



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Wesley Hipke, recharge program manager for the Idaho Department of Water Resources, said aquifer recharge will be impacted as irrigators become more efficient. He spoke during a meeting of the Idaho Water Resource Board in Jerome on May 2.

More recharge projects planned in Idaho

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — While the abundance of available water this year proved a blessing in the Idaho Water Resource Board's efforts to recharge the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer, there's more work to be done in the effort to restore and maintain aquifer levels.

And that challenge is going to become more difficult as irrigators gain efficiencies that reduce incidental recharge, which currently accounts for two-thirds of aquifer recharge.

"The more that happens, the more managed recharge has to pick up that slack," said Wesley Hipke, IWRB recharge program manager.

Hipke gave an update on this year's recharge efforts and current and potential recharge projects during the IWRB joint committee meeting last week.

Managed recharge for the 2016-2017 water year is expected to reach 340,000 acre-feet, well above the 250,000 acre-feet annual goal.

Current recharge projects include five in the upper Snake valley and five in the lower valley with a projected cost of \$8.9 million. Potential projects for the next fiscal year include four in the upper valley and five in the lower valley, including two using water from the Big and Little Wood rivers, at a projected cost of \$4.7 million.

Projects in the lower valley provide "more bang for the buck," with water for recharge dependably available every year — with the exception of the Big and Little Wood rivers, which have available water every three to 10 years. The Upper Valley comes into play in 50 percent of the years, he said.

Though water isn't available in some areas every year, "they're very important in wet years, and recharge sites need to be scattered throughout the ESPA — we want to benefit the whole aquifer," Hipke said.

"When water is available, we want to be able to catch it," he said.

When current projects are completed in the lower valley, winter capacity for recharge will be 850 cubic feet per second — about 170,000 acre-feet. That's short of the 250,000 acre-foot goal, and IWRB is looking at developing more capacity to capture excess water in years like this, he said.

The minimum needed to reach the goal of 250,000 acre-feet is 1,100 cfs capacity, but Hipke would like to get capacity to 1,500 cfs to 2,000 cfs.

"I basically want to double what I have now. These projects get me a whole lot closer," he said.

Potential construction projects in the lower valley have the potential to add 600 to 800 cfs.

Capacity throughout the ESPA when this year's projects are completed is more than 900 cfs, but it's harder to translate capacity to acre-foot benefit in the upper valley because available water is less dependable and the recharge period is normally only 30 days.

Inslee nixes rural rail development bill

Veto disappoints Farm Bureau

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee vetoed a bill Tuesday to loosen restrictions on industrial development near intrastate railroads in rural Eastern Washington, disappointing groups such as the Washington Farm Bureau, which said the legislation would help farm-based economies.

Inslee sided with an environmental group that argued the legislation would actually threaten farmland.

In a veto message, the governor said the bill might help rural counties develop, but at a cost. "It would undermine our longstanding commitment to preserve working farms and promote our agriculture econo-



Gov. Jay Inslee

my," he stated. House Bill 1504 would have allowed rail-dependent industries on land that may now be off-limits because of the state's Growth Management Act.

Farm Bureau associate director of government relations Mark Streuli said the bill would not have harmed agriculture.

"We're not talking about prime farmland," Streuli said. "The land we're talking about is right along the railroad, not real useful for growing stuff, but it is useful for building stuff that might be useful for agriculture."

The legislation stemmed from a dispute over industrial development in Clark County. The bill was written to apply to only Clark County west of the Cascade Range, but all counties

east of the Cascades.

Amber Carter, lobbyist for the Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad, said the bill would have opened the way for land along the railroad to be rezoned, potentially creating hundreds of industrial jobs in Clark County.

She said Tuesday that she thought the bill was going to be signed after it passed the Democratic-controlled House and Republican-led Senate by wide margins.

The railroad's president, Eric Temple, said in a written statement that rezoning property near the railroad would generate far more revenue for government.

"The irony is, Gov. Inslee promotes himself as a leader who cares about the environment, wants to create family wage jobs, and supports school funding, as well as other essential services, all of which this bill would achieve," Temple said.

The environmental group Futurewise fought the bill, and Inslee's veto message reflected its arguments.

Futurewise state policy director Bryce Yadon said Tuesday that the group was most concerned that land officially designated as agricultural lands of long-term significance would be lost.

