

## Water

# Warm temps prompt early melt, impacts streamflow



Sean Ellis/Capital Press file

A sugar beet field near Ontario, Ore., is irrigated in this file photo from June 11, 2015. Owyhee Irrigation District patrons will receive a full allotment of irrigation water this year.

## Owyhee Irrigation District growers will get full allotment

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — For the first time since a lingering drought began to grip this area four years ago, Owyhee Irrigation District patrons will receive a full allotment of irrigation water this year.

"It's really a positive thing for the area," said Bruce Corn, a farmer and OID board member. "It's a tremendous change from what we've faced the past three years."

The Owyhee Reservoir provides irrigation water for 1,800 farms and 118,000 acres of ground in Eastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho. OID patrons receive 4 acre-feet of water during a good water year.

But due to the effects of a sustained drought, they only received 1.7 acre-feet last year and 1.6 acre-feet in 2014.

Because of good snowpack, farmers in this area anticipated receiving 4 acre-feet this year but the OID board chose to be conservative and not allocate the full amount until the water was actually in the reservoir.

The board set the allotment at a tentative 3 acre-feet in March, raised it to 3.8 acre-feet in April and then 4 acre-feet in late May.

OID Manager Jay Chamberlin said a major storm last month dumped a lot of snow in the valley and snowmelt was also higher than anticipated, which increased in-flows into the reservoir.

"Those two things combined gave us an additional 25,000 to 30,000 acre-feet of water that was somewhat of a surprise to us," he said. "It

really gave us a shot in the arm."

The focus now shifts to trying to ensure there is a decent amount of carryover water left in the reservoir to provide a buffer heading into the 2017 season, Corn said.

There was only 5,000 acre-feet of carryover water left in the reservoir at the end of the 2015 water season, a drop in the bucket compared to the reservoir's 715,000 acre-foot capacity.

"The hope now is that we can carry over a little water into next year so we don't start at zero like we did last year," Corn said.

That means it's doubtful that any excess water will be sold this year, he said. In years when there is ample water, OID patrons can purchase excess water above their 4 acre-foot allotment.

"We've been operating off of the bottom of the tank here," Chamberlin said in regard to the fact the system has ended the past two seasons with close to no carryover water. "We want to get to the point where we are operating off the top again. It's going to take some time to get there."

The reservoir has about 350,000 acre-feet of carryover water following good water years.

Malheur County Onion Growers Association President Paul Skeen said even 150,000 to 180,000 acre-feet of carryover water would provide farmers some breathing room heading into 2017.

"Going into next season with even 150,000 acre-feet would be a whole lot better than what it has been," he said.

Warm temperatures in April and May have caused early snowpack melt across the Pacific Northwest, prompting concerns in some areas about the availability of water late in the growing season.

### Idaho

Idaho managers say streamflow levels are peaking ahead of normal, and the Upper Snake Reservoir system won't fill to its capacity this year.

However, crops are also progressing ahead of schedule, and they still anticipate an adequate water supply for irrigators throughout most of the state, though the Natural Resources Conservation Service predicted in its June 1 water supply outlook report that potential shortages may occur by season's end in the Big Wood, Big Lost, Little Lost and Oakley basins.

Snowpack was average or better throughout most of the state, with the Bruneau and Salmon Falls basins having already received more than their normal precipitation for the entire water year. The driest areas throughout the water year — Henry's Fork and the Snake Basin above Palisades Reservoir — have still received 93 percent and 95 percent of their average precipitation respectively.

But water managers say the snowpack has melted prematurely and peak flows have arrived a couple of weeks earlier than normal, shifting demand to storage. Temperatures were above average in both April and May.

June temperatures have been unusually hot, with record highs of 97 degrees in Boise and 88 degrees in McCall set on June 5, according to the National Weather Service.

"Because of the hot weather, that's pushing the rest of the high elevation snow out," said Ron Abramovich, NRCS water supply specialist. "The Big Lost River just peaked June 6, and most streams will be in residual."

