

Washington

Washington water supply better than expected, despite heat spikes

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Water supply in Washington is a whole lot better than anticipated this summer due to moderate temperatures in June and July.

River and stream flows are slightly below normal statewide but not at the extreme lows of last year, says Jeff Marti, drought coordinator for the state Department of Ecology in Olympia.

“Back in April and May when we had record warm temperatures and rapid snowmelt, we thought we were likely to see really low river flows later in summer, but thanks to moderate temperatures and normal precipitation in most of the state we haven’t seen the deterioration of conditions to the extent we feared,” Marti said.

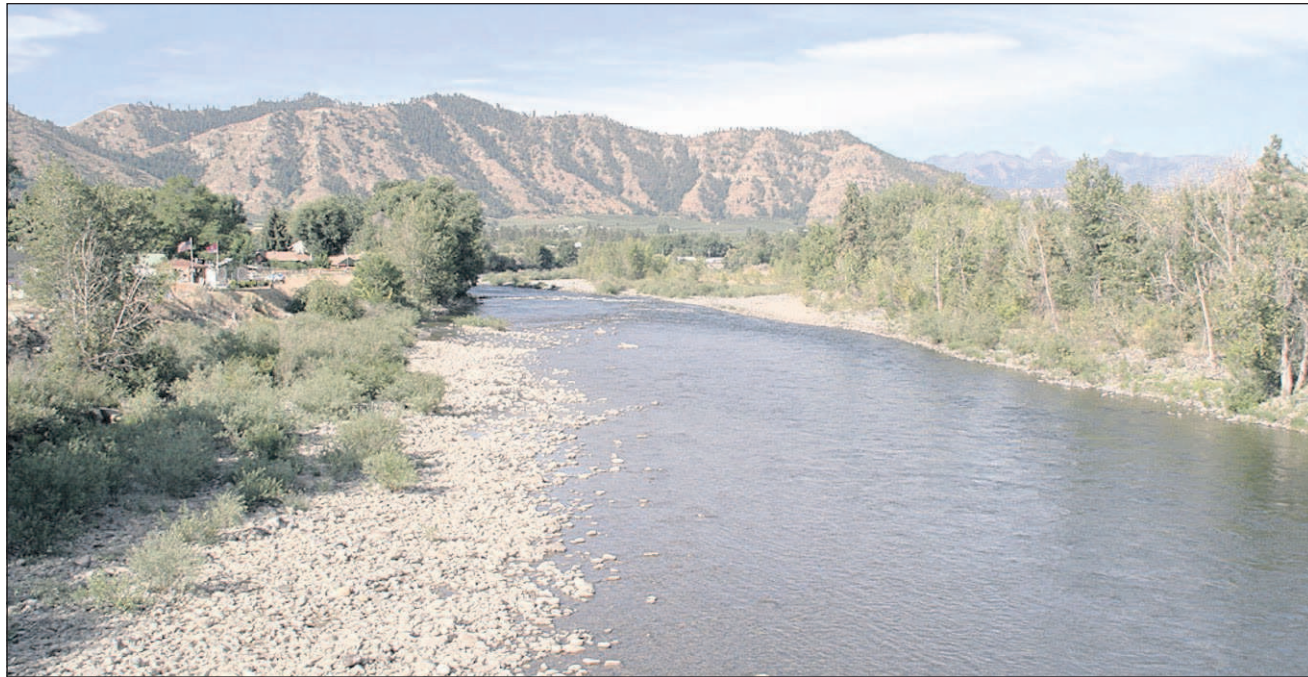
There have been hot days but not lengthy heat waves like last year, he said. That’s important in keeping water demand and river temperatures down, he said.

As of Aug. 9, 31 percent of the state’s rivers were below normal flow compared to 80 percent a year earlier during a statewide drought, Marti said.

Last year, 34 percent of rivers were at record lows on Aug. 9. This year, just 2 percent are, he said.

Those are the Upper Nooksack River in Whatcom County, the Satsop River in Grays Harbor County and the Hoh River in Jefferson County.

Last year’s drought caused



Looking west up the Wenatchee River from Aplets Way Bridge, Cashmere, Wash., Aug. 10. Riverflows statewide are much better than during last year’s drought. Nonetheless, some junior water rights were just curtailed on the Wenatchee.

Dan Wheat/Capital Press

millions of dollars of crop losses due to irrigation restrictions, particularly in the Yakima and Kittitas basins were junior water right holders were at 47 percent of normal supply.

The drought killed more than 200,000 sockeye salmon upriver of Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River and 182 sturgeon between John Day and Priest Rapids dams and in the lower Willamette River in Oregon, Marti said.

This season junior water right holders in the Yakima and Kittitas basins are at 90 percent of normal supply.

Irrigation districts can manage well at that level, said

Chris Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation hydrologist overseeing the Yakima Basin Project in Yakima.

Jim Willard, a Prosser grape and apple grower and board member of Roza Irrigation District, said the district is operating with normal water deliveries and foresees making it to the end of the season around Oct. 20 with no reductions.

