

Yakima Basin irrigation water woes continue

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Mismanagement of Yakima Basin water conservation by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is threatening the supply of water to the Kennewick Irrigation District, the district's managers say.

"The threat to our water supply is coming from a lack of leadership at the bureau. We're not contesting conservation. We do it, too. We contest how the bureau manages the conserved water," Charles Freeman, KID manager, told Capital Press.

While not directly responding to the allegations of "mismanagement" and "lack of leadership," Chad Stuart, manager of the bureau's Yakima office, issued a statement saying KID is a "valuable partner" in the Yakima Basin.

The bureau is aware of KID's water supply challenges and will continue regular meetings with KID to address them, Stuart said.

"Electrification (of the Chandler pumping plant) is one of many options that has been discussed to replace any reductions to KID's water supply" resulting from conservation authorized in the Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan, Stuart said.

The KID diverts water from the Yakima River at the

Prosser Dam into Chandler Canal, and 11 miles downstream. The Chandler Power and Pumping Plant pumps the water up to the district's main canal to serve its customers.

Hydraulic pumps at Chandler use 1.25 gallons of water for every gallon they pump to the main canal, said Jason McShane, KID engineering and operations manager. A proposed \$23 million project to electrify pumping would double the water going to the district in water-short years, he said.

Such water may be made available to KID only to replace reductions caused by conservation. The KID and bureau managers don't agree on how to quantify the amount, according to a May 16 letter from Stuart to Freeman.

The KID serves 65,000 Kennewick and Richland residents and 20,200 acres, of which about 11,000 acres are in orchards, vineyards and some blueberries, hay, pasture and row crops.

The district has rights to 102,674 acre-feet of water annually from the Yakima River and uses about 87,000 acre-feet, McShane said.

As the last major irrigation district downriver on the 214-mile system, the KID uses water returned to the river from operational spills and seepage from other irrigation districts upriver.

Increased conservation by



The Yakima River flows through Prosser, Wash., to the top of Prosser Dam, where diversion for Kennewick Irrigation District starts.

Capital Press Photo/Dan Wheat, File

those districts in recent years has reduced return-flow water for the KID, causing it to call for direct releases of mountain reservoir storage water for the first time this year.

Direct releases are not a sustainable solution because they take water away from upriver districts and are not sufficient in severe drought, McShane said.

Less return-flow was anticipated and planned for in the 1994 enabling legislation of the Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan, McShane said.

"We supported that legislation because it obligates the Secretary of the Interior to replace water loss for the district," he said.

The law gives the secretary options to do that. The one KID has pushed for is electrification of the Chandler pumping plant. Another option, called subordination, is reduc-

ing the 12,000-kilowatt power production at Chandler to save water, and the bureau already is doing that, according to Stuart's letter.

Even with electrification of the pumps, the bureau and some of its other constituents are concerned about having enough water in the remaining portion of the river from Benton City downriver for fish, McShane said.

"It's a timing issue," he said. "There are fewer concerns during certain times of the year when fewer fish are present."

KID raised its issues with the bureau in 2014 and it has taken the bureau four years to acknowledge it has an obligation to do something, McShane said.

There's been a lack of leadership at the bureau from the local to national level, but Brenda Burman, bureau commissioner, has visited the

Chandler pump station and the bureau finally is acknowledging the Secretary of the Interior's obligation to do something, McShane said.

"Our customers have a right to federal water and the federal government has to meet that obligation," he said.

Two Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District conservation projects and one Roza Irrigation District project have saved approximately 39,200 acre-feet of return flow from reaching the KID, Freeman said, adding he doesn't know how much has been saved by other projects.

Last October, the KID withdrew from the Yakima Basin Joint Board, a group of irrigation districts that discusses basin water policy.

"The board has moved away from a collaborative approach to a more parochial one, which often works against the lower river basin and KID's interests," Freeman wrote to the board.

Some board members didn't support Chandler pump electrification, saying it might harm fish, Freeman wrote. Some also said loss of KID water is justified because KID receives more water than other districts during pro-rationing in drought and because a large amount of KID water goes to residences instead of agriculture, he wrote.

"It's true the KID receives more on average but in July

and August we get less than everyone else because the water is not there," Freeman said.

Some say KID is misinterpreting the 1994 legislation but its "plain language" protects the KID, he said.

"We need the federal government to provide leadership and resolve these issues. In our opinion the bureau is more concerned with the politics of the basin than what the law requires. Our contract and the law is clear," Freeman said.

