

Owyhee Irrigation District ends season with strong supply

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The supply of water in southeastern Oregon’s Owyhee River drainage remains well above average heading into the Oct. 15 closure of irrigation season, which means many farmers can start making planting decisions for 2020.

Owyhee Irrigation District Manager Jay Chamberlin on Oct. 7 said Owyhee Reservoir, southwest of Adrian, was about 63% full compared to a long-term average 35-40% for that date.

“We are going to end the season with around 450,000 acre-feet stored in the reservoir. That almost guarantees us enough for all of next year,” he said.

Winter snowpack notwithstanding, “we know inflows will continue to be strong,” Chamberlin said.

Streamflows in the 11,000-square-mile drainage continue to benefit from summer and fall precipitation, as well as aquifers that got a big boost from heavy storms in late May and early June.

Those storms temporarily quashed irrigation demand and factored into substantially higher releases from Owyhee Dam for nearly three weeks. The heavy rains also “charged the



U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
The Owyhee Dam and reservoir near Adrian, Ore. The reservoir is about 63% full, all but guaranteeing full allocations next season, irrigation district managers say.

whole watershed,” Chamberlin said.

“Inflows for the rest of the summer were above average, and they augmented (reservoir) storage,” he said. “That helped supplement us and helped get us to where we are at 63%.”

Chamberlin said the district expects the reservoir to contain more than 500,000 acre-feet of water as the next irrigation season nears, based on current inflows.

“Regardless of snowpack, that assures us a good, adequate irrigation season for 2020,” he said. “Now ag producers know what and how they are going to plant, for the most part.”

OID board member Bruce Corn, who farms in the Nysa-Cairo area, agreed.

“We will be pretty well at full allotment without any

winter storms,” he said.

Farmers, confident in next year’s water supply, can plan next year’s crops and rotations, and prepare ground accordingly, Corn said.

Chamberlin said OID off-season construction projects this year include replacing an open-canal lateral with about two miles of buried pipe to create pressurized delivery west of Ontario. The Vista View project, to benefit customers including the Oregon State University Malheur Experiment Station, is expected to cost \$450,000 to \$500,000. It is a cooperative effort among OID, Malheur County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.



Boise Project Board of Control
Repairs to three Arrowrock Dam gates took three days.

Repairs to Arrowrock Dam gates completed

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Repairs to three malfunctioning gates on the downstream side of Arrowrock Dam limited the loss of water, a manager says.

An estimated 7,100 acre-feet of water was lost in the Boise River system in September as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation completed repairs to the clamshell-like gates, said Bryan Horsburgh, deputy area manager for the bureau’s Snake River Area Office in Boise.

Crews repaired one on Sept. 20 and the other two Sept. 22.

“The gates are running correctly and we have returned to normal fall operations,” Horsburgh said Oct. 4.

The Reclamation-owned dam is in the middle of the three-dam Boise system. The bureau also owns Anderson Ranch Dam upstream. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns Lucky Peak Dam downstream. Water stored in the reservoirs is important for irrigation and other uses across the region.

Arrowrock Dam’s downstream wall marks the upstream end of Lucky Peak Reservoir, which the Corps says has a total storage capacity of 306,000 acre-feet.

Horsburgh said Reclamation and the Corps cooperated on necessary outflows from Lucky Peak.

At Arrowrock, “normally we would have closed the gates when irrigation demand decreased,” he said. “This year we had to leave them open until the Lucky Peak pool dropped enough to access the gates.”

Water flows through Arrowrock Dam via a penstock on the upstream side and clamshell gates, which are parallel to each other, on the downstream face.

Reclamation discovered the gates were stuck partly open during spring and summer operations, when water in the Lucky Peak Pool was too high to accommodate repair access.

“Every drop of water is important,” Horsburgh said. “Reclamation is pleased that we were able to repair the gates as soon as possible.”



Capital Press File
Wheat is harvested in Washington state’s Palouse. The National Agricultural Statistics Service is updating small grain harvest data. Some harvests were delayed because of late planting.

NASS re-surveying for unharvested small grains

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service will re-survey farmers who had unharvested small grains in time for the agency’s crop report in November.

The agency will verify what it heard from growers in September and record any difference in yield, said Chris Mertz, Northwest regional director for NASS, based in Olympia, Wash.

He oversees the agency’s offices in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

“We want to go back and re-interview those producers that had unharvested small grains to make sure they did get it harvested,” Mertz said.

Some harvests were delayed due to late plantings, Mertz said.

As of Sept. 1, the reference date for the report,

55% of spring wheat in the country had been harvested, 23% below the five-year average.

Some farmers may still be trying to finish harvest, he said.

“Farmers are typically busy and we have a pretty persistent crew,” Mertz said. “We’ll do whatever we can to go out and get ahold of these producers again.”

Estimates may be updated based on the data the agency collects, he said. If there’s enough difference to warrant a change, the new data will be released Nov. 8.

NASS last re-surveyed growers in the Northwest in 2014.

It happens periodically, Mertz said based on how well harvest is progressing.

According to NASS, when the small grains growers were first surveyed there was significant unharvested acreage of barley

in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota; of oats in Idaho, Oregon, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota; of durum wheat in Idaho, Montana and North Dakota; and a large proportion of other spring wheat acreage not yet harvested in Idaho, Washington, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

The unharvested area and expected production were included in the totals released on Sept. 30.

NASS wants to ensure its state and county-level estimates are correct, Mertz said.

“We want to make sure it’s right, because everybody wants to know what the production is, accurately, for the growing season and future data uses of that report,” he said. “We want to make sure it’s as accurate as possible.”

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