Lyle Swank, watermaster for the Upper Snake water district, said his system is 84 percent full, and he anticipates it will peak at about 90 percent full.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we're close to 10 percent, or 400,000 acre-feet, short on a 4 million acre-foot storage system," Swank said. "I think (water users) will have to do some rentals and other transactions to get the water where it needs to go, but I don't see widespread



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Steve Howser, general manager of Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., watches as the start of his canal system begins to fill after opening the gates on April 11. Howser anticipates he'll have sufficient water to make it through the season, with some carryover to spare, though he probably won't allocate the full amount to share holders.

problems at this stage."

Steve Howser, general manager of southeast Idaho's Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., said a wet May in his growing area allowed him to significantly reduce diversions, which he's ramped up lately. Howser said his water rights have filled in Jackson and American Falls reservoirs, but he's expecting only 80 percent of his Palisades rights to fill, and anticipates delivering shareholders 85 to 90 percent of their maximum allocations this season. He expects to hit his mark of ending the year with 50,000 acre-feet of carry-over storage.

"It's looking like we'll have a normal or better year," Howser said.

Brian Olmstead, general manager of Twin Falls Canal Co., gets three-fourths of his water from natural flows. He expects to exhaust his natural-flow rights originating from the Upper Snake by about June 20, which would be a couple of weeks ahead of normal. Olmstead said supplemental surface water that groundwater users provided this year under a water call settlement agreement should protect his users.

"We won't drain the storage system this year," Olmstead said. "Most people will have some carryover storage."

### Oregon

The final water supply report of the season concludes Oregon creeks and rivers will have below normal flows this summer, tightening the amount of water potentially available for irrigation, fish and recreation.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Portland predicts most streams will

be at about 60 percent of normal flow, worse in the southeast corner of the state.

The June Water Supply Outlook reflects an up and down year as monitored by the NRCS snow survey team in Portland.

In a recap, team supervisor Scott Oviatt said heavy winter precipitation helped refill the state's reservoirs, which dropped precipitously during the drought.

"Water year precipitation (measured Oct. 1 to March 31) has been near to above normal across the state, and has boosted reservoir levels that were near record low at the end of last summer," Oviatt said in a prepared statement. "This paints a much better picture for water supply this year, compared to last year when reservoir storage was well below average. However, if the summer is hot and increases demand, water users drawing from reservoir sources could still experience possible water shortages."

Reservoir levels won't be sustained into the summer by melting snow, because it's already gone.

About half the state's snow monitoring sites recorded near normal snowfall this past winter, but the peak of it occurred one to four weeks earlier than normal, the NRCS report said. Then came an early April heat wave, and the snow at most monitoring sites melted one to three weeks earlier than normal, and up to five weeks early at a few sites.

### Washington

Cascade Range snowmelt was above normal in May, depleting the remaining statewide snowpack to 46 percent of nor-

mal in the first days of June.

Snowpack below 5,000 feet elevation is virtually gone and five mountain reservoirs supplying summer irrigation water to 464,000 acres in the Kittitas and Yakima valleys have been full since mid-May.

The reservoirs hold 1,065,400 acre-feet of water, one third of what's needed for annual riverflows and irrigation. The other two-thirds is provided by snowpack.

Drawdown of the reservoirs is just beginning and will continue through summer, occasionally slowed by cooler weather or rain.

Major irrigation diversions on the Yakima River totaled 4,818 cubic feet per second on June 6, which is normal and largely still made up of water being released just to keep the reservoirs from overflowing.

Inflow at the five reservoirs was 83 percent of average, releases were 112 percent of average and major canal diversions were 103 percent of average on June 6, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

"Diversions collectively are pretty normal. Things look solid right now, but heat snaps or rain storms can increase usage or moderate it," said Chris Lynch, USBR hydrologist in Yakima.

The 46 percent of normal snowpack is a "tricky number because only about 25 percent of our 70 SNOTEL (snowpack telemetry) sites in Washington still have snow on them," said Scott Pattee, water supply specialist with the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service in Mount Vernon. Those sites are at 5,000 feet elevation and higher. Little snow is left below that, he said.

## Yakima, Wash., irrigators cross their fingers

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

ELLENBURG, Wash. — Two big Yakima Basin irrigation districts that dramatically

cut water usage last summer because of drought hope to make it through this season with no restrictions.

One of them, Kittitas Reclamation District serving 60,000 acres of farmland in the Kittitas Valley, took advantage of record April snowmelt by opening its canals three weeks early on April 1 and capturing 14,000 acre-feet of water that otherwise would have flowed to the ocean unused.