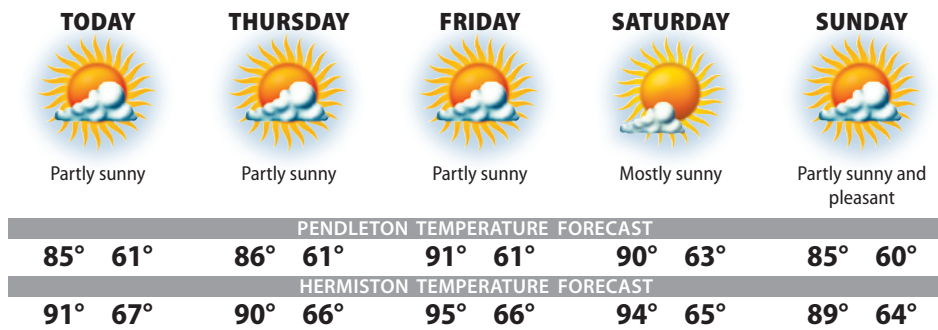
The Roza Irrigation District in Sunnyside and Kittitas Reclamation District in Ellensburg are two members of the joint board and the junior water right districts most affected in water shortage years.

The Roza has spent \$10 million since 2015 piping open canals and lining and sealing canals to conserve water.

"The KID has taken a more bellicose approach lately. They filed an appeal on the environmental permitting of our pipe project last year and we have ongoing litigation on that," said Scott Revell, manager of the Roza Irrigation District. "It's unhelpful to working together."

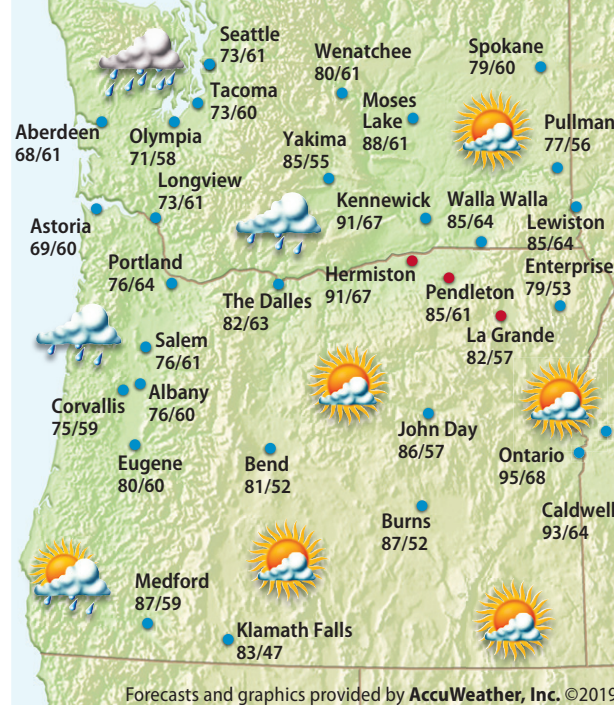
Urban Eberhart, Kittitas Reclamation manager, said he's optimistic the bureau, KID and state Department of Ecology can work things out through the integrated management plan.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	86°	52°
Normals	87°	58°
Records	110° (1919)	42° (2011)

PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.02"	
Normal month to date	0.09"	
Year to date	9.59"	
Last year to date	6.49"	
Normal year to date	7.66"	

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	88°	54°
Normals	88°	58°
Records	106° (1968)	42° (1935)

PRECIPITATION	24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	Trace	
Normal month to date	0.06"	
Year to date	4.55"	
Last year to date	5.10"	
Normal year to date	5.76"	

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Thu.
Boardman	WSW 6-12	WSW 6-12
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	W 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	5:16 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:45 p.m.
Moonrise today	2:45 p.m.
Moonset today	1:13 a.m.

