

Washington

U.S. Senate committee backs Yakima irrigation plan

State official happy for down payment

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Legislation authorizing federal support for a 10-year, \$900 million plan to increase water supplies in the Yakima Valley, Washington's most-valuable farmland, passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Nov. 19.

The Yakima River Basin plan would bring drought relief to farmers and benefit fish, providing a template for sharing water in the West, said Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington. "I do believe it serves as a national model for water," she said.

The 10-year plan is the first phase of a proposed 30-year, \$4 billion project developed by irrigation districts, the Yakima Nation, environmental groups, and state and federal agencies.

S. 1694, sponsored by



U.S. Bureau of Reclamation photo

Cle Elum Reservoir in Washington would be raised by 3 feet to hold an additional 14,600-acre feet for fish, farms and cities in the Yakima Valley. A bill passed Nov. 19 by the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee would commit \$9 million toward the \$18 million project.

Cantwell would commit \$92 million over the next 10 years, with \$77 million going to the Wapato Irrigation Project operated by the Yakama Nation. Another \$9 million would go to raise the Cle Elum Reservoir to store another 14,600 acre feet of water. Environmental and groundwater storage studies also would be

funded. If Congress appropriates additional money for other parts of the plan, the federal government could pay up to half the costs, according to the legislation, which passed the committee unanimously. "We'll be looking for additional cost-sharing in the years to come, but this is a

wonderful down payment," said Tom Tebb, director of the state Department of Ecology's Office of the Columbia River.

The bill must still be approved by the full Senate, as well as the House. The Obama administration has indicated support, and the Interior Department has estimated the federal government's contribution would be between \$350 million and \$375 million.

The Washington Legislature has appropriated \$30 million for the next two years.

Yakima Valley irrigation districts are championing the plan as the only way to avoid the deep water cutbacks during droughts. The Roza Irrigation District and Kittitas Reclamation District received 46 percent of their normal water allotment this year from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The Yakima River Basin plan calls for eventually increasing water storage

by 450,000 acre feet. The basin's five reservoirs now have a capacity of 1 million acre feet. Projects in the next 10 years include pumping an additional 200,000 acre feet from the Kachess Reservoir, as well as raising the Cle Elum Reservoir.

Plans for the pumping station have not been finalized, and a construction timetable has not been set. The Roza Irrigation District is working on a plan to install a smaller pump station in time for the next growing season.

Tebb said that with federal funding the Cle Elum Reservoir could be enlarged within two to four years.

Homeowner associations and some environmental groups not involved in writing the plan say the water-storage projects would damage wildlife habitat, property values and recreational sites. Opponents, including the Sierra Club and Seattle Audubon Society, allege the plan would violate environmental laws and have

urged Cantwell to abandon it. Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Arizona, said he didn't oppose Cantwell's bill, but he noted the federal government was taking on an expenditure without resolving potential litigation. "I hope that when we move to some of Arizona's priorities regarding drought relief that those are favorably considered," he said.

Cantwell defended the plan as a collaboration between groups with different interests. "Acting now on this legislation is critical, and I think it sets a tone for how to get larger water projects done in the West," she said.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Washington, issued a statement praising the bill's passage from the committee.

"As climate change continues to threaten our communities, iconic salmon runs and local agricultural economies, it is critical that we continue to invest in and protect our state's water resources," she said.

Wheat 'all in' on TPP, farmer says

Commodity groups stump for trade pact

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Wheat growers will keep old customers and may gain new ones under the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Washington state farmer Brett Blankenship said in a national conference call with reporters.

"For wheat, TPP is an all in, a no-brainer," said Blankenship, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers. "This is a fantastic chance, and we will not squander it."

Blankenship joined leaders from five other farm groups and a top U.S. Department of Agriculture official at a Kansas City hotel to tout the TPP and answer questions.

Major agricultural organizations largely support TPP, which faces an uncertain future in Congress. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said in a speech Nov. 6 to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that portions of the 12-nation trade deal may need to be renegotiated. He specifically mentioned concerns over drug patents, labor rules, tobacco and dairy.

