

Wash. irrigation district settles with Ecology

District must fix meters

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

An southeastern Washington irrigation district will pay a \$21,271 fine and spend at least \$10,000 to correct metering problems that led it to draw water that had been allocated for threatened steelhead in the Touchet River, according to a settlement reached with the state Department of Ecology.

If the metering problems resurface in the next three years, the Touchet Eastside Westside Irrigation District could face an additional \$31,271 fine.

“We’re going to work very, very hard,” irrigation district board chairman Stephen Ames said Thursday. “We have to monitor more closely.”

The district irrigates 1,927 acres of hay, alfalfa, onions,



Courtesy of en.wikipedia.org

The Touchet River flows in Walla Walla County in southeast Washington. The Touchet Eastside Westside Irrigation District has agreed to a reduced fine for drawing too much water from the river in 2014. Some of the fine will go toward repairing water meters.

corn and other crops in Walla Walla County. It was originally fined \$73,530 by DOE for illegally diverting 90 acre-feet over 21 days in October 2014. The district appealed the penalty.

DOE reviewed the metering information and adjusted the water withdrawal to 77 acre-feet and the fine to

\$62,543, a sum roughly equal to the district’s annual budget.

DOE spokeswoman Brook Beeler said the department agreed to essentially halve the fine in return for the district correcting the metering problems. “It’s really to put them on a good path to be compliant,” she said.

The district acknowledged

problems with its meters and asked for leniency. Ames called the settlement “the best we do, with what we had.”

He said the fine and meter repairs will cause district rates to increase, though the district has not calculated by how much. He said the district will have three years to pay the fine, reducing the hit on the budget.

The district’s water rights date back to 1882. It gave up a substantial percentage of its water for fall irrigation in 2010 in exchange for \$2.56 million to replace canals with pipelines. Leaving more water in the river benefits threatened steelhead, according to DOE.

In setting the penalty, DOE calculated the public spent \$817 on pipelines for every acre-foot illegally diverted.

Ames said tracking water use has been difficult as the district transitioned from canals to pipelines. A new alarm system should alert the district to when it’s drawing too much water, he said.



Courtesy of National Corn Growers Association

Brent Hostetler, chair of the National Corn Growers Association’s production stewardship action team, presents a trophy to Boardman, Ore., farmer Jonathon Lewis Springstead for placing first in the state in the irrigated category in the organization’s annual yield contest. Several Oregon farmers say the competition allows them to compare varieties and farming practices.

Oregon corn growers touted for high yields

Virginia farmer tops national contest with 532.03 bushels per acre

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Several Boardman, Ore., corn growers placed highly at the state level in the National Corn Growers Association’s annual yield contest.

Vern Frederickson placed first in Oregon in the no-till/strip till irrigated class with a yield of 309.28 bushels per acre, using DeKalb DKC62-06.

Jonathon Lewis Springstead placed first in Oregon in the irrigated class with a yield of 273.9 bushels per acre using Pioneer 35K02. Springstead did not respond to requests for comment.

Nolan Mills placed second in the no-till/strip-till irrigated class with a yield of 255.29 bushels per acre using Pioneer P1266.

Rod Taylor placed second in the irrigated class with a yield of 267.13 bushels per acre using DeKalb DKC62-08RIB. Taylor could not be reached through the corn organization.

The contest announced 407 state winners and 18 national winners. David Hula of Charles City, Va., won with a yield of 532.03 bushels per acre.

According to the organization, the average yield among national winners was 386.4 bushels per acre, with six national winners recording yields of 400 bushels or more per

acre. The U.S. average corn yield in 2015 was 169.3 bushels per acre.

Frederickson said his yields are usually 280 to 290 bushels per acre. Last year he yielded 314 bushels per acre and won the organization’s contest in Oregon, too.

“We farm about 5,000 acres, about 1,200 acres devoted to corn, so we have several people involved in this process,” he said. “It’s a good team effort.”

Frederickson participates in the contest to compare his performance against other farmers in the industry.

“It gives us an incentive to continually improve our process,” he said. “We do hope we do well, but it’s not our primary focus.”

Mills said his winning field averaged five bushels more than his other, non-contest corn fields averaged.

“It’s a good measure to see how we’re doing,” he said. “We try to pick the best field and the best spot.”

The contest helps growers compare varieties and farming practices, Mills said.

Frederickson has several ideas to further boost his yield. He is looking for a 15- to 20-bushel increase, he said.

“The most important thing is, focus on the planting and getting a good stand (and) even emergence,” he said.

Mills also plans to enter again this year. He expects a similar approach to last year.

