



BORROWED WATER

In times of crisis, some Oregon farmers transfer and trade water

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

TERREBONNE, Ore. — Matt Lisignoli was running out of water. Nearby Wickiup Reservoir had hit 75-year record lows for June and July, so North Unit Irrigation District cut patrons' water allocations first in half, then to 32%, of the usual and announced deliveries would end in mid-August.

"I'm in trouble," Lisignoli said. His Central Oregon farm, Smith Rock Ranch, grows seed, wheat, hay, squash and has an annual pumpkin patch and corn maze. It's a popular destination because of its backdrop: towers of rust-colored basalt

rising like cathedral spires out of the high desert overlooking the Crooked River.

Without water, Lisignoli would have to cancel his pumpkin patch for the first time in 20 years. Desperate, he scrambled for a solution.

First, Lisignoli applied through the Oregon Water Resources Department to transfer water from his other property in the neighboring Central Oregon Irrigation District. But that was too complicated.

Then he found a North Unit neighbor who had postponed a planned cover crop and now had a water allotment for 18 acres to spare

— water Lisignoli offered to pay for. "This fell out of the sky and was just perfect," he said.

The farmers participated in a district-level transaction called a temporary water transfer, sometimes called a lease or trade, a tool to move water to areas of critical need.

Unlike a permanent transfer or sale of water rights, a temporary transfer is, as its name implies, temporary. It typically lasts for one year, allowing the original owner to keep the water right.

According to the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press
Jim McKay and Kathy Bridges talk about the temporary water transfer, duck hunting and farming history in the Willamette Valley.

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Jim McKay and Josh Kraemer walk beside pipes they are installing along with a drip irrigation system to irrigate McKay's hazelnut orchard.

E. Oregon counties raise objections to River Democracy Act

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

ENTERPRISE, Ore. — At least two counties in rural Eastern Oregon are raising objections to the River Democracy Act, an ambitious federal bill that would add nearly 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers across the state.

The Wallowa County Board of Commissioners opposed the legislation in a resolution passed July 21, citing impacts to ranching, forest management, public access and

recreation. Commissioners in neighboring Union County also sent a letter July 6 to the bill's architects, Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, outlining similar concerns.

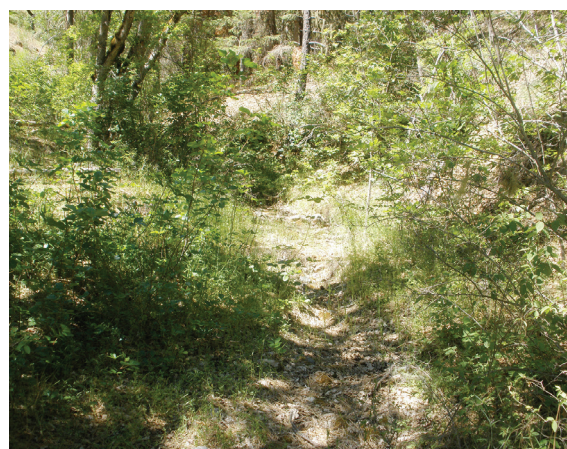
Representatives for Wyden and Merkley will meet Aug. 10 with the Eastern Oregon Counties Association to brief commissioners on the bill.

The association's members include Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Uma-

tilla, Union and Wallowa counties. Created in 1968, the National Wild and Scenic River System calls for preserving certain rivers with "outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values." Oregon currently has 2,173 miles of rivers designated as wild and scenic, or 2% of all rivers statewide.

The River Democracy Act would roughly triple that number. It was developed based on more than 15,000 nominations submitted

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Courtesy of Nick Smith
AFRC

Bear Gulch in Southern Oregon was nominated as a Wild and Scenic River under the River Democracy Act introduced by Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Eastern Oregon counties oppose the bill.

This drought like no other, NOAA scientist says

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The West has been so dry and so hot for so long that its current drought has no modern precedent, according to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration meteorologist.

For the first time in 122 years of record-keeping, drought covers almost the entire Western U.S. as measured by the Palmer Drought Severity Index, said Richard Heim, a drought historian and an author of the U.S. Drought Monitor.

"It's a very simple 'yes,' in terms of this drought being unprecedented," Heim said.

The Palmer index estimates relative soil moisture based on temperature and precipitation records. Unlike the Standard Precipitation Index, which measures water supply, the Palmer index also takes into account heat-driven demand for water.

In June, about 97% of the West — Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Washington — was in water-deficit territory, according to the Palmer index.

Utah was never drier, while Oregon and California were at their second driest on record. Idaho and Arizona were at their third driest ever, and Nevada was at its fourth driest.

Washington was at its 10th driest, while Montana and New Mexico, where recent monsoons have brought relief, were at their 17th driest.

Oregon and Washington state climatologists gave their qualified endorsement for calling this drought "unprecedented."

"I'd be slightly cautious about calling it 'unprecedented,' but that's probably a fair description," Oregon

State Climatologist Larry O'Neill said. "It's borderline unprecedented, or at least among the worst."

The cumulative effects of the West's current drought, illustrated by low major reservoirs, gives credence to calling it unprecedented, Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said.

"I don't have any real quarrel with using that term," he said.

The Drought Monitor, a partnership between NOAA and the USDA, has been mapping drought in the U.S.

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