

Southwestern Idaho snowpack levels well above normal

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A series of storms that have hammered Southwestern Idaho have resulted in snowpack levels far above normal for this time of year.

But reservoirs in the region ended the 2015 irrigation season with much less carryover water than normal and water managers say the trend needs to continue in order to ensure a good irrigation supply for 2016.

“This is my Christmas

present,” Ron Shurtleff, watermaster for the Payette River system, said about the basin’s snowpack levels, which were 150 percent of normal on Dec. 28.

But the Payette system ended 2015 with much less carryover water than normal and “we have a challenge to get those reservoirs filled,” Shurtleff added. “We’re very thankful for this precipitation and just hope it hangs on.”

The Weiser River basin stopped water deliveries at the end of August this year,

well ahead of the system’s normal Oct. 15 shutoff date. But snowpack is at 166 percent of normal for this date, stock ponds are starting to fill and the reservoir level has risen a little bit recently.

“It’s looking way better than last year, by a bunch,” said Weiser Irrigation District Chairman Vernon Lolley. “Things could change but it’s a good start.”

Most irrigation districts that get their water from the Boise River basin also ended the 2015 season with significantly less carryover water

than normal.

But water managers are encouraged by snowpack levels that are at 157 percent of normal.

“Every day this keeps happening, I smile,” Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District Water Superintendent Greg Curtis said of the recent snow storms.

But NMID ended the 2015 irrigation season with 20,000 acre-feet of carryover water, half its normal amount, and Curtis said there’s still a long way to go before there is enough snow in the mountains

to ensure irrigators have a normal water supply in 2016.

“I like what’s happening, but it has to keep going,” Curtis said.

Last year’s snowpack levels also started out good but the situation reversed as the winter progressed, said Tim Page, manager of the Boise Project Board of Control, which provides water to five irrigation districts in the Boise River valley.

“It’s off to a good start but my concern is, is it going to continue to bring a few storms in and keep that snowpack up

there,” he said. “This is just (157) percent of normal for today. If the storms stop, that (157) percent can drop pretty fast.”

Pioneer Irrigation District ended the 2015 season with about a third of its normal carryover amount and is depending on a good snowpack to get its 5,800 patrons through 2016.

“Those are good numbers to see, as long as it stick with it,” PID Manager Mark Zirschky said about the Boise basin’s current snowpack level.

Thresher Artisan Wheat finds new investors

By JOHN O’CONNELL
Capital Press

The parent company of Thresher Artisan Wheat, a major buyer of Eastern Idaho grain, recently completed a financial restructuring that corporate officials anticipate will lead to new acquisitions and investments in the region.

Kansas-based Agspring has undergone a process known as recapitalization, which officials say should provide long-term stability for Thresher and the holding company’s three other subsidiaries.

“I am pleased with what the Agspring recapitalization means for our growers, agribusiness partners and downstream customers,” said Thresher CEO Don Wille. “Agspring and Thresher are very committed to the long-term growth of agriculture in the Idaho region.”

Bradford Warner, vice president of marketing



Submitted photo

Grain is stored at Thresher Artisan Wheat’s American Falls, Idaho, facility. It was among five Eastern Idaho facilities that Thresher overhauled during the 2015 growing season, and company officials anticipate a financial restructuring by Thresher’s parent company will lead to more investments and acquisitions in the region.

with Agspring. explained the company was founded in 2012, backed by private equity from a fund dealing with natural resources. He said the investors were interested in selling their

stake and earning a return after a few years. Agspring has found new investors who plan to remain involved over the long term, Warner said. They’re led by American Infrastructure

MLP, a group that focuses on infrastructure holdings.

“Agspring is their first move into agriculture. That has been an interest of theirs for a long time,” Warner said. “Their whole basis is

being pretty diverse.”

Thresher was formed in 2014 after Agspring acquired General Mills’ Eastern Idaho grain handling infrastructure. Warner said Thresher recently completed major overhauls to its grain elevators in Blackfoot, American Falls, Rockford and Newdale, as well as to the Moreland grain elevator, which it acquired in March. The projects increased Thresher’s regional grain handling capacity by nearly 2.5 million bushels, and have improved the ef-

iciency of unloading for growers, Warner said.

“In many ways, we’re powered up with the right amount of capital to invest where we need to do it,” Warner said. “We’re prepared to grow in this segment for a long time.”

