



O'Delia Linden/East Columbia Basin Irrigation District
East Columbia Basin Irrigation District Manager Craig Simpson speaks during a ceremony May 27, 2021, for the new EL 47.5 delivery system, replacing declining well water with water from the Columbia Basin Project.

Stakeholders seek funding for bottleneck bridges in irrigation system

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Eastern Washington agricultural leaders are seeking funding to replace a handful of bridges that will create bottlenecks in new canals used to distribute irrigation water from the Columbia River.

Pushing past an obstruction causes the water elevation to rise in canals and creates safety concerns, said Craig Simpson, secretary-manager of the East-Columbia Basin Irrigation District in Othello.

The district would have to interrupt or ration water deliveries to avoid backups.

"It's not optimal," Simpson said. "If it was unchecked ... the elevation would rise, overtop the canal and the canal would fail because it would erode out the side."

Eight of the bridges that need to be lengthened are in Adams County, which cannot afford to replace them, the Columbia Basin Development League says.

The total cost of the eight bridges, plus two others in Grant County, is more than \$42 million.

"Only so much construction can occur in a given year, and Congress will only fund what can be obligated within one year and spent within five years," league executive director Sara Higgins said. "We want to see more than one bridge funded in a year, but all 10 at once probably isn't realistic."

The bridges do not qualify for funding from other sources such as the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bridge Investment Program, as they are not in a significant state of disrepair.

Currently, the Adams County bridges don't cause

problems with water deliveries, Simpson said.

"We probably have just a few years before another system would come on that would put us in a position that would actually cause us some problems," Simpson said.

Progress hinges on how quickly farmers' groundwater replacement systems are built, Simpson said.

A bridge in Grant County needs to be addressed "sooner than later," as it causes "some backwater" and is at a point in the system that all the water goes past it, Simpson said.

The district is working with county officials.

"I'm not overly concerned, as long as we're making efforts, ..." Simpson said. "That's a good start, at least we recognize some work needs to be done there and we're trying to figure out how to address it."

According to the irrigation district's analysis, only eight of the 10 bridges may wind up needing to be replaced, Simpson said.

"We're going to do more measurements and surveying this winter to confirm that," he said. "(It) would be fantastic for everybody."

The league will continue to seek state and federal funding, Higgins said.

"The support both state and federal legislators have shown for this project continues to be enormously appreciated," she said. "It simply wouldn't be happening without their efforts."

Simpson is optimistic about future funding.

"There's a lot of effort going on right now, and it's just trying to find the funding source that gets us there," he said. "It may just be that we need to keep knocking on a door until we find the right door to get in."



Sara Higgins

Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association gets new director

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

BOISE — The Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association has a new executive director.

Samantha Parrott started Aug. 22 at the Boise-based association. It represents about 700 growers and 180,000 acres in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Parrott has more than a decade of fundraising and relationship-building experience. She worked nearly seven years for the University of Idaho, including the past four as the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences development director.

While at the UI ag school, she was instrumental in raising more than \$9 million, including \$3 million to expand the Parma Research and Extension Center.

Parrott succeeds Brad Griff, who was executive director from January 2019 until June, when he and his family moved to Houston, where he took a government affairs job with an energy company.

Griff earlier worked for U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo and former Rep. Raul Labrador, both R-Idaho, and Rep. Paul

Gosar, R-Ariz.

Parrott said her predecessor "did an incredible job with the association in terms of brand awareness." She aims to "continue on with the great work he has done..."

"I plan to use existing relationships to hit the ground running," she said.

Parrott during the rest of the year plans to meet with board members, tour their farms and understand the "direction they think the association should go." She aims to learn more about the industry and prepare for the 2023 Idaho legislative session.

Next year, she plans to organize grower fly-ins to Washington, D.C., to advocate maintaining current federal sugar policy in the new farm bill.

Another goal is to develop and circulate a grower-engagement survey centered on how beet growers would like to get involved in the association, and their priorities.

"I am very passionate about the agricultural industry, and I can't wait to work directly with growers to tell their story and advocate on their behalf," Parrott said.

"Agriculture is one of the main industries that fuel our economy. It is extremely important to advance pol-



Samantha Parrott

Sugar beet crop shows good promise

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Dave Reynolds' sugar beets look better than he thought they would, and he wishes he had planted more.

"The beets we do have look pretty good, really," the Kuna, Idaho, farmer said Aug. 16. "And the price is strong. I'm sad we don't have more."

The approximately 700 grower-owners of Boise-based Amalgamated Sugar planted around 180,000 acres of beets in Idaho, Oregon and Washington, similar to the 2021 total.

Amalgamated needs a consistent supply for its three processing plants in southern Idaho. Members of the coop-



Capital Press File

The sugar beet crop is doing well, growers report.

erative own acreage shares they can shift among themselves, such as by leasing to one another.

Some of this year's crop was shifted to take best advantage of irrigation supplies, given that a low-water year was initially expected.

"The sugar company adapted to the situation," said Reynolds, who planted fewer acres of beets than he first intended.

"We started out this year and we were kind of sick about what it was going to look like" due to the ini-

tial water outlook, said Ben Jantz, who farms in the Nampa, Idaho, area.

But water supply improved in many locations thanks to unusually wet, cold conditions in April, May and part of June. Sugar beet planting was slowed due to those conditions and heavy wind.

The crop is "so much better than we were expecting back in March," Jantz said.

He said he had to replant some of his sugar beets, "but even my replants, I'm happy with the way they look right now."

Progress is a little behind that of a normal year, "but overall I would say that the crop looks good," Jantz said.

Pendleton flour mill fire cause under investigation

By **DAKOTA CASTETS-DIDIER**
EO Media Group

PENDLETON, Ore. — Investigators continue working to determine what sparked the fire more than a week ago that tore through the Grain Craft flour mill in Pendleton.

Assistant Chief Anthony Pierotti with the Pendleton Fire Department said a structural engineer is analyzing the mill and Grain Craft "is going to find a demolition company."

Pierotti also said an investigation into the cause of the fire continues. The fire department is keeping a fire truck at the scene to "knock down" the smoke and com-

bat any flare-ups.

"All is status quo," he said.

Although the situation has remained unchanged, roads surrounding the mill have reopened, and Grain Craft dispatched members of its leadership team to walk the site last week.

James Reeder, owner of the Outlying Perspective, a drone operator from Athena, flew a specialized drone on Aug. 17 on behalf of Grain Craft into and over the mill to create a 3-Dimensional model of the building to help determine its structural integrity and find any remaining hot spots.

A timeline for demolishing the 100-year-old structure has yet to be determined.

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