"We're not trying to prevent rural economic development," he said. "Our concern is that this would take away a resource (land) that's really at the heart of a growing agricultural economy."

The bill's prime sponsor, Rep. Liz Pike, R-Camas, said Inslee put protecting the Growth Management Act over creating jobs.

"Gov. Inslee has once again shown that job creation and the economic vitality of those citizens who live beyond what he can see from the top of the Seattle Space Needle is just not

important to him," she said in a written statement.

Inslee stated he was "committed to fully supporting the Growth Management Act," but also supported reviewing the act to see whether rural counties could be given more flexibility to develop.

The House and Senate budget proposals both include \$600,000 for such a review as part of creating a "road map to Washington's future."

Washington Public Ports Association Executive Director Eric Johnson said in a letter this month to Inslee that the bill would help short-line railroads, which in turn would help farmers and food processors move goods.

"Short-line railroad owners and operators need another tool to be able to pursue business opportunities that will lead to more diverse regional economies," he wrote.

Oregon dairy industry builds trade 'pipeline' to SE Asia

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Representatives of Oregon's dairy industry recently completed a trade mission to Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore, where they were building a "pipeline" to sell artisan cheese in Southeast Asia.

Dairy processors from Oregon, Utah and Arizona, along with government officials and other industry experts, traveled to the three countries from April 22 to May 4.

"The trade missions are part of a bigger picture. The bigger picture is allowing small- and medium-sized firms to enter the export market," said Pete Kent, executive director of the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council.

The council has organized several trade missions to the region in recent years — joining with representatives from nearby states — to meet with food distributors and create a critical mass of demand for Western dairy products.

"We realized Oregon alone is not going to have the volume, particularly in artisan cheese, to build the market," said Kent.

Cheesemakers and other dairy processors in Oregon already export goods to Asia, but these opportunities often occur in isolation, he said.

The council is trying to create an ongoing, reliable connection between Oregon dairy producers and consumers in Southeast Asia, an area with a newly burgeoning middle class and demand for protein-rich foods.

"Here we are, 12 hours away from that," Kent said.

Reducing the cost of shipping U.S. dairy products would make them more affordable in the region, improving their marketability, he said.

Air freight is expensive, so consolidating pallet loads of dairy products from several companies would be more cost-effective, Kent said.

Eventually, given enough demand, transporting dairy products on ocean contain-



Pete Kent/Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council
Participants sample cheeses from the U.S. during an April 25 trade show in Vietnam. Representatives of the Oregon dairy industry recently returned from a trade mission to Southeast Asia, where they visited food distributors in Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore.

er ships could further bring down the cost, particularly for hard cheeses with a longer shelf life, he said.

"By combining our efforts, we can bring several cheesemakers together," Kent said.

Cheese isn't a traditional component of Southeast Asian diets, so expatriates from the U.S., Europe and elsewhere would likely be the initial target demographic for artisan cheeses, he said.

However, the region has experience with incorporating foreign foods into domestic cuisine. For example, Vietnam's colonial past introduced the country to French baguettes and other breads.

Aside from cheese, the council is also trying to export U.S. ice cream and dairy ingredients such as lactose and whey.

There also may be an opportunity to manufacture novel products, such as flavored butters and drinkable yogurts, that are proving popular in Southeast Asia, said Kent.

"What can we learn over there that we can bring back here?" he said.

Singapore is a particularly attractive destination for Oregon dairy products, given its

low barriers to trade and small land base, which forces the nation to rely on food imports, Kent said.

Vietnam and Malaysia have higher import hurdles and their cooling and distribution infrastructure aren't as developed, he said.

The two countries are nonetheless appealing export markets since their humid climates aren't conducive to sustaining large domestic dairy industries, he said.

As a follow-up to the trade mission, the council hopes to have dairy processors send four to six sample shipments of their products to the three Southeast Asian countries.

Such samples could help determine which goods are popular among consumers there and how they could best be promoted, Kent said.

The council also wants to hire a consultant — possibly using a USDA grant — to coordinate shipments to Southeast Asian distributors from U.S. dairy companies, easing the export process, he said.

"Being mostly family operations, they're doing two, three, four jobs each," Kent said.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press
Water is released April 14 from Lucky Peak Reservoir on the Boise River system for flood control.

