

# Hood River Basin's water reservations renewed

Renewal allows for development of new water rights

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Nearly 83,000 acre-feet of "water reservations" in Oregon's Hood River Basin have been renewed by state regulators, opening the way for new water rights development.

The Oregon Water Resources Commission voted in favor of extending water reservations in the region for another 20 years during its Aug. 18 meeting in Hermiston.

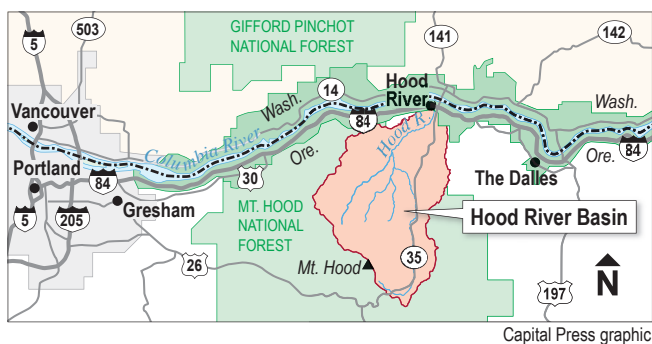
Oregon lawmakers allowed state agencies to "reserve" water for economic development when they established minimum in-stream flows nearly 30 years ago.

More than 300,000 acre-feet of water were reserved by the Oregon Department of Agriculture in five river basins — Hood, Grande Ronde, Powder, Malheur and Owyhee — but few farmers used the program to actually develop water rights.

Lack of awareness and concerns about environmental barriers limited participation in the program, but the ODA believes there's now a greater recognition of the need to develop water supplies.

Most water reservations were set to expire between 2016 and 2020, so the ODA has been working to win approval for their renewal by the commission.

The commission renewed a portion of the Powder River Basin's reservations earlier this year — roughly 26,000 acre-feet — but the 82,900 acre-feet renewed in the Hood River



Capital Press graphic

Basin was the largest chunk of reservations up for consideration.

Water supplies are a concern in the region because some irrigators rely on flows from glaciers around Mt. Hood that have been shrinking over time, said Margaret Matter, ODA's water resource specialist.

Irrigation districts in the Hood River Basin have already made great strides in modernizing their systems and saving water by piping open canals, which prevents seepage, she said.

"They can't tighten up their systems much more. If they want water, they need new sources," Matter said.

In terms of financing storage projects, it doesn't hurt that the area produces several high-value orchard crops, she said.

John Buckley, manager of the East Fork Irrigation District, said the water reservations would be useful if the district built a reservoir to capture flows in early spring.

The district doesn't currently have any storage, which would be useful in adding water supplies that can be used during the late irrigation season, when flows are lower, he said.

"With snow depleting on the mountain, we will struggle," said Buckley.

The Farmers Irrigation District is currently planning to raise a dam, which should provide adequate water capacity, but the renewed water reservations will provide added flexibility, said Les Perkins, the district's manager.

"A lot of it has to do with keeping the door open to future possibilities," he said.

Extending the water reservations has not been without controversy, however.

WaterWatch of Oregon, an environmental nonprofit, opposed the renewal proposal because it would "put in-stream values at serious risk," according to a letter to the commission.

ODA also failed to provide the commission with progress reports for the water reservation, as required by the rules for program renewal, the group said.

The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, meanwhile, urged the commission to assess the renewal's impacts on endangered species due to streamflows declining since the reservations were established.

"The Tribes do not support the proposed 20-year extension unless environmental safeguards are included in the amended basin program," according to a letter to the commission.

# Organic seed supply lags demand as industry grows

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

The state of the U.S. organic seed industry has improved over the past five years and more organic farmers are using organic seed.

But major seed supply gaps remain and most organic farmers still use conventional seed, according to the State of Organic Seed 2016 report.

The 111-page report was recently released by the Organic Seed Alliance, which surveyed 1,364 organic farmers in 47 states in 2014.

Organic certifiers and other industry stakeholders were also surveyed and it was the first five-year update of the initial State of Organic Seed report, which measures progress in meeting the organic seed needs of farmers.

The National Organic Program requires organic farmers to use organic seed when commercially available.

According to the 2016 report, 27 percent of farmers who responded to the survey use 100 percent organic seed, up from 20 percent in 2009.

It also showed that private and public investment in organic seed plant breeding and other research has increased significantly since the last report.

However, the report found that most organic farmers still use conventional seed and overall investment in breeding and other organic seed research is woefully lacking when compared with the conventional seed industry.

"We have made a lot of progress over the last five years. The findings are encouraging," said Kristina Hubbard, who co-authored the report and is OSA's director of advocacy and communications.

However, she added, a lot



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Beth Rasgorshek inspects organic watermelon seed at her farm near Nampa, Idaho, on Aug. 19. A recently released report on the state of the nation's organic seed industry contains encouraging news but most organic farmers still use conventional seed.

of work remains to be done.

For example, while \$22 million has been invested in public and private organic seed research in the past five years — from 1996 to 2010, only \$9 million was invested — that number pales in comparison with funding for conventional seed research, Hubbard said.

