

Boise River's Water District 63 under new leadership

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

STAR, Idaho — The organization that delivers water to farmers and other customers along the 102-mile Boise River system has new leadership.

Mike Meyers has succeeded Rex Barrie as Water District 63 watermaster. Barrie, who served more than 13 years, will stay on through February to assist, and then remain available as a consultant for the district.

Meyers has been training with Barrie for three years. Daniel Hoke, who started Nov. 1 as a trainee, has succeeded Meyers as deputy watermaster.

Meyers and Hoke both came from the Pioneer Irrigation District in Caldwell, along the river's lower section.

Meyers said he doesn't plan to make any changes except to continue to automate water measurement to aid conservation.

"Rex has been invaluable and an excellent trainer," he said. Barrie has extensive institutional knowledge, and "I can only hope to learn it all."

Barrie said Meyers "has really excelled, and really picked up on all of the subtle-



Brad Carlson/Capital Press
Rex Barrie, left, with Mike Meyers and Daniel Hoke at the Water District 63 office in Star, Idaho.

ties of the job."

Water users "are going to be left in good hands," he said.

The district's advisory committee hired Meyers in part to bring in operation of the river's upper basin. The Idaho Department of Water Resources director in 2014 ordered administration of all Boise River surface water rights. Previously, the only administration was below Lucky Peak, the farthest downstream of the three reservoirs.

Hoke, 35, has been learning the upper basin as he develops a systemwide view. He works with data and "a lot of different people and entities" throughout the district.

The Boise River system has 38 space holders who contract for reservoir water. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation owns the Ander-

son Ranch and Arrowrock dams. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns Lucky Peak, below which lie 325,000 irrigable acres.

The three reservoirs have a combined 963,468 acre-feet of storage space.

Anderson Ranch, slated for expansion, is the biggest reservoir. Barrie said it typically fills seven years out of 10.

Management is much more challenging when reservoir supplies and runoff are below normal, he said, though daily communication with users is required even in banner years.

The district takes orders for water deliveries. It reports remaining availability, important as users plan usage and conservation.

"You have to be a good communicator and you have to be able to think on your feet," said Meyers, 45.

Economist: Russia-Ukraine conflict may have 'huge' impact on natural gas prices

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Political conflict between Russia and Ukraine could have a small impact on the international wheat market but a "huge" impact on natural gas prices worldwide, a Washington State University economist says.

The conflict has two potential outcomes, Randy Fortenbery, small grains economist at WSU, told farmers Feb. 2 at the Spokane Ag Show.

The Russian military is currently occupying a large wheat-producing region for both Ukraine and Russia. If the conflict prevents that wheat from being exported, prices would be pushed upward in the short-term, he said.

Russia and Ukraine are major wheat producers.

"On the other hand, the natural gas impact could be really significant," he continued. "If the Europeans, especially Germans, don't buy natural gas from Russia, the effective world supply

would be reduced and the price would explode, and the chemicals we're already seeing rising to record prices would just continue to escalate."

Initial input price increases of 5% to 7% won't be sustainable, but Fortenbery predicts inflationary pressure will be about 4.5%.

"I don't think it's going to go away, I don't think it's just transitory," he said.

In addition, Russia plans to limit wheat exports this year. That's been known since November, Fortenbery said, and likely won't push wheat prices higher unless it doesn't export any wheat.

Fortenbery doesn't see much room for wheat prices to trend much higher.

"Wheat is a bit of a paradox for me right now, for a couple of reasons," he said. "USDA has actually been increasing ending stocks the last several months, decreasing the export expectation and simultaneously raising the ending price. That seems really counterintuitive to me."

Soft white wheat ranges

from \$10.50 to \$11 per bushel on the Portland market.

In the absence of any production problems, futures prices are likely to trade between \$7 and \$8 per bushel, Fortenbery said.

The price isn't likely to hit \$5.50 per bushel, so the Price Loss Coverage crop insurance program isn't likely to pay farmers at this point, he said.

Higher input costs could reduce yields, which means higher prices, indicating the Agriculture Risk Coverage program is more likely to pay, Fortenbery said.

Fortenbery expects net farm income to be down in 2022, due to lower government payments, higher input costs and lower commodity prices.

China has come nowhere near meeting its phase one trade deal commitments, and no one is seriously discussing phase two, Fortenbery said. But China has been an "aggressive" purchaser of U.S. feed grains, particularly corn and oilseeds.

Reclamation transfers federal water facilities to Washington irrigation districts

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has transferred ownership of federal water facilities to two Washington state irrigation districts — the Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District in Central Washington and Kennewick Irrigation District in the Tri-Cities area.

The transfer of the water infrastructure and land will allow for more localized ownership and management of water, which experts say will trim costs and layers of bureaucracy. Irrigation district managers say the greater local control and efficiency will benefit farmers.

"It allows the districts greater autonomy in operating and managing the water more directly," Michael Coffey, public affairs officer for the Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia-Pacific Northwest region, told the Capital Press.

The transfers, she said, are a "win-win" for everyone — the American taxpayer, the federal government, irrigation districts and farming communities.

The two transfers — the first of their kind in the state — were made possible under the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act passed in 2019.

The law allows the federal government to transfer water infrastructure to local districts without congressional approval. It permits the Bureau of Reclamation to transfer rights of way, canals, pipelines, diversion dams, pumps and associated infrastructure to districts.

While Congress has authorized title transfers in the West for decades, the Trump administration and Congress agreed in 2019 that streamlining was needed through the Dingell Act, which makes voluntary transfers faster and cheaper.

Irrigation districts are watching the law unfold with these two transfers.

"I am very proud to see the conveyance of these two federal title transfers to the Washington irrigation districts as a direct result of the 2019 Dingell Act," Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton said in a statement.

The Act, she said, has given Reclamation "a new tool that benefits both water users and the federal government."

The Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District, in the Columbia River Valley, is receiving through the title transfer all federally owned facilities within the water conveyance and distribution system, including about 82 acres needed for the district to permanently provide irrigation water to patrons.

The transfer includes federally owned facilities, land, buildings, pumps, diversions, control structures, fixtures, improvements, drains, laterals, pipelines, waste wells, ponds and roads.

"Title transfer puts the management of our region's most vital resource — water — in the hands of those who live here and know it best," said Craig Gyselinck, Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District secretary and manager.

The Kennewick Irrigation District title transfer covers the federally owned facilities within the water conveyance and distribution system, including about 100 miles of canals and appurtenant works, a 46-acre parcel and 971 acres of easements.

"The benefits of title transfer to Kennewick Irrigation District and our local community will be substantial," said Gene Huffman, Kennewick Irrigation District board president.

Huffman thanked Reclamation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the

Yakama Nation and Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., for their support.

By transferring Bureau of Reclamation works to local entities like the Kennewick Irrigation District and the Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District, "our critical water resources can be managed by those who know our needs best, the men and women who live, work and farm right here in our communities," said Newhouse.

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