Idaho Supreme Court to decide Treasure Valley flood control issue

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Supreme Court could decide this year how Boise River system reservoir water released to prevent flooding should be accounted for.

Treasure Valley irrigators say water released for flood control purposes should not be counted against their reservoir storage rights.

The Idaho State Department of Water Resources says it should, and the two sides have fought over the issue for several years.

Judge Eric Wildman, presiding judge of the Snake River Basin Adjudication Court, ruled in favor of the state last summer.

Irrigators have appealed that decision to the state Supreme Court, and both sides say a decision could be issued before the end of the year.

In a second, related decision that went in favor of the irrigators, Wildman ruled that a water right exists for water that is stored in the reservoirs following flood control releases.

He sent that issue back to a special court master to decide the priority date of those water rights. That ruling is stayed until the Supreme Court decides the major issue of how flood control releases should be accounted for.

The Treasure Valley Water Users Association, which is representing irrigators on the issue, is using this year's unusually high river flows to point out the danger the state's stance poses to irrigators.

TVWUA Executive Director Roger Batt pointed out that more than 1 million acre-feet of water has already been released to prevent flooding in the valley.

The system's three reser-

voirs have a combined storage capacity of 983,000 acre-feet. The water releases began when fields and canals were mostly still under snow and ice and too wet to work the land, Batt said.

Irrigators in the region rely on natural flow in the Boise River until June in an average year and then turn to water stored in the reservoir to finish the season.

Under the state's stance, irrigators' reservoir storage rights would already be exhausted, Batt told Capital Press.

"Applying the state's theory, we would have zero storage water for the irrigation season (this year)," he said. "If that came to fruition, we would literally have exhausted all of our storage water rights because of flood control releases this year."

IDWR Deputy Director Mathew Weaver said the department feels vindicated by Wildman's ruling. The many public comments the department used to receive on the issue have mostly evaporated since the decision, he said.

In his ruling, Wildman wrote that the arguments put forth by water users "would effectively transfer water right distribution in the basin from the (IDWR) director to the federal government...."

Aside from being contrary to the prior appropriation doctrine, Wildman wrote, "this would cripple the director's ability to effectively distribute water under our system of water rights administration."

Weaver said the department is still hopeful the sides can reach a settlement, but Batt said any settlement offer that includes subordinating senior water rights to junior rights is a non-starter.

Industry hopes for wheat yield increase as season progresses

Growers report good moisture conditions

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The USDA projects lower wheat yields for Washington and Idaho compared to last year, but industry officials say they are hopeful those numbers will improve by harvest.

Based on May 1 conditions, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service projects the average winter wheat yield in Washington will drop from

78 bushels per acre last year to 67 this year.

Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires said a lower yield "totally" makes sense. Last year's average yield was nearly a record, due to good weather.

"I don't know that anyone was anticipating we'd have another near-record (year)," Squires said.

But that 67 bushel estimate could increase to around 70, Squires said, noting it's only the USDA's first yield estimate.

With the exception of two drought years, average yields have ranged from 65 to 71

bushels an acre in recent years, he said.

"It's still a long way to harvest," he said.

Mike Eagle, a Washington Grain Commission member who farms 1,200 acres north of Almira, Hartline and Wilbur in Eastern Washington, isn't certain what yield to expect yet.

"Half of my wheat looks good and the other half is in need of some mild weather," he said. "We've got lots of moisture, so there's good potential for a good crop."

That moisture delayed Eagle by more than a month. He usually is in his fields around April 1, but got started about

May 1.

"People are getting stuck and it's wet," he said.

Eagle was spraying his winter wheat for weeds and stripe rust, and expected to make a second application to combat rust, which can reduce yields.

"If you don't, it'll destroy your crop," he said.

Winter wheat yield in Idaho was expected to average 85 bushels per acre, down about 9 bushels from last year.

Yield is expected to average 59 bushels per acre in Oregon, up 9 bushels from last year.

Farmers report the wheat

crop came through the winter in generally good condition, said Blake Rowe, Oregon Wheat CEO.

"We are encouraged by the good moisture conditions we are seeing in Oregon," Rowe said. "It is too early to speculate on the NASS estimates for the harvest, but we hope they are correct. We will just have to give it a little more time."

Eagle is cautiously optimistic for the season.

"We just need some warm weather — not hot weather, warm weather," he said. "I'm superstitious, so I don't like to jinx myself."