

Washington's snowpack remains above normal

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — Washington state's mountain snowpack continued to improve through March, just as it did during the second half of February.

Statewide snowpack was 113 percent of normal on April 3, up from 109 percent on March 2 and 100 percent on Feb. 5, said Scott Pattee, state water supply specialist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon.

"It's a combination of some good storms and being cool enough to keep snowpack intact. We've had slightly above normal snowfall in the mountains in March. As long as we have no big rapid warmup, we'll be in good shape," Pattee said.

The Climate Prediction Center of the National Weather Service is predicting equal chances of above and below normal temperatures and precipitation in Washington for the next three months, he said. Good snowpack is critical for summer irrigation of farmland. The Yakima Basin's 464,000 irrigated acres, mostly farmland, includes the area most



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Mission Ridge Ski Area south of Wenatchee, Wash., on March 30. The ski area and almost all of the Cascade Mountains received plentiful snowfall through March.

vulnerable in drought years.

The five mountain reservoirs serving the Yakima Basin were at 75 percent of capacity and at 120.5 percent of average for this time of year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The reservoirs' inflow from Oct. 1 to April 1 was 791,000 acre-feet and 119 percent of average and releases were 351,000 acre-feet and 118 percent of average.

Releases were accelerated to aid downstream passage of fish smolts but the

reservoirs are on target to be full about the end of May for maximum help for summer irrigation, said Douglas Call, USBR Yakima River operator.

Pattee said he would have April 1 through September state streamflow forecasts calculated by April 6 and that they should be normal or above normal.

Snow water equivalent snowpack in the Spokane basin was 120 percent of normal on Feb. 3. The upper Columbia (Okanogan

and Methow rivers) was 136 percent. The central Columbia (Chelan, Entiat and Wenatchee) was 108, the upper Yakima was 100 and the lower Yakima 101. Walla Walla was 102, the lower Snake River was 116, the lower Columbia was 108, south Puget Sound (from Cascade crest to lowlands) was 98, central Puget Sound 114, north Puget Sound 124 and the Olympics 116. Except for the Olympics, they were all the same or higher than a month earlier.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Alex Paraskevas was hired in February by SEDCOR as a rural innovation catalyst, helping to make connections for agriculture and technology in the Mid-Willamette Valley. He also focuses on business retention and expansion for Polk County, Ore.

New SEDCOR position focuses on ag, technology

By GEORGE PLAGEN
Capital Press

At the intersection of agriculture and technology, Alex Paraskevas sees major potential for the Mid-Willamette Valley.

The greatest advancements may not come from the slickest machines, Paraskevas said, but from data mining solutions to help local growers make the best possible management decisions.

"Margins are slim, time is short and people don't necessarily want to go out on a limb," Paraskevas said. "We're trying to be the glue, holding things together."

Paraskevas was hired in February by the Strategic Economic Development Corporation, or SEDCOR, as a regional innovation catalyst, focusing particularly on building bridges between the agriculture and technology industries.

Recently, tech giant Intel teamed with Rogue Ales on a project at the brewery's hops farm in Independence, Ore., tracking environmental conditions aboard trucks as the sensitive crop is hauled north to Portland.

Though Paraskevas cannot talk about specific proposals in the pipeline — they are closely guarded secrets, discussed using code names — he believes the collaboration between Intel and Rogue Ales may be just the beginning. His job, he said, is to continue building that culture and momentum.

"We're trying to create an environment where two individuals can talk to each other, where they might not talk to each other normally," Paraskevas said. "We would love for this to become sort of a test bed innovation area."

SEDCOR, which serves members in Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, hired Paraskevas with support from a two-year, \$50,000 grant from the Ford Family Foundation. He previously worked 10 years at Willamette University in Salem, Ore., serving as assistant director of alumni communication and then as the associate director of research and prospect management under University Advancement.

In addition to being a regional innovation catalyst, Paraskevas will be responsible for business retention and expansion in Polk County. He is already working closely with Shawn Irvine, economic development director for the city of Independence, on its Smart Rural Community effort, encouraging the growth of agricultural technology businesses.

"Alex brings an inquisitive mind and go-getter attitude," Irvine said in a statement shortly after Paraskevas was hired. "He is quick to see connections and understand what people need. I'm excited to get started and see where we can go together."

Paraskevas, 33, is a native of the area, graduating from South Salem High School in 2002 and from the University of Oregon in 2006. Both of his parents are professors at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Ore.

Paraskevas readily admits he has little to no background in agriculture. He describes himself as the "typical Salemite," not fully aware of where his food comes from. But he said he is learning fast as he goes.

"It's fun to be learning the nuts and bolts of all the different commodities in this area," Paraskevas said.

SEDCOR President Chad Freeman said they are excited to have Paraskevas aboard.

"We are excited to see where his energy, enthusiasm and knowledge takes us as we work directly with business to grow jobs for Polk County and the region," Freeman said.

Moving forward, Paraskevas said there is no real agenda for his position, other than to foster participation and cooperation that could lead to big developments down the road.