"Farmers started applying the water early and it was a form of ground water storage that helped us get a jump on the season," said Urban Eberhart, KRD manager.

It evened out later demand and was a "rapid adaptive move we were able to make because of the work we've done on the Yakima Basin

Integrated (Water Resource Management) Plan," Eberhart said.

It underscores the need for more surface and underground water storage as drier weather becomes the new norm, he said.

The district raised its water allotment by .5 acre-feet of water per acre to encourage growers to use early water, he said.

It's resulted in a much better looking first-cutting Timothy hay that started in late May, instead of mid-June, and was in full swing the week of June 6, he said.

Late summer water supply for the KRD, Roza Irrigation District in Sunnyside and other junior water right holders in the Yakima Basin was forecast at 86 percent of normal by the U.S. Bureau of Recla-

mation on June 3. That's up 1 percent from a month earlier.

At that level, the KRD should make it to the normal Oct. 15 end of the season with no restrictions if farmers all conserve as much water as possible, Eberhart said. The district normally diverts 336,000 acre-feet of water per season from the Yakima River at Easton.

Farther downriver, the Roza Irrigation District serves 72,000 acres of farmland from Selah to Benton City.

It's manager, Scott Revell, said the Roza should be OK at 86 percent of normal supply as long as it isn't a long, hot summer with little or no precipitation.

If it does become too hot and dry for too long, the district will begin working backward from its normal Oct. 20 shut off for an earlier ending, he said. He's keeping a wary eye on the situation.

At 47 percent of normal water supply last summer, the Roza cut water to growers by up to 75 percent and shut-down from May 11 to 31.

Kittitas Reclamation cut off water after in early August instead of October, largely preventing a second-cutting of Timothy. The district lost \$11.4 million in crops and the statewide crop loss due to the drought was \$336 million-plus, the state Department of Agriculture has said.

### LEGAL

#### Potato Variety Management Institute (PVMI) (http://www.pvmi.org)

#### Request for Proposals:

To produce a document that evaluates PVMI's business practices including financial management, policies/procedures, and board/business operations, and recommends improvements. The work will include a 10-year business plan and a succession plan.

#### Background:

In August of 2005, the potato commissions of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho filed Articles of Incorporation to create the Potato Variety Management Institute (a.k.a. PVMI). Incorporated in Idaho as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization (501(c)(3)), and with the potato commissions as its sole members, PVMI's stated purpose is "to enhance the agricultural capacity and resources of Idaho, Washington and Oregon for the benefit of their citizens by coordination of potato varietal research programs; management and protection of potato varieties created by state funding; and education of growers, processors and retailers." The top priorities of PVMI are to ensure intellectual property protection (via the Plant Variety Protection Act), and to collect license and royalty income from users of potato varieties developed by the Northwest Potato Variety Development Program, a cooperative venture of USDA-ARS, the potato commissions, and Land Grant universities in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. PVMI currently manages thirty protected potato varieties, collects license fees and royalties from seed potato producers, and after covering its business costs, returns funds to USDA-ARS and the universities to support potato research at those institutions.

Much has changed in the potato industry and research programs since PVMI was incorporated in 2005, and PVMI has accomplished more than the founders anticipated. In light of this change and success, the potato commission members and the PVMI board of directors have decided to embark on a formal planning process to launch PVMI into an even more successful second decade of operation.

#### To respond to this RFP, please provide:

- A proposal of no more than 5 pages describing how you would provide the document described above including a suggested timeline and cost estimate(s).
- A description of at least two successful projects you have completed, similar to the one contemplated here.
- At least two references from previous clients

Deadline for receipt of proposals: June 15, 2016.

Send all materials as a single PDF to Jeanne Debons, PVMI Executive Director, at: <mailto:jeannedebons@msn.com>

#### Proposal review process and timeline:

Proposal review will begin immediately after the June 15 deadline, with the aim of the PVMI board of directors selecting the successful consultant during its mid-July board meeting. We anticipate that most of the work of this project will be completed in the fall and winter months when the PVMI board members have more time available to dedicate to PVMI, with a completion deadline of March 15, 2017.