Warner believes Thresher’s model is unique, and should be enticing to local wheat supply-chain businesses that are interested in significant growth but wish to retain their local management and control after being acquired.

UI Extension course helps new farmers

NIFA funding revamps Cultivating Success program

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

University of Idaho Extension is offering a course to help beginning farmers.

The five-session course called “Starting Your Sustainable Idaho Small Farm” begins Jan. 14 with an online webinar. It will also include in-person sessions and farm tours and runs through March 31.

Local sessions will be offered in Caldwell, Cascade, McCall, Coeur d’Alene, Hailley, Moscow, Salmon, Sandpoint and Weiser.

Called Cultivating Success, the class is funded by a \$506,000 grant from USDA National Institute of Food Agriculture. The goal is to increase the number and success of small-acreage farmers.

The program emphasizes the benefits of local agricultural production. Demand for locally grown food has increased in the last three de-

Online
<http://www.cultivatingsuccess.org/>

acades, said Iris Mayes, small farms educator for UI Extension in Latah County.

Mayes hopes to have 10 to 20 people with a range of experience at each of the 10 sites.

“There’s a synergy created working with the other existing farmers, (who) are going to be mentors in our program, and help coach the new, upcoming farmers,” she said.

UI Extension hopes to build local farmer networks and connect growers. Even those who have been farming for eight to 10 years still feel they have a lot to learn, Mayes said.

“In that five- to 10-year range, if someone’s been renting land, they usually want to start owning their own land,” she said.

The mentoring program will begin later in 2016. UI Extension is developing a website to help participants find land and capital, Mayes said.

“This will help them be eligible for financing if they’re trying to buy property,” she said.

Cultivating Success originally began in 2001. UI and Washington State University Extension have offered it as a for-credit and non-credit class, but the new NIFA funding helps to make it more accessible, Mayes said.

“This is like a boiled-down, concentrated version,” she said. “Students will have to do a lot of work on their own as well. But people who are wanting to get into this small farming business are pretty motivated.”

The program includes whole-farm planning and resource assessment.

UI Extension will offer the class each year.

“We’ll be doing a lot of evaluation and getting feedback from the students about what they think they will need in the future,” Mayes said.

The course fee is \$115. The registration deadline is Jan. 7.

Celebrating 75 Years Conserving the Idaho Way

LOW INTEREST LOANS FOR IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

Sprinkler Irrigation, No-Till Drills, Fences
Livestock Feeding Operations
Solar Stock Water Pump Systems

2.5%-3.5% Terms 7-15 Years Up to \$200,000

IDAHO CONSERVATION LOAN PROGRAM

swc.idaho.gov | 208-332-1790

The Idaho Irrigation Equipment Association Presents:

The 2016 Idaho Irrigation Equipment Show & Conference

this Thursday, Jan 7th at the Nampa Civic Center

311 Third Street South, Nampa, ID • 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

FREE TRADE SHOW & TECHNICAL CLASSES

AGRICULTURAL IRRIGATION EDUCATION

9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

1. Save Energy & Money with LESA Technology
2. Remote Telemetry

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

1. Introduction to Variable Frequency Drives
2. Crop Diversity Using Drip Irrigation

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

1. Water Use in Drip Irrigated Peppermint
2. Irrigation Efficiency for Idaho

3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

1. Food Safety - Pesticide Use and the Public
2. Drip Irrigation Systems for Pivots

LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION EDUCATION

8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

1. Troubleshooting an Irrigation System
2. Getting the Most from Your Irrigation Filter

10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

1. 8 Keys to Efficient Irrigation & Design/Installation
2. Best Practices for Sub Surface Drip in Turf

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

1. Installation and Maintenance of Irrigation Pumps
2. ABC’s to Efficient Irrigation Systems

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

1. How to Save \$13 Million Dollars
2. Backflow Basics

No Registration Required

www.idahoirrigationequipmentassociation.org

Bag needs? Bag solutions!

SMITH PACKAGING YOUR MAIN SUPPLIER FOR:

- Polyethylene Bags
- Polypropylene Bags
- Paper Bags
- Bulk Bags
- Stretch Films
- Hay Sleeves
- Mesh Produce Bags
- Plastic Pallet Covers
- Bag Closure Products
- General Warehouse Supplies

Competitive pricing!
Great quality products!
Service you expect and trust!

• Halsey, Oregon: 541-369-2850
• Eastern Washington, Ed Kropf: 509-936-2652 or ed@smith-packaging.com
www.smithpackagingservices.com