"It's just building more of a formal pipeline for this kind of stuff to come out," he said. "Necessity is truly the mother of all invention for (farmers). They don't care what necessarily it looks like. They just need to get the job done."

Irrigators pursue Bureau of Reclamation assets

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The Kennewick Irrigation District is obtaining title to some of its canals and infrastructure from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and its members are considering whether to seek the rest.

Title transfer will give the district control over assets it has paid nearly \$4.6 million for on a lease-loan over the past 65 years and will benefit the local community, said Charles Freeman, KID manager.

"We have 300 land property transfers a month. The bureau can't keep up with that work. Developers have waited over a year for easements," Freeman said.

Easements have to be processed when properties are sold and released in cases where they've never been used. USBR has one person for such work for the entire Yakima Basin whereas KID has five engineers handling subdivisions, Freeman said.

The city of Kennewick is seeking "linear parks" — rights-of-way on top of enclosed canals for use as recreational trails, he said. It's almost impossible for USBR to approve such a request, but KID would allow it, he said.

KID already does all the maintenance on the system and is liable for it, so why not own it? he said. The district has 62 full-time employees



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

The Yakima River flows through Prosser, Wash., to the Prosser Dam. The 6-megawatt hydroelectric dam could be transferred from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to the Kennewick Irrigation District as part of the second phase of a facility transfer contemplated by the district.

and an \$11 million annual operating budget.

A year ago, the KID board directed staff to explore title transfer. Staff recommended a two-phase approach with phase one being the transfer of 74 miles of canals with laterals, pumps, drains and wasteways downstream from the headworks at Chandler Pump Station, which is 11.2 miles east of Prosser.

In February, KID and USBR signed an agreement and KID paid USBR \$115,000 for USBR's portion of a consultant's review of the phase one title transfer.

KID owes \$480,000 on the original \$4.6 million, zero-interest loan from 1953 that's scheduled to be paid off in 2024. KID will pay it

off early, possibly in a year, as part of the process of Congress approving phase one title transfer, Freeman said. Being early, the amount may end up a little lower, he said.

Phase two, which is still being considered, would include the dam at Prosser, fish screens, the 11.2-mile diversion canal from the Yakima River to Chandler Pump Station, two six-megawatt hydroelectric generators, associated water rights and a mile-long, 99-inch diameter siphon that carries water under the river and Interstate 82 from hydropumps to the canal.

"The easy stuff is in the first phase and phase two concerns fisheries and tribes.

We need their support. It may not be in KID's interest to take phase two. We're not committed yet," Freeman said.

The generators produce about \$1 million worth of electricity annually with that revenue going to the bureau, he said. If KID owned the generators and had the revenue it likely would be spent on deferred maintenance of the facility, he said.

Freeman testified before the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee's subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans on Feb. 14. Title transfer approval could occur in a bill for the KID or a broader bill taking in other items nationwide.

As a separate project, the district is nearing completion of the preliminary design for electrification of the Chandler Pumping Plant. Congress authorized approximately \$24 million for the project in 1994.

KID, however, can do the work for less money and is negotiating to have the remaining \$20 million of the authorization credited to KID, which might use it to acquire 9,000 acre-feet of bureau water in Lake Roosevelt, Freeman said.

Currently, Chandler Pumping Plant is powered by water pressure. During droughts there's not enough pressure and the district loses its water supply. Electrification would avoid that.

Employees buy Ward Rugh hay company

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — Three employees of the oldest hay company in Ellensburg have bought the firm from the family who started it 84 years ago.

Corey Rogers, Andy Schmidt and Craig Leishman bought Ward Rugh Inc. from Rollie and Marla Bernth on March 6 for an undisclosed price. Marla's father, Ward Rugh, started the company in 1934 as a trucking concern and moved into hay. Rugh died in 1995.

"Our business philosophy will not change as we move forward. We will continue the legacy of Ward Rugh Inc., which is known around the world for supplying the highest quality Timothy and alfalfa hay," said Corey Rogers, new president.

"The foundation of this highly reputable business is stronger than ever due to the conservative business philos-



Courtesy of Ward Rugh Inc.

From left are Andy Schmidt, Corey Rogers and Craig Leishman, new owners of the Ward Rugh Inc. hay company in Ellensburg, Wash.

ophy which Rollie and Marla Bernth created," Rogers said.

Customers, growers and those in business relationships with Ward Rugh Inc. won't notice much difference as the three partners continue their same roles while taking new titles, he said.

Schmidt, vice president and treasurer, will continue handling purchasing in Kittitas County and domestic sales. Leishman, vice president and secretary, will continue with

Columbia Basin purchasing and South Korean sales. Rogers, president, will continue as general manager and with sales to Japan.

The three have a combined 60 years of experience and knowledge working at Ward Rugh Inc.

Joe Wahle, a 32-year employee, will continue as truck dispatcher to the ports of Tacoma and Seattle, safety officer and fleet manager, Rogers said.

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