While many commodity groups are lavishing praise on TPP, the National Milk Producers Federation hasn't taken a position. The TPP would leave in place a complicated web of tariffs, taxes and quotas on dairy products.

Federation spokeswoman Madelyn Berner said Thursday that the organization is still reviewing the text, which was released Nov. 5. "We really don't know the details enough to say anything for certain," she said.

Farm leaders were asked at the Kansas City forum about Hatch's comments. Renegotiating any TPP chapter will affect every other chapter, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service Administrator Phil Karsting said. "Every piece of that agreement is related to every other piece in that agreement," he said.

Blankenship said he was optimistic Congress will approve TPP, noting that the agreement's supporters in June rounded up enough votes for trade-promotion authority, laying the groundwork for an up-or-down vote on TPP.

"People said we wouldn't get that done," he said. "It will be a heavy lift. There's no question about it, but I think we'll get it done."

Blankenship, who farms in Washtucna in Eastern Washington, said almost all the wheat he harvests goes overseas, as does about 90 percent grown in the state.

The U.S. already exports \$2.4 billion worth of wheat to TPP partners, with Japan the biggest customer, according to the USDA.

Blankenship said that al-



Courtesy of ZimmComm New Media National Association of Wheat Growers President Brett Blankenship, an Eastern Washington farmer, speaks Nov. 11 in Kansas City about the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The leaders of six farm groups and a USDA official praised the 12-nation pact at a press conference.

though wheat is a firmly established export commodity, it needs TPP to defend market share, particularly in Japan. Australian, Chilean and Vietnamese wheat exports already receive preferential market access due to trade pacts with Japan, according to the USDA.

The TPP would eliminate wheat tariffs and duty taxes in all TPP countries except Japan, which would increase its quota on U.S. wheat imports. Tariffs on wheat products — such as cookies, breads and uncooked noodles — would be reduced or phased out, depending on the product.

Besides defending market share, TPP would create new opportunities if other countries, such as India and Indonesia, later joined, Blankenship said.

The agriculture groups said TPP will benefit farmers and

ranchers by lowering tariffs and demanding that food-safety barriers be backed by science. They warned that U.S. agriculture will lose customers to producers in other countries if TPP fails.

"None of us are scared to compete in the world market. You call it arrogance, whatever, we think we're the best and most efficient in the world," said American Soybean Association President Wade Cowan, a Texas farmer. "Bring it on."

The U.S. Grains Council, National Corn Growers Association, National Pork Producers Council and National Cattlemen's Beef Association also were represented at the press event.

Judge denies Washington kids' climate change petition

SEATTLE (AP)—A judge in Washington state has denied an appeal by eight young activists who petitioned the state to adopt stricter science-based regulations to protect them against climate change.

King County Superior Court Judge Hollis Hill affirmed some of the children's arguments, saying the state has a duty to protect natural resources for future generations. But she said the Department of Ecology is already working on meeting that ob-

ligation by writing new rules for greenhouse gas emissions.

The lawsuit was brought by eight children, 10 to 15 years old. They asked the court to force state officials to base new rules on the best available science.

The judge noted in her ruling the Ecology Department is taking science into account, along with economic, social and political considerations. She said she doesn't have the authority to dictate how officials develop the rules.

WSU website changes help farmers track price forecasts

Yield forecast tool coming in spring

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Changes to Washington State University's small grains website will help farmers track prices and — eventually — predict yields, a university economist says.

The website's "Marketing and Economics" tab now includes monthly average price forecasts for 47 cash markets for soft white wheat, covering roughly 11 months.

"Those forecasts change regularly as new information comes in, so the models are continually being updated," said Randy Fortenbery, WSU professor and small grains endowed chair. "We can kind of see where we think we're going, and you can compare that to the price action over the last three years."

Prices have generally trended downward on average over the last three years, and this year show "a bit of an uptick" moving forward, Forten-

bery said. Fortenbery said farmers deciding whether they want to forward price their crop are an appropriate audience for the information.

"Let's say I want to lock in the price for next summer's wheat," he said. "If I

can look at these price forecasts, given where the market is today, it might give me an idea of what might be a reasonable expected price to guarantee. I can decide whether that's reasonable or if I want to wait until that improves."

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