

# Irrigation season starts in Umatilla Basin

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
EO Media Group

PENDLETON, Ore. — Ray Kopacz shouted over the rumbling of the cement truck one recent morning as workers patched a break in the Stanfield Branch Furnish Ditch that cost farmers a full day's worth of irrigation water.

The Stanfield Irrigation District had just started pulling water from the Umatilla River on March 31 and already they were faced with an emergency repair. Fortunately, Kopacz said they were able to catch the leak before it caused serious damage and the system was turned back on.

"It's getting to be that time of year everybody wants water," said Kopacz, SID manager. "Water is like gold. If you don't have it, this ground is worthless."

Irrigation season is underway across the Umatilla Basin, and most districts are feeling better than they did during last year's brutal, drought-stricken summer. Local snowpack is close to average, and so long as it doesn't melt too quickly, farms should be able to make their stored water last longer into the season.

Right now, Kopacz said growers are focused on watering their wheat and cattle pastures, while getting a head start on vegetables like potatoes and onions. Corn should be planted in the next week or so, he said.

The SID covers about 10,800 acres of high-value farmland. It is something



Workers with the Stanfield Irrigation District work on patching a ruptured spillway April 7 in one of their irrigation canals near Echo, Ore.



Water is diverted from one of the Stanfield Irrigation District's canals northeast of Stanfield, Ore.

of a special case, since the district has 34,700 acre-feet of water guaranteed through the Umatilla Basin Project — an acre-foot being the amount of water it takes to cover 1 acre with 1 foot of water.

Once the Umatilla River drops below a certain point, the district switches over to pumping irrigation water from the Columbia River. In exchange, the SID leaves its water right from McKay Reservoir in stream to protect native salmon and steelhead runs during periods of low flow. Kopacz said the program, which was passed by Congress in 1988, has been valuable not only to protect fish, but it has also

removed a lot of the guesswork for irrigators.

"Before we had the exchange, growers had to ask whether McKay was going to fill or not," Kopacz said. "Now, they already know we're going to have water for next year."

Not everyone has that luxury. The Westland Irrigation District, which has about 14,750 acres within its boundaries, isn't on the exchange and still depends entirely on Mother Nature for its water supply. Once it runs out, it's forced to shut off.

District Manager Mike Wick said this year looks much better than last, with the basin's snowpack at 98

percent as of April 7. Mountain snow is critical because it acts as a natural storage system for water, gradually replenishing streams and rivers into the summer. The longer they can pull live flows from the Umatilla River, the longer McKay Reservoir has to fill and the later into the season they can irrigate, Wick said.

"At this point, we should have an average to maybe above-average year," he said. "If we run to the end of September, that's a pretty good year."

Last year, Westland was forced to shut off its irrigation by mid-August. The district began irrigating this year in early March, and as

of April 8, McKay was 86 percent full. Wick said he'd be disappointed if the reservoir doesn't fill, but he has learned not to try to predict the weather.

District Watermaster Greg Silbernagel said April and May rainfall will go a long way toward determining how the rest of the water year goes. The state allows irrigation on most of the Umatilla River from March through October, though Silbernagel's office must continue to meet target flows for fish. The cutoff point for SID on the exchange program is 250 cubic feet per second.

The Hermiston and West Extension irrigation districts are also part of the Columbia exchange program, with HID using its flows from the Umatilla River to store at Cold Springs Reservoir. The 9,600-acre district is then eligible for credits to draw from the Columbia, if

necessary. HID Manager Annette Kirkpatrick said Cold Springs is about 70 percent full, which combined with the district's exchange credits should bring them close to a full water year. Irrigation from the reservoir started last week.

"This year is going to be better than last year," Kirkpatrick said. "We're not filled to capacity, but this year is definitely looking like an improvement."

Beverly Bridgewater, manager of the West Extension Irrigation District, said they began diverting their irrigation water March 18.

She agreed last year was difficult, but said the one positive was it got farmers thinking more about conservation.

"I think we're going to have a really good season, because we're all experienced paying attention to our water," she said.

## UI students skip graduation to attend international meat processing convention

Industry provides financial support for Germany trip

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Five University of Idaho students are so dedicated to meat processing they're going to skip graduation to attend an international conference.

The students will attend IFFA May 7-12 in Frankfurt, Germany, said Ronald Richard, Vandal brand meats manager and instructor at UI.

The conference takes place every three years. This is the first time the university is sending students abroad to IFFA. The university discussed sending students three years ago, Richard said, but the conference conflicted with UI's finals week and graduation.

"The parents won out for the graduation, walking and stuff," Richard said. "This year's group, the students decided this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and the parents concurred. People have told me time and time again, 'You need to get some students over there,' so that's what we're doing."

IFFA offers seminars, workshops and more than 1,000 vendors, including state-of-the-art meat processing and handling equipment and technology, Richard said.

"It's geared more towards the industry, which is one of the reasons why I like to get the students out there," he said. "Get them exposed to the industry, see what's there and make those contacts."

Meat processing is a global industry, and much of the technology and equipment used in the United States comes from Europe, Richard said.

Participating students are juniors and seniors involved in UI's meat processing program and student employees of UI's Vandal Meats, the university's retail sales outlet. Students applied to attend the conference, Richard said.

Depending on conference location, cost to attend IFFA is roughly \$2,750 to \$3,000 per student.

The Northwest Meat Processors Association and

several companies raised \$4,250. Several equipment supply companies also provided several thousand dol-

lars, Richard said.

The students will return to share their experience with various companies and

organizations connected to the UI program, Richard said.

"It basically broadens

their horizons and experiences to be more knowledgeable going out into the industry, being more aware

of what's going on out there and able to relate that to the companies they go to work with."

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## **Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association Policy Memorandum**

**DATE:** April 4, 2016

**TO:** Board of Directors, East Columbia Basin Irrigation District (ECBID);  
Mr. Craig Simpson, Manager, ECBID;  
Mr. Richard Lemargie; Counsel, ECBID

**FROM:** Ron Reimann, President, CSRIA  
Darryll Olsen, Ph.D., Board Rep. and Resource Economist

**SUBJECT:** Irrigators/CSRIA Proposed Assessment to ECBID to Allow Private Sector Financing/ Construction for Odessa Subarea Water Distribution Systems

**Representing System 1 (and 2 and 4) Irrigators, the CSRIA remains open to a litigation settlement with the ECBID Board, to allow for private construction of new surface water delivery systems from the East Low Canal (ELC).**

**The economics, and renewed call for further subsidies, surrounding Odessa Subarea irrigation system development make ever-more apparent the need to unleash private sector capital and construction. The Irrigators/CSRIA assessment proposal to the ECBID serves that end.**

**The Irrigators/CSRIA assessment (\$125/acre) proposal to ECBID provides for:**

- Full private sector funding and construction of System 1 (and other systems).
- Full private sector funding for the remaining modifications to ELC, estimated to be about \$28 million (in addition to the state's 2013 contribution of \$27 million).
- Full private sector funding for all District and USBR OM&R costs.
- Full private sector funding for the new systems' integration and management.
- Private sector transfer payments to the District for undefined costs or services.

**The Irrigators/CSRIA assessment proposal:**

- Does not rely on any further state/federal subsidies or transfer payments to complete System 1 (or other system) development.
- Already has received formal lender borrowing authority for about \$42 million (System 1), with further lending commitments for up to \$100 million.

**Continued objection to direct private sector funding/development only makes the state's 2013 funding allocation to ELC modifications appear fiscally irresponsible.**

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