Bessie Wetzell Newspaper Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 126 NO. 45 10 Pages Wednesday, November 7, 2007 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Irrigators to get more lake water permanently

By David Sykes

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning on making long term agreements to release an additional 2,500 acre-feet of water from Willow Creek Lake each year for use in irrigation of farm land down stream from the dam.

The Corps, which operates the lake, is currently taking public comment on the proposal. In the past the Corps has released extra water for irrigation, but was authorized to do so only under emergency drought conditions. The current action would make the additional water available permanently.

In a draft environmental assessment posted on the internet, the Corps describes how much and when the water would be released, and the economic impact of the release.

When the dam was built in 1983 the Corps described the main purpose of the dam as flood control. "Flood control is the primary use of storage space in Willow Creek Lake. Recreation, fish and wildlife, sedimentation, and future irrigation are secondary uses of storage space (water)," it says in the operational manual for the dam. The Corps manual also stated that 1,787 acre-feet would be reserved for "future irrigation." There is slightly over a total of 14,000 acre-feet of water storage available in the lake.

Under the proposed increase in irrigation usage the lake will be drawn down earlier and farther that under typical operations. The Corps says Irrigation withdrawals would start after April 15 (see table), and continue through September 30. The change will not alter the winter flood control operations but will make more flood control space available the rest of the year.

The irrigators who purchase the water will divert water at two locations that have been used the last few years to divert water under emergency water contracts. The first diversion is three miles downstream from the dam and the second four miles. Irrigation pumps have been screened to protect fish and the irrigators are in the process of forming an irrigation district. According to the Corps the district will sign a contract with the US government for use of the water and "repayment of certain costs." What that cost will be was not spelled out in the environmental impact statement.

The impact statement also addressed the economic impact of selling more irrigation water on a long-term basis. "Water-based recreation uses of Willow Creek Lake would be affected by the proposed action. The lake would be drawn down earlier and farther than under typical operations. The early, lower drawdown would reduce the lake area available for recreational boating use. However, the usability of the boat launching facility at the project should not be affected," the Corps wrote. "In addition to the decreased surface area, the drawdown for irrigation would expose muddy slopes and banks that are aesthetically unappealing and restrict access to the shoreline of the lake. Also, some economic losses in the local area would occur because of the reduction in water-based recreation use. Sport fishing opportunities may be decreased as the population of largemouth bass and fingerling rainbow trout could be reduced or eliminated by the proposed irrigation drawdown. However," the Corps concluded, "ODFW (Oregon Dept. Fish & Wildlife) restocks catchable tout in the lake on an annual basis, which will help alleviate some of the effects to the recreational fishery."

The Corps did not attach a dollar amount to the potential loss of recreation usage at the lake; it did cite the following statistics from 1999.

"There was a total of 39,972 recreation visits to Willow Creek Lake. Of this amount, recreation use was estimated to include 7,195 picnickers, 2,798 swimmers, 799 water skiers, 9593 boaters, 8794 sightseers, 7,994 anglers, and 8,794 others. This amount of visitation was estimated to result in $600,000 in visitor spending within 30 miles of the lake. Visitor trip spending was estimated to result in $650,000 in total sales, $340,000 in total income, and supported 17 jobs in the local community surrounding the lake."

The Corps did not estimate losses to recreational income as a result of less water in the lake.

While the Corps did say it is difficult to estimate the economic impact of not providing the extra irrigation water, it did site USDA Farm Services offices in Heppner which said "The average normal yield for alfalfa is four to five tons per acre, and current value is $90 to $100 per ton. The USDA estimated a 50 percent loss in yield if this crop is not adequately irrigated. Based on providing supplemental irrigation for 1,725 acres of alfalfa, the estimated maximum total yield is 8,625 ton with an estimated maximum total value of $862,500; 50 percent of that value is $431,250. Also, there would be an unquantified monetary loss for small grains and the potential for additional impacts if the alfalfa plants themselves are damaged because it is a perennial crop with the potential for losses in future years, as well as likely increased costs for more frequent tillage and reseeding," the Corps concluded.

According to a Corps spokesman the exact amount irrigators will pay for the lake water has not been determined, but the Bureau of Reclamation will handle the actual sale.

The Corps will be accepting public comment on the irrigation release proposal until November 30. Anyone wishing to comment should contact Carolyn Schneider at: Carolyn.B.Schneider@usace.army.mil email, 503-808-4770, or regular mail at District Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineer District, Portland. Attn: CCENWP-E/Carolyn Schneider, PO Box 2946, Portland, OR 97208-2946.

Corps of Engineers plans to give long-term irrigation contracts for Willow Creek Lake water.