Last year, the Roza, probably the hardest hit irrigation district in the state, cut water to growers by up to 75 percent and shutdown from May 11 to 31. It serves 72,000 acres of farmland from Selah to Benton City.

“Everybody is pleased. Life is a lot better than last year,” Willard said.

Five mountain reservoirs serving the Yakima Basin were at 62 percent of capacity on Aug. 9 which is about 98 percent of average for this time of year, Lynch said.

“We’re hanging in there pretty well,” he said.

The reservoirs store 1,065,400 acre feet of water when full. They were at 658,040 on Aug. 9 and likely will finish the season above 200,000 acre feet, Lynch said. A lot depends on temperatures and rain in September and October. Last year, the reservoirs finished at 107,323 acre feet

on Oct. 27, the lowest since the drought of 2005.

Rapid snowmelt this spring caused water usage to be terminated for about 600 junior water right holders, individuals not irrigation districts, on the Walla Walla, Touchet, upper Yakima, Okanogan, Methow, Chehalis and Nooksack rivers. Also included were the Little Spokane Basin and Cow, Charmokane and Harvey creeks all north of Spokane.

In recent days, Ecology sent curtailment letters to several users on the Wenatchee River and 14 users on Tucannon River and Asotin Creek in southeast Washington.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

The Owyhee Reservoir, which supplies irrigation water to farmers like this wheat field near Ontario, Ore., could end the season with as much as 160,000 acre-feet of carryover water.

Owyhee could have 160,000 acre-feet carryover

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — There could be as much as 160,000 acre-feet of carryover water left in the Owyhee Reservoir when the 2016 irrigation season ends.

That’s less carryover water than would be expected during an average year but, due to extended drought conditions that broke this winter, much more than the reservoir has ended the irrigation season with since 2012.

The reservoir provides water to 118,000 acres of irrigated farmland in Eastern Oregon and part of southwestern Idaho.

“It feels a lot better,” than the last several years, Owyhee Irrigation District Manager Jay Chamberlin said about the 2016 water year. “I think overall it’s going to be a good season.”

In an average water year, the Owyhee system will end the season with about 350,000 to 400,000 acre-feet of water that farmers can bank on for the next year. During good water years, that number is as much as 500,000 acre-feet.

The reservoir can hold a maximum of 710,000 acre-feet of storage water for irrigators.

As of Aug. 9, there was 277,000 acre-feet of storage water left in the reservoir and about 3,000 acre-feet has been leaving the system each day.

Chamberlin said that based on current trends, there should be more than 100,000 acre-feet left at the end of the season.

“(That’s) still a long way from normal, but when you’ve come off those really, really tough years that we’ve had, that gives you a lot more hope heading into next year,” he said. “We’re going to be in a lot better shape than we’ve been in.”

OID board member and farmer Bruce Corn estimates there will be between 120,000 and 160,000 acre-feet of carryover water left.

OID patrons get 4 acre-feet of water during a normal water year, like 2016, but only received a third of that amount in 2014 and 2015.

If there is around 150,000 feet of carryover water this year, growers would have a lot more breathing room heading into next year than they have enjoyed the past two years, when the reservoir finished the season with about 5,000 acre-feet of carryover water.

“It gives you a little bit of a cushion” heading into 2017, Corn said. “Exactly how much carryover water we will end up with remains to be seen. But certainly we should be over 100,000 acre-feet.”

Corn and Chamberlin said it’s likely that irrigation water will be shut off about the first of October, a couple weeks earlier than normal, in an effort to ensure as much carryover water as possible.

The OID board will probably decide on a firm shutoff date during its Aug. 23 meeting, Corn said.

Most of the area’s high-water crops are about two weeks ahead of normal, Corn said, which means September irrigation usage should be way down.

“I’d be surprised if we go past that” early October date, Chamberlin said. “Our crops are coming off early (and) I think that will help and nobody hopefully will come up short on water.”

DON'T MISS OUR ONLINE LIVE AUCTION!

August 15 – September 15



GLENER

Challenger

HESSTON
by MASSEY FERGUSON

SUNFLOWER

WHITE
PLANTERS



MASSEY FERGUSON

RoGator

TerraGator

GET THE EQUIPMENT YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR.

Join Agri-Service for our first online live auction! This is your chance to bid on an exclusive selection of used tractors, hay equipment and more at great prices. Be the highest bidder and take your machine home!

Highest bidder must purchase machine and is responsible for freight. Payment and trucking must be determined within two weeks of the end of the auction.

REGISTER NOW!

Visit agri-service.com/auctions/schedule to register for the auction and view available equipment.

AGRI-SERVICE 
Together, we drive agriculture FORWARD



©2016 AGCO Corporation. Massey Ferguson is a worldwide brand of AGCO Corporation. Hesston, Gleaner, RoGator, TerraGator, Sunflower and White Planters are brands of AGCO. Challenger is a worldwide brand of AGCO Corporation. Challenger, Cat and Caterpillar are trademarks of Caterpillar Inc. and are used under license by AGCO. AGCO, Challenger, Gleaner, Hesston Massey Ferguson, RoGator, Sunflower, TerraGator and White Planters are trademarks of AGCO. All rights reserved.