

# Senators optimistic about wildfire funding bill

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — Sponsors of a bill first introduced three years ago to fund suppression of catastrophic wildfires the same as other natural disasters, thereby freeing resources for wildfire prevention, believe the timing is now ideal to pass the legislation.

Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho, and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., say federal land managers must often divert funding from wildfire prevention and other programs to fight big wildfires.

Their Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, S. 235, would authorize Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster funding for fires costing more than 70 percent of the 10-year average, leaving the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to continue funding responses to more typical fires.

"These are the catastrophic fires," Crapo said. "They are disasters just as much as a hurricane, a flood or a tidal wave, and we should deal with them with the funding Congress has

already allocated for dealing with natural disasters."

The senators said during an Aug. 15 press conference the bill should impose no new financial burden on taxpayers, as adequate investment in prevention should reduce the prevalence of the largest wildfires.

"When prevention gets short shrift, and that is today's reality, you're always going to play catch-up ball in the rural West," Wyden said.

The bill passed the Senate and failed in the House, but a joint conference committee, which includes both Wyden and Risch was formed anyway, with plans of attaching the language to an energy and natural resources authorization bill or some other appropriations bill. Action on the bill is likely in November, according to Crapo's office.

Wyden said more than 250 organizations and several key lawmakers now support the concept, including Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., who has grown increasingly concerned about wildfire impacts on his state's baseball bat industry.

"I think after years of bitter debate on this issue we may just



Courtesy of inciweb.nwgc.gov

A smoke column rises Aug. 12 from the Pioneer Fire in the Boise National Forest.

may have found a sweet spot to finally get this resolved — to fix this broken, dysfunctional mess of a budget system and do it in a bipartisan way," Wyden said.

According to the senators, the Forest Service spent \$1.7 billion fighting fires in 2015, and the top 1 percent of fires represented 30 percent of the total cost.

Risch believes the Pioneer Fire, currently burning about 77,000 acres north of Idaho City in the Boise National Forest, demonstrates the importance of active forest manage-

ment. The timber industry had planned to harvest 15 million board-feet of timber from the fire area, which burned before the harvest could take place. Risch believes the Pioneer Fire, which was half contained as of Aug. 16, wouldn't have grown so big had thinning been conducted more expeditiously.

In Eastern Idaho, the Power Line Fire, which burned 3,106 acres of range land on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, was controlled on Aug. 15. The fire was ignited Aug. 10 by lightning, said BLM spokesman Lynn Ballard.



Courtesy of Mike McMillan

Black Mountain Hotshot Skyler Penna works a burn operation on the Pioneer Fire in the Boise National Forest.

## Irrigation water should flow in SW Idaho until October

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — Water is expected to continue to flow in most irrigation ditches in southwestern Idaho until the first part of October.

That's about normal for most water delivery entities in this part of the state, where farmers are heavily dependent on water stored in reservoirs.

"We're going to sail right through and go the whole season; there's no doubt in my mind," said Alan Newbill, a farmer and member of the Pioneer Irrigation District's board of directors.

Newbill said the district will likely shut the system down during the first or second week of October and would also like to end the season with some carryover water for the 2017 water season.

"If it's really dry and people need some water, we could run a little bit longer but if they don't need it, there's no sense in wasting it," he said.

The amount of storage water Pioneer still has available in Boise River reservoirs is about two weeks better than last year, said manager Mark Zirschky.

Pioneer's 5,800 patrons can expect their irrigation water to flow until the first or second week of October in an aver-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A peppermint field is irrigated Aug. 16 near Nampa, Idaho. Water is expected to flow in irrigation ditches in southwestern Idaho until the first part of October, the normal water delivery shutoff date for this region.

age year. Zirschky agreed with Newbill that the system should meet that goal this year.

"We should certainly make a full season," he said. "We should have some carryover water but we're not sure how much yet. It just depends on what the weather does."

The Boise Project Board of Control, which provides water to 167,000 acres and five irrigation districts in southwestern Idaho, is also looking at operating for a full season, said manager Tim Page.

"The decision hasn't been made yet, but I suspect we'll go into October before we shut irrigation off," he said. "We're in pretty good shape and we're going to have a fairly good season."

Page said water use this year hasn't been as high as in some

past years, which he assumes is due to different cropping rotations and irrigation practices in the valley, including many farmers' switch to drip irrigation.

Farmers who get irrigation water from the Weiser River system are having a much better water year than they did in 2015, when the system was shut down in mid-August, two months ahead of normal.

The system is getting low, but farmers who depend on it are also down to the last few weeks of their main irrigation needs. Demand should fall off significantly in September, said Weiser River watermaster Brandi Horton.

"It's crunch time but we're still looking pretty good," she said. "Last year was rough. This year has been pretty good to us."

## Strong Snake Plain water outlook deteriorates

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — A once comfortable water outlook has deteriorated on the Eastern Snake Plain, where water users now face record-low stream flows in some reaches, tightening supplies and the likelihood of ending the irrigation season with little storage carryover.

"Some of the junior priority water rights have been shut off, and some of the canals have run out of water," said Lyle Swank, watermaster for the water district encompassing the Eastern Snake Plain. "There are some that are still trying to find if there's any possibility to get water to their areas."