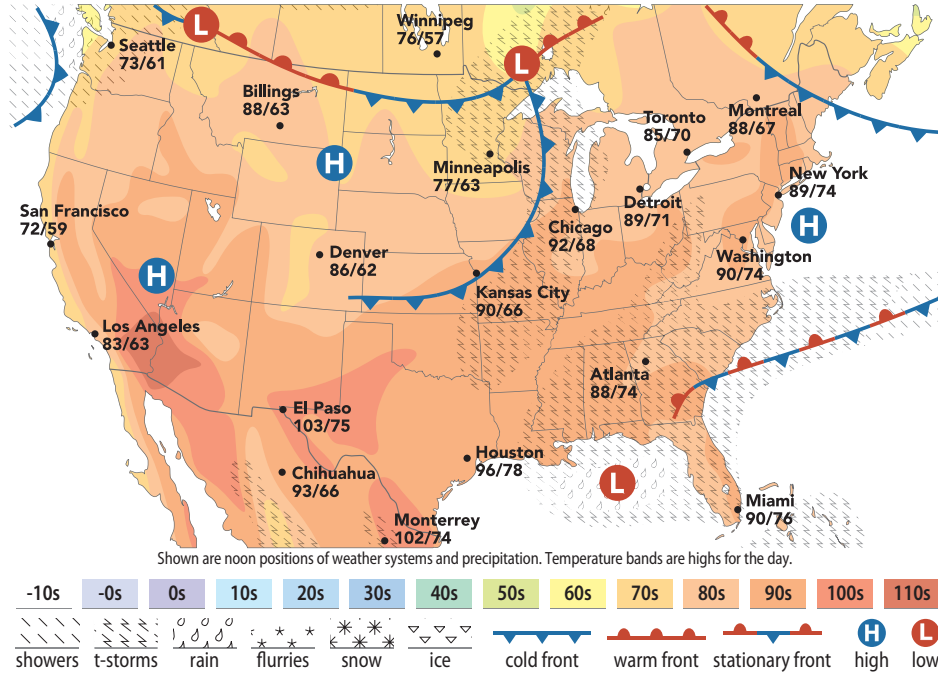


NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 108° in Zapata, Texas Low 24° in Truckee, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Progress made at Ladd Canyon

Widening of shoulders completed in June

By DICK MASON
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Life in the fast lane is becoming safer for those driving between La Grande and Ladd Canyon on Interstate 84.

The shoulders of the westbound and eastbound fast lanes of the 10-mile La Grande-to-Ladd Canyon stretch of I-84 have been widened by 3 feet as part of the first phase of the Oregon Department of Transportation's \$30 million Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project.

The widening of the shoulders, completed in June, is part of a project in which crews will also add a 1.5-mile eastbound third lane to the Ladd Canyon entrance and replace a bridge.

The expansion of the shoulders, which are now 7 feet wide, provides more space for drivers to pull over during emergencies, said Mike Remily of ODOT, manager of the Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project. Remily also said the expanded shoulders will be a big help when ODOT has to close the slow lanes to do maintenance work. All slow-lane traffic will be diverted to the fast lanes, where the additional space will be make things less hazardous for drivers as well as maintenance workers.

"(The expanded shoulders) will make it safer for everyone," Remily said.

Other I-84 work that has also been completed as part of the project includes

repaving Exit 265, about 5 miles west of Ladd Canyon. Remily said the Exit 265 roadway was badly in need of repair.

"It was cracked and rutted," he said.

Although the Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project was hindered by wet weather this spring, its contractor, Knife River Construction of Boise, Idaho, remains right on schedule. Regardless, Remily said he is looking forward to the drier weather Northeast Oregon is expected to have in July and August.

"Everything always moves faster in construction when conditions are dry," Remily said.

All of the project's remaining work is being done over a 2-mile stretch around the entry into Ladd Canyon. The speed limit in the zone is 50 miles per hour 24 hours a day and will remain so until the Phase 1 work is completed in late October. Remily said not all drivers are obeying the limit.

"A number of (work zone traffic) citations have been issued (by law enforcement officers)," Remily said.

Since early April, everyone in the Ladd Canyon area, including those who have cabins, have not been able to leave via I-84 on weekdays between 7 a.m. and noon and between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. because of bridge removal work crews are doing. No restrictions for leaving Ladd Canyon via I-84 will be in place this week because work crews will be in a different area. The restricted weekday schedule will take effect again July 15.

The bridge being removed is one in an eastbound lane. It will be

replaced by a concrete box-like structure that will be large enough to accommodate log trucks and semitrucks, Remily said.

"It will feel like you are driving under a tunnel," he said.

The bridge is being replaced because it tends to get icy and has long posed a problem in freezing weather, the ODOT official said.

About half of the bridge has been removed and the rest will be taken out by the end of September. The concrete box is being installed as the bridge is being taken out and should be in by October.

ODOT will resume its Ladd Canyon project in April 2020. The work done will include the addition of a 1.5-mile third lane on I-84 from milepost 269.5 to milepost 271. The new lane will be meant for trucks. The expanded space should reduce the number of accidents by spreading out traffic.

The number of times Ladd Canyon has to be closed due to trucks blocking lanes will also decrease, Remily said. He explained that if a truck crashes in the future, there will be enough room for traffic to move around it while it is being cleared.

Truck drivers will be allowed to use only the inner and the middle lanes while automobile drivers will be permitted to drive in all three. The three-lane stretch, Remily said, will be similar to an eastbound one on I-84 just east of Pendleton.

The entire Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project is expected to be completed by October of 2020, Remily said.

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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