“Mostly try to stay up on the fertilizer and water and be timely with our inputs,” he said. “More of the same thing we’ve already done, just trying to be timely on all our inputs from planting to harvest.”

Idaho ag forum celebrates farming’s role in Canyon County

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

NAMPA, Idaho — Agriculture’s importance to Canyon County’s economy was

driven home in multiple ways March 16 during the Nampa Chamber of Commerce’s third Annual Ag Forum.

But farmers and representatives of major agribusiness

companies also expressed concern about how the county’s rapid growth will affect their industry.

Though one of Idaho’s smaller counties in area, Canyon County is one of its most important when it comes to agriculture. There are more than 2,330 farmers in the county, by far the most in Idaho, and the county ranks No. 5 in farmgate receipts with \$513 million.

It is also home to many large processing and food companies, including milk-processor Darigold, cheese-maker Sorrento Lactalis, applesauce producer Materne, Amalgamated Sugar Co. and Simplot Co.’s new potato processing facility.

Most of the world’s major seed companies have a large presence here and the state’s wine and fruit industries are centered in Canyon County.

“Canyon County is the most diverse county in all of Idaho in terms of agriculture,” said Laura Johnson, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture’s Market Development Division bureau chief.

Johnson applauded the local business community’s decision to host the annual forum. “We are very proud to see you embrace your agricultural roots,” she said.

As an example of how important agribusiness employers are to the county,

presenters pointed out that Amalgamated employs 500 workers and pays \$20 million in wages annually as well as \$60 million in sugar beet payments.

Sorrento Lactalis and Darigold together process 7 million pounds of milk per day, most of it from local dairies.

Brett Lolley, Idaho production manager for Seminis Vegetable Seeds, said the state’s seed industry, which is centered in Canyon County, has an economic impact of about \$500 million in Idaho.

“We are here (today) because agriculture is important; it’s a huge piece of our community,” Debbie Kling, president and CEO of the chamber, told the nearly 320 attendees. “You are greatly appreciated.”

The county is also experiencing explosive growth and during a panel discussion, agribusiness representatives said that was a concern.

Nate McKnight, plant manager of Darigold’s Caldwell facility, said he is concerned about the impact of that city’s planned downtown plaza, which will be located near Darigold and attract about 250 events a year.

A lot of milk tankers are needed to bring the facility’s product in and out and Darigold wants to make sure parking, traffic and safety concerns are addressed.

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By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho lawmakers have turned back a bill that would have required the federal government to obtain legislative approval before acquiring any

additional land within the state.

The House Resources and Environment Committee voted 10-6 March 17 to hold the bill in committee, which means it won’t move forward.

The bill would have rescinded any past consent Idaho gave to the federal government to acquire additional lands within the state, said Rep. Judy Boyle, the Republican rancher from Midvale who authored the legislation.

Nobody knows how much land the federal government is acquiring in Idaho and the bill would “shine the light of day on what is really occurring out there; how much private land is being sold to the federal government,” she said.

Boyle said her bill was meant to prohibit a situation where the federal government uses its leverage to create an unwilling seller. For example, she said, threatening the loss of a landowner’s grazing permits could be used to convince them to sell their land.

“If you lose your permit, your private property and your ranch is no longer viable,” she told fellow legislators.

But several lawmakers said requiring the Legislature to approve a land sale would violate the owner’s property rights.

Rep. Steven Miller, a Republican farmer and rancher from Fairfield, said he agrees with Boyle’s goal of having some control over federal acquisition

of land in Idaho.

“The part I’m really struggling with is having my property rights subject to the Legislature,” he said.

Rep. Fred Wood, R-Burley, said he and three other people purchased 1,500 acres of farm ground several years ago to hunt geese on and then sold it later.

If the federal government had offered to buy it, Boyle’s bill would have required the Legislature to approve the sale, he said.

“That violates my property rights, in my opinion, by having to have one side of any transaction ... come to the Legislature and then theoretically the Legislature could say ‘no,’” he said.

Boyle said nothing in the bill would prohibit a private landowner from selling land to the federal government and one of its main goals is to prohibit the federal government from creating unwilling sellers.

She said the federal government “are the ones who come to the Legislature, not you as a property owner.”

If the bill became law, “It would be easier to sell my ground to China or Russia than the very United States in which we live,” said Rep. Van Burtenshaw, a Republican rancher and farmer from Terreton.

Burtenshaw, who made the motion to hold the bill in committee, said that if he chooses to sell his land to the federal government, for any reason, “that ought to be between me and the federal government and not the Legislature.”

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