Swank said stream flows in the plain are approaching historically low levels. For example, the Snake River reach past Jackson Reservoir, at Flag Ranch in Wyoming, was flowing at a record-low 195 cubic feet per second on Aug. 10, about half of the median level for the date.

With natural flows prematurely diminished, Swank said, water users have been rapidly drafting storage, which has accounted for 70 percent of his water district's recent use. Reservoirs were 44 percent full as of Aug. 10, with American Falls Reservoir just a quarter full.

Snake Plain water managers were planning for a strong water year in March, but peak flows arrived early, limiting storage accumulation, and the summer has brought little precipitation and a prolonged stretch of high temperatures.

Twin Falls Canal Co. general manager Brian Olmstead said he'll make it through this



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Eastern Snake Plain storage and river flow levels have dropped far below normal. American Falls Reservoir in southeast Idaho has just a quarter of its capacity, leaving boat docks at Seagull Bay Marina exposed.

water year without cutting deliveries only because of roughly 40,000 acre-feet of water he's received from junior groundwater irrigators under terms of a Surface Water Coalition water call settlement. Olmstead said users began tapping storage much earlier than normal.

"I used considerably more storage in June than during the last several years," Olmstead said.

Steve Howser, general manager of the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., said he received about 15 percent less storage accrual this season than he anticipated, demand is about 25 percent higher than normal for this time of year and evaporative losses have been up during a summer in which temperatures have topped 90 degrees for 25 days. "I'll have no carry-over," Howser predicted. "With no carry-over, I'll need a better-than-average winter."

Complicating matters for many water managers, Swank said 141,340 acre-feet of surface water was leased this sea-

son — mostly to groundwater districts seeking to inject it into the aquifer to stabilize groundwater levels, and help meet terms of their water call settlement. In addition to forfeiting their water for this season, entities that leased water will be the last to have their rights filled next season.

Surface Water Coalition attorney John Simpson sees no net gain to conducting recharge when it cuts into storage carryover.

"One of the guiding principles the surface water people looked at when negotiating with the groundwater folks was a continued reliance on the storage system to solve this problem was not addressing the issue, and the issue was declining spring flows and reach gains," Simpson said.

Howser said Aberdeen-Springfield leased 20,000 acre-feet to groundwater users for recharge when the water outlook appeared strong. He recently sought to rent water to help finish this season but discovered "an awful lot of companies rented for recharge in one way or another" but now believe they have no water to spare.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

### Public Hearing on Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association

**WHAT:** Public hearing on proposal to expand protection and make name change in the Oregon Wildfire Protection System.

**WHEN:** 6 p.m., Aug. 24, 2016.

**WHERE:** Ashwood Elementary School, 18624 NE Main St., Ashwood, Ore. 97711

**WHY:** Surrounding landowners wanting to join the Ash Butte RPA.

**WHO:** Interested members of the public are invited to attend and give testimony.

**MORE INFO:** Public comment is sought on the proposal to: 1) expand the Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association area and change the name from Ash Butte to Ashwood-Antelope RPA in the Oregon Wildfire Protection System, and, 2) develop an agreement with the Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association to provide fire protection to rangelands in portions of Jefferson County, and Southern Wasco County. The Association would operate in cooperation with the Oregon Board of Forestry.

Oregon Dept. of Forestry staff will provide background on the proposal and answer questions. A report of the public testimony will then be provided to the Board for review prior to its consideration of the Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association proposal to expand at its next meeting.

If the proposal is ultimately approved by the Board, the new fire protection association would be directed and managed by local rangeland owners. Associations prepare annual budgets for review by the Board. Operating funds for Association activities typically are derived from annual dues assessed by the association on its members. Grants provided through ODF may provide supplemental funding.

Rangeland fire protection associations were authorized by the Oregon Legislature in 1963 to fill a gap in protection for portions of the state that do not lie within a rural fire protection district or a forest protection district. There are currently 21 active Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.

To ensure the broadest range of services to individuals with disabilities, lead-time is needed to make necessary arrangements. If special materials, services or assistance is required, please contact Marvin Vetter at the Oregon Department of Forestry office in Prineville at least 48 hours in advance, 541-447-5658 ext 244, text telephone (TTY) 800-467-4490 (outside Salem) and 503-945-7213 (in Salem).

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OREGON TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (OTAC)

**WHAT:** OTAC Meeting

**WHEN:** September 15, 2016 @12:30pm-4:00pm

**WHERE:** Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 4034 Fairview Industrial Drive, SE Salem, OR 97302 The Classroom (Conference Room) - 1st Floor

For more information, or to arrange special accommodations for meeting attendees, please contact Tracy Robillard, Oregon NRCS State Office, 503-414-3206.

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**PURSUANT TO ORS CHAPTER 87 Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 8/29/2016. The sale will be held at 10:00 am by TRS OREGON INC 1887 ANUNSEN ST NE SALEM, OR 2015 Coachman Trailer VIN - 5ZT3CH1B1FA310517 Amount due on lien \$7,874.37 Reputed owner(s) SEAN & HEIDI HALVERSON USAA FEDERAL SAVINGS BANK**

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