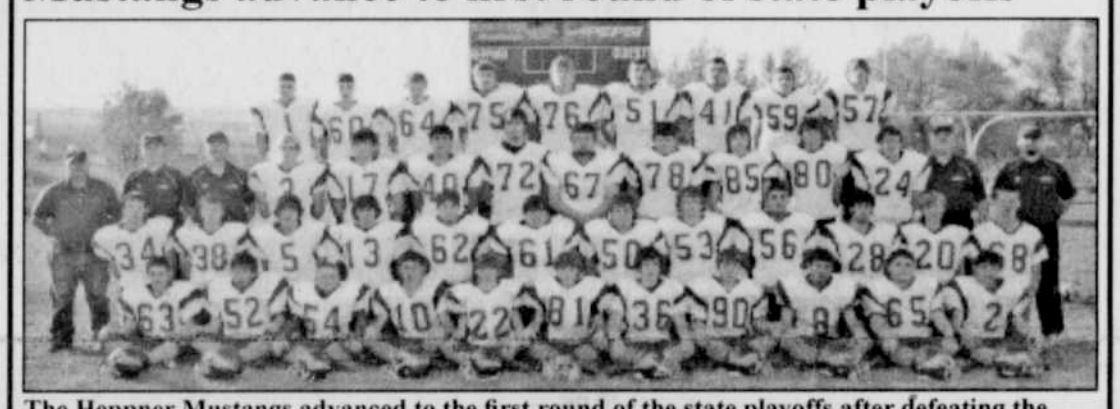
Proposed monthly release of irrigation water from lake

Month	Percent to be Released	Acre-feet Released (2,500 total)
April 15-30	4	100
May 1-31	15	375
June 1-30	18	450
July 1-31	25	625
August 1-31	22	550
September 1-30	16	400
Totals	100	2,500

Estimated visitation at WC Lake, 2002-2007

Period	Estimated Number of Visitors
Oct – Dec 2002	13,165
Jan – Mar 2003	12,129
Apr – Jun 2003	36,814
July – Sep 2003	45,277
Oct – Dec 2003	13,717
Jan – Mar 2004	6,649
Apr – Jun 2004	38,633
July – Sep 2004	55,631
Oct – Dec 2004	22,058
Jan – Mar 2005	7,280
Apr – Jun 2005	39,362
July – Sep 2005	41,535
Oct – Dec 2005	15,792
Jan – Mar 2006	32,355
Apr – Jun 2006	47,657
July – Sep 2006	30,944
Oct – Dec 2006	8,459
Jan – Mar 2007	10,818
Apr – Jun 2007	42,686

Mustangs advance to first round of state playoffs



The Heppner Mustangs advanced to the first round of the state playoffs after defeating the Elgin Huskies 48-0 and capturing first place in Blue Mountain Conference play. The Mustangs will play the Loggers from Scio on Saturday, November 10, at 1 p.m. in Heppner. *–Photo by Sandy Matthews*

County and cities to meet Friday over 'tippage' fees

By David Sykes

The Morrow County Court will meet Friday morning with the mayors of the five communities in the county to discuss the usage of "tippage" fees generated at the Finley Buttes landfill near Boardman.

Heppner, Ione, Lexington, Irrigon and Boardman joined together in January to demand that the county turn over the majority of the tippage money generated by the landfill. The funds, which come from fees levied on each ton of garbage dumped, average around $80,000 per month, or just under $1 million per year, and currently go directly into the county general fund. The cities say this is not what was originally promised when the landfill was constructed back in the 1992 and that they should get the majority of the money.

In February the Morrow County Court said no to a demand by the cities that the money allocation be changed. "This money goes to the county fund and the county is going to keep control of those funds," Commissioner John Wenholtz said at the time.

The cities had threatened to take the issue to the voters if the county declined their demands, and August 9 they followed through on the threat and filed a measured titled "An ordinance requiring distribution of landfill fees to cities/towns" with the county court.

Under the proposed ordinance beginning in fiscal year 2008-2009 the county would give up 25 percent of the tippage fees to cities. In 2009-2010 that would jump to 50 percent and 2010-2011 it would top out at 75 percent.

The ordinance stipulates that the cities portion will be divided in half, with one half the funds divided equally among the cities, and the other half divided according to population.

The measure is expected to be voted on in the May election.

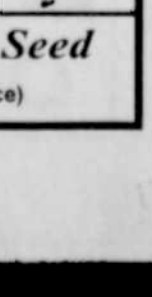
The meeting Friday will be an attempt to iron out differences and avoid a vote on the issue. The meeting will be held at 9 a.m. at the

-Continued on page seven

Trick or Treat!

Makayla Shiley, 5, waits patiently for her candy on Halloween.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

At the MCGG GREEN FEED STORE in Heppner:
WERNER FIBERGLASS STEPLADDER
6 foot • 250 lb. capacity
Reg. $107.99 **ON SALE $75.00**

Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed & Seed
242 W. Linden Way, Heppner • 676-9422 • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)