



# Snowpack in Owyhee River Basin far above normal

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — The Owyhee River Basin is holding an unusually large snowpack right now, a good sign for the 1,800 farms that depend on irrigation water from the Owyhee Reservoir.

“The Owyhee looks really, really good. It’s incredible,” said Malheur County farmer Bruce Corn, a member of the Owyhee Irrigation District’s board of directors.

Snow melt from the basin flows into the reservoir, which provides water for 118,000 acres of irrigated farmland in Eastern Oregon and part of Southwestern Idaho.

Average snowpack was 164 percent of normal as of Jan. 30, but that only tells part of the story, Corn said.

“The whole watershed has snow in it right now,” he said. “There is a lot of snow where we normally don’t get any.”

There are significant amounts of snow in parts of the 11,000-square-mile basin that usually don’t receive much, said OID Manager Jay Chamberlin.

That means lots of snow



Submitted photo

As much as 40 inches of snow fell on Malheur County, Ore., during recent storms, damaging onion storage and packing facilities but also promising to fill the Owyhee Reservoir, which supplies irrigation water to farms in the region.

in the basin beyond the snow measuring sites.

“What’s so different about this year is that it’s spread out through the whole watershed and normally we don’t see that,” Chamberlin said. “We’re going to get water from areas we’re not used to getting water from.” Chamberlin said it’s pos-

sible the reservoir, which can hold more than 700,000 acre-feet of water for irrigation, could fill for the first time in several years.

OID patrons last year received their full 4-acre-foot allotment of irrigation water for the first time since 2011. In 2014 and 2015, they received only a third of that amount.

Now the 53-mile-long Owyhee Reservoir, which can hold two years’ supply of irrigation water when full, could return to maximum capacity for the first time in several years if the rest of the winter plays out right.

Forty inches of snow has been recorded at Oregon State University’s Malheur County

research station near Ontario so far this winter, said OSU Extension cropping systems agent Stuart Reitz. The previous record for an entire winter was 26 inches.

“Nobody around here has really ever seen these kind of conditions before,” he said.

OSU Extension cropping systems agent Bill Buhrig said the abundant snow is great news for the region’s farmers from a water supply standpoint — but it could cause other problems.

While area farmers have been able to plant some crops early in recent years, that’s unlikely in 2017, he said.

“We may be looking at a spring where we have to have a little more patience before we can get into the fields,” Buhrig said.

He also received a question from a farmer asking if he should be concerned about snow mold in winter wheat. Buhrig, also a farmer who grew up in the area, said he will have to do his homework on that.

“That’s a good question. We’ve never had that issue before around here,” he said.

## Grazing halted to study impacts on Oregon spotted frog

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

A federal judge has prohibited cattle grazing on 68,000 acres in Oregon’s Fremont-Winema National Forest until federal officials reconsider its impacts on Oregon spotted frogs.

Annual grazing authorizations for the Chemult Pasture issued by the U.S. Forest Service “did not account for evidence in the record showing cattle trespass, unauthorized use, and harm to habitat under the current management,” according to U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken.

Further grazing authorizations should be enjoined until the agency can determine the actual effects of grazing on the viability of spotted frogs and other sensitive species, according to Aiken’s ruling, which upholds conclusions reached by U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Clarke.

Multiple environmental groups — Concerned Friends of the Winema, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Western Watersheds Project, Oregon Wild and the Center for Biological Diversity — have long opposed grazing within the pasture, which has been ranched by the Iverson family for more than a century.

A lawsuit filed in 2008 was dismissed as moot because the U.S. Forest Service had built a riparian fence within the pasture to protect the frogs, which are now a threatened species.

In another case, filed in 2010, the Forest Service was found to have violated environmental laws but the judge didn’t impose an injunction against grazing because it would have been impractical and likely hurt frog populations on private land elsewhere.

The most recent complaint accuses the agency of underestimating the damage that cattle inflict on wetland habitats inhabited by spotted frogs in violation of several environmental laws.

The plaintiffs argued that during dry periods, the frogs gather in shallow pools and are trampled by cattle that regularly venture beyond areas they’re authorized to graze.

Because such unauthorized grazing wasn’t fully analyzed by the Forest Service, the agency’s conclusion that cattle had only a minimal impact on the species “lacks rational support” contrary to the National Forest Management Act, according to the court.

## OSU president criticizes Trump’s temporary immigration order

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

Oregon State University President Ed Ray said he is “angry and disappointed” by President Donald Trump’s temporary executive order on immigration, saying the changes lack detail, are being unevenly implemented and have created “anxiety, uncertainty and hardship” among “thoroughly vetted” refugees, immigrants and green card holders.

OSU counts 165 students and six visiting scholars from the seven predominantly Muslim countries included in Trump’s 90-day order. It appears none of them were in transit when the executive order was issued, and so were not stuck at airports or otherwise prevented from reaching Corvallis, according to OSU.

Ray made his remarks in a prepared statement.

University Vice President Steve Clark could not immediately say whether some of the students or scholars are involved with OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences. Clark said OSU is not allowed to give out confidential student information. If only a handful of affected students or scholars are affiliated with the ag college, they would effectively be identified, he said.

OSU, like much of Pacific Northwest agriculture, has extensive international connections. University faculty travel worldwide, Clark said, and OSU hosts researchers and students from dozens of nations. Restrictions on the opportunity to do collaborative research are a serious matter, he said. During a 2015 wheat field day in Eastern Oregon, for example, OSU breeders and soil scientists cited an Iranian study of wheat yield losses caused by root lesion nematodes and fusarium crown rot.

Ray, the OSU president, previously declared the university an immigration sanctuary, and repeated that stand in the statement issued Monday.

“OSU’s Sanctuary Uni-



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Oregon State University President Ed Ray, shown in this 2015 photo, said OSU will remain a sanctuary university for immigrants and opposes Trump’s temporary travel ban on people from seven predominantly Muslim countries.

versity status is not subject to recent presidential executive orders since the university complies with all federal laws. The United States Con-

stitution provides for states’ rights that effectively allow state entities such as OSU to decline to participate in an enforcement role in carrying out

deportation actions,” Ray said in the statement.

OSU won’t provide information to aid in those actions unless required by court order or an emergency health or safety situation, Ray said. The university’s public safety department won’t voluntarily collect or provide information to federal immigration enforcement officials, Ray said.

Vice President Clark acknowledged the university has heard from critics, including some alumni, who disagree with that stand.

The university doesn’t appear overly worried about losing federal funding due to its sanctuary stand, an action Trump has threatened to take against cities that defy him.

Executive action by the Trump administration or fed-

eral funding changes based on OSU’s sanctuary status “would be subject to legal scrutiny” based on separation of powers and delegation of authority, the university said on its website. “OSU would oppose any effort to provide executive or statutory authority for such actions,” OSU said.

According to OSU’s website, the university had 3,937 international students as of fall 2016. Of those, 89 are from Iran, one of the nations included in Trump’s ban.

More than a third of international students, 1,678, are from China. The next largest segment, 442, come from Saudi Arabia, which was not included in Trump’s immigration ban. The College of Ag Sciences has 123 international students; the College of Forestry has 42.

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