top dollars, Hajny said.

"It will wipe out the top 15 percent and we're really concerned about being able to find the correct quality that overseas horse markets expect us to have," he said.

Tree fruit is not big in the Kittitas Valley but there are several hundred acres. Eberhart said growers are seeking state Department of Ecology permission to use emergency drought wells to save pear and apple crops. Pasture irrigation also ended



Ruth Wheat/for Capital Press

Lower end of Keechelus Lake near Snoqualmie Pass is shown on July 23. It held 44,762 acre-feet of water on Aug. 4, 28 percent of capacity. It is one of five reservoirs serving the Yakima Basin.

with the Aug. 6 curtailment and irrigators depending on return flows from the KRD will be impacted, he said.

Parts of KRD canals will still carry water to Cascade Irrigation District and tributaries, he said.

"All of this underscores the importance of getting the Yakima Integrated Water Management Plan passed (through Congress) so all the things authorized can be implemented,"

Eberhart said.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation decided Aug. 3 to give Yakima Basin junior water right holders another 1 percent of normal water supply which is 12,000 more acre-feet of water. Junior water right holders moved up from 46 to 47 percent of normal supply.

"Cooler temperatures gave us a little break in usage from some people," said Quentin Kreuter, the bureau's Yakima

River operator.

It helped get the KRD to Aug. 6 and helped the Roza Irrigation District in the Yakima Valley a little, he said.

"Another cool off or a big rain is the only thing that would change numbers again," Kreuter said. "Right now we don't foresee anymore increasing in the prorationing level."

Roza Irrigation District will remain at 3 gallons per minute per acre through Sept. 12 and

will supply water to the end of September, said Scott Revell, district manager. The 1 percent boost in supply may add a few days to the end of the season, he said.

Pears and apples are smaller and trees are stressed from inadequate water and some hops didn't reach trellis wires by the Fourth of July, he said. Winegrapes should be OK but growers won't know for a while yet, he said.

Washington Department of Ecology awards first drought-relief grants

Money goes for new well, fish passage and advertising

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington Department of Ecology on Monday awarded drought-relief funds to drill a community well in Stevens County, shepherd salmon up the Dungeness River on the Olympic Peninsula and promote water conservation in the Kennewick Irrigation District.

DOE plans to fund other projects in the coming weeks to preserve crops, help fish and shore up municipal water systems.

"We're moving quickly to support critical water supplies for communities, farmers and fish across the state who are enduring extreme hardships in this unprecedented drought," DOE Director Maia Bellon said in a written statement.

The Legislature has appropriated \$16 million for a two-year response to the drought. With Monday's grants, DOE has now spent \$3.6 million on



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A low Dungeness River flows at Railroad Bridge Park near Sequim, Wash., on June 1. The river provides irrigation water for farmers living in the Olympic Mountains rain shadow. A historically light winter snowpack in the mountains means the river will run much lower than normal this growing season.

drought relief, including \$1.1 million to authorize emergency wells on farms in the Yakima Valley and \$1.9 million for state Department of Fish and Wildlife fish projects.

DOE is reviewing 11 other applications, including one from a Central Washington irrigation district trying to get fruit growers through the summer. It's one of the few proposals that would deliver water to growers this season.

"It's so dry out there, there isn't water to go after," said Mike Schwisow, a lobbyist for the Washington State Water Resources Association, an alliance of irrigation districts.

The Icicle Irrigation District in Cashmere has applied for \$41,000 to install pipes to siphon 800 acre-feet of water from Eightmile Lake.

The district has rights to the water, but the lake has nearly dropped below the outlet, mak-

ing it impossible to tap the water without the project, the district's manager, Tony Jantzer, said.

The water would flow into a canal that serves fruit growers on about 2,300 acres in the neighboring Peshastin Irrigation District.

The districts have a close working relationship and many common landowners, said Jantzer, who manages both districts.

To stretch the irrigation season, the Peshastin growers had their water supplies cut from 6.7 gallons per minute to 4.5 gallons per minute in mid-July. New pipes from Eightmile Lake would allow growers to continue receiving that rationed amount through late September, Jantzer said.