The report, which can be viewed online at stateoforganicseed.org, also found there is a lack of experienced organic seed producers and most large organic farms still use comparatively little organic seed.

The report offers 30 recommendations to further improve the organic seed industry.

The top three include investing more public and private dollars in organic seed research, training more organic farmers in seed production and working with the NOP and organic certifiers to advocate for organic seed.

Dale Coke, an organic farmer in Aromas, Calif., said the report contains promising news but also

showed there is a lot of room for improvement to ensure organic farmers have access to a reliable source of quality seed.

"The quality of organic seed remains a mix," he said. "Some of it is really good and some of it is less (desirable) than you would hope for. All in all, it's moving in the right direction. It's just a slow process."

Idaho organic seed producer Beth Rasgorshek said providing better access to quality organic seed is one of the biggest developments that could help organic farmers succeed.

"For organic farmers to use organic seed is just a perfect mix because that seed is adapted for organic systems," she said. "I think we have to do a better job of letting organic farmers know that there are seed options. And if that seed is not the right option for that farm business or that farm system, we need to figure out what we can do as breeders and growers to create those traits that (they need)."

# WSDA mum on where highly contagious horse traveled

State's first equine herpes case since 2011

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

A Washington state quarter horse euthanized Friday was infected with a highly contagious form of equine herpes virus and had spent the preceding weeks competing in Pacific Northwest rodeos, according to animal health officials.

The 18-year-old mare from Newport in Pend Oreille County in northeastern Washington would have been contagious for up to three weeks while traveling to rodeos in Washington and Idaho, said Scott Haskell, assistant state veterinarian at the Washington

Department of Agriculture.

Haskell declined to specify which rodeos the horse attended. He said rodeo organizers have been informed.

"It's not our role to communicate to the public about this," he said.

Haskell said the horse had been to so many events that it's possible the owner couldn't remember them all.

The horse arrived Thursday afternoon at the Washington State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Pullman and was immediately placed in isolation, hospital spokesman Charlie Powell said.

Based on neurological signs and laboratory tests, veterinarians confirmed the horse had contracted equine herpes, the first such case confirmed in Washington since 2011.

The virus can be spread by an infected horse sneezing or coughing, or touching the nose of another horse.

The virus can be spread indirectly through contaminated objects, such as buckets and blankets, that came in contact with nasal discharges from an infected horse.

The horse that was euthanized had been vaccinated against equine herpes, Haskell said.

"There are lots of factors that make up how well a vaccination works in a given animal," he said. "We are still very much recommending vaccinating animals for the control of this virus."

Symptoms of the virus include a high temperature, unsteady gait, weakness and urine dribbling.

# Idaho growers pleased with spud yields, quality

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

Idaho potato growers harvesting early season varieties report their 2016 crop generally has good yields, excellent tuber quality and an ideal size profile.

However, industry experts warn growers there's an elevated threat of zebra chip, a crop disease that causes bands in tuber flesh that darken during frying. Farmers are advised to continue protective insecticide sprays until vine kill.

According to an alert University of Idaho Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger issued Aug. 19, the first fields of the season, in Western Idaho, have symptoms of zebra chip, with the incidence above 60 percent. Samples are undergoing molecular testing.

Zebra chip is spread by tiny, winged insects called potato psyllids and caused by the Liberibacter bacterium.

Wenninger said the infected fields were not part of the university's extensive psyllid monitoring network, but he didn't specify details of the growers' insecticide programs.

"This development supports the need to maintain an inte-

grated pest management program targeting psyllids through the end of the season," Wenninger said in the alert.

Sampling of sticky traps surrounding fields involved in the monitoring network produced 728 psyllids during the week ending Aug. 13, with 643 of the psyllids coming from Treasure Valley. One psyllid collected that week tested positive for Liberibacter.

Jeff Miller, with Rupert-based Miller Research, suspects a mild winter helped insects such as psyllids build up populations. He suggests growers prioritize psyllid spraying over late blight, which hasn't surfaced as a problem this season.

"The number of psyllids has been so high and the number of hot psyllids has been so high the risk is pretty great," Miller said.

Wilder grower Doug Gross said news of the infected fields is alarming.

"In our own fields, we approached it as being a high-psyllid year and went with the Cadillac program," Gross said. "We're spraying for the seventh time now, and we've used the high-dollar in-

secticides."

Despite his psyllid concerns, Gross, who recently concluded harvesting Russet Norkotahs for the fresh market, said his yields and size profile have both exceeded expectations. He'll begin harvesting processing varieties after Labor Day.

In Eastern Idaho, Wada Farms started digging Norkotahs and reds on Aug. 22 and has been pleased by good size, yields and quality, said Wada official Kevin Stanger.

Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir expects a "trend-line yield," reflecting the natural tendency of farmers to increase their production a bit each season, and a traditional size profile, compared with the smaller tubers harvested last season.

"I think quality is going to be above last season," Muir said.

Prices, however, haven't improved, with USDA quoting the top four carton sizes selling for \$10.50 to \$12, mostly \$11 to \$11.50, and five 10-pound film bags of Norkotahs selling for \$4.50 to \$6, mostly \$5, on Aug. 19 out of Twin Falls and Burley.

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