The district will have to match the state's contribution. It also must still work out logistical details, such as air-lifting equipment to the lake, which is in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. "We've got some big hills to climb," Jantzer said.

The projects funded Monday are:

- The Kennewick Irrigation District will receive \$28,872 to promote water conservation among 23,400 customers

in Kennewick, Richland, West Richland and incorporated Benton County. The district has been advertising on television and radio for several months and hired a code enforcement officer in June. The district has imposed mandatory limits on when lawns can be watered. The district — which has pro-ratable rights to the Yakima River — has about 500 agricultural users.

The district's manager, Chuck Freeman, said Tuesday that the district has issued more than 700 warnings about illegal water use. Growers have been getting about half their normal water supplies, but without the mandatory restrictions, "there wouldn't have been any water for anyone."

- The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe will receive \$74,430 to install temporary dams in the Dungeness River to concentrate flows to help spawning salmon migrate upstream. WDFW anticipates the return of 1.3 million pink salmon.

- The Stevens County Public Utility District will receive \$47,000 to drill a well to replace one that has been failing since last fall. The well will help supply drinking water to 385 residents, according to DOE.

Group says Boise River plan won't harm ag

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

MERIDIAN, Idaho — A diverse group that is developing a plan to improve the health of the Boise River watershed told leaders of the region's irrigation community that their proposal will not harm agriculture.

Three members of the Boise River Enhancement Network's 12-member coordinating team explained the plan to the newly formed Treasure Valley Water Users Association Aug. 10.

TVWUA represents irrigation districts, canal companies and farmers in Southwestern Idaho.

Association members have concerns about the BREN plan, which suggests several changes to irrigation, farming and grazing practices.

"We're not attacking irrigation," said Derek Risso, principal for Ecosystem Sciences, a member of BREN's coordinating team. "We understand that very few people would be here in the valley without irrigation."

Risso said BREN members took data from all existing local, state, federal and private studies and reports on the Boise River watershed from the last 60 years and used the best available science to offer solutions to improve the health of the watershed.

Risso said the group has no jurisdictional power, the solutions are voluntary and BREN needs the farming community's involvement to make the plan work.

"You guys are big players; we need you to make these kind of things work," he said.

After the meeting, TVWUA Executive Director Roger Batt said he still has several concerns with the group's draft plan. A final plan is due this fall.

"Whether we agree with (the plan) or not, we do appreciate being included in the discussion," he said. However, he added, "There are some concerns and we'll definitely continue to monitor it ... as things progress."

Major BREN members include Land Trust of the Treasure Valley, Idaho Rivers United, Trout Unlimited, South Boise Water Co. and Ecosystem Sciences.

A draft summary of the plan suggests removing or improving diversion dams and other irrigation structures to allow for more natural river flow, fish passage and sediment transport.

USDA extends drought disaster relief to 30 more PNW counties

The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Thursday designated farmers and ranchers eligible for federal drought relief in 18 Washington counties, seven Oregon counties and five Idaho counties.

Producers in many of the

counties were already eligible for assistance because they live in counties that border areas declared disaster zones in prior declarations.

The USDA declares disasters in counties that have had severe drought conditions for at

least eight weeks.

The designation makes producers eligible for low-interest loans and other programs through the USDA's Farm Service Agency.

The Washington counties declared disaster areas Thursday are Asotin, Chelan, Douglas, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Lincoln, Mason, Pacific, Pierce,

Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Whatcom and Whitman.

The Oregon counties are Benton, Coos, Curry, Josephine, Lane, Lincoln and Tillamook.

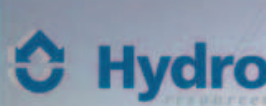

The Idaho counties are Boundary, Idaho, Lewis, Nez Perce and Valley.

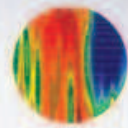


Farmers and ranchers in 38 of Washington's 39 counties are now eligible for relief. Only San

Juan County has not been included in a disaster declaration.

Some 31 percent of the state is in "extreme drought," the U.S. Drought Monitor reported Thursday, unchanged from the week before.

Oregon and Idaho also were unchanged. Some 41 percent of Oregon and 22 percent of Idaho are suffering an extreme drought.

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