

## WESTLAND IRRIGATION DISTRICT

# Project aims to boost water supply

BY JOHN TILLMAN

Hermiston Herald

Umatilla County has hired a consultant on the \$17 million project to take more water from the Columbia River to help local farmers while providing a ready water source for economic and environmental benefits.

Westland Irrigation District Manager Curtis Engbretson said the Ordinance Regional Water Supply and Aquifer Restoration Project will be “a big benefit to the district and the community as a whole.”

Umatilla County and Westland Irrigation District are co-sponsoring the project, with funding and technical support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service. Farmers Conservation Alliance is assisting the NRCS with the planning process.

“We would use the Columbia River water in the summer, when there would be no water in an open ditch,” Engbretson explained. “We wouldn’t have to rely on McKay Reservoir.”

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners at its Aug. 17 meeting approved contracting with Michael Bergstrom of AgriNorthwest, Kennewick, as a consultant on the pipeline project. John Shafer, board chair, said it became apparent that hiring an irrigation system consultant would be beneficial.

“We don’t want to get too far over our skis on this project,” he explained. “We want somebody with the necessary background to look out for the best interest of the county.”

At least half the \$17 million for the project is coming from federal and state grants, according to the Westland Irrigation District’s website. The balance will be through long-term, low-interest loans with repayment obligated to only those patrons who choose to participate in the project.

## PROJECT ADDRESSES WATER INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Westland Irrigation District’s water supplies come from early-season, snowmelt water from the Umatilla River and then later-season, stored water from McKay Reservoir, delivered to approximately 14,700 acres, according to the district’s website. Water passes through 30 miles of canals and pipelines to more than 260 patrons, with a



Photos by John Tillman/Hermiston Herald

Even in a wet year, McKay Reservoir near Pendleton is low Aug. 25, 2022. It provides late season water for the Stanfield and Westland irrigation districts. The \$17 million Ordinance Regional Water Supply and Aquifer Restoration Project would bring Columbia River water to the Westland Irrigation District, allowing the reservoir to retain supply for other uses.



The upper reaches of McKay Reservoir near Pendleton show the effects of water loss during the late summer irrigation season on Aug. 25, 2022.

majority living in the northern reach of the system on smaller acreages.

When stored reservoir water is re-

leased for use, the conveyed distance increases by an additional 30 miles

to reach those patrons in the district’s

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— John Shafer, chair of the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners

north end, resulting in lowered delivery efficiency and increased system losses.

Westland, the county and other project partners proposed in late 2021 to modernize existing irrigation infrastructure and build new facilities to increase late season water supply. The project also would provide water for other economic and environmental uses, and permit leaving more in McKay Reservoir, south of Pendleton, to support fisheries.

The supply and recharge project includes pressurized pipelines, pump stations and aquifer recharge basins,

to improve water delivery and supply reliability to district users, improve conservation and support groundwater recharge. Westland is collaborating with Farmers Conservation Alliance and Umatilla County on the project to bolster water deliveries in the district’s north end while providing all users the opportunity to add to their water supplies.

Westland and the county want to run a pipe and pressurize the northern section of its A Canal, Engbretson said. The pipe diameter is planned to be 42-inches and would cross Interstate 84 and tie into another pipe to replace the open canal.

“The water would come from the John Day Pool, below McNary Dam, west of Umatilla,” Engbretson said. “The pipeline would run along the edge of the (Camp Umatilla) depot to a chunk of ground next to the interstate near the gravel pit. The pipeline will spur off, cross the freeway and tie into the ditch. The concrete-lined canal and its three pump stations are to be decommissioned once the district can use Columbia River water.”

## BACKGROUND AND FURTHER STUDIES

Umatilla County acquired the right from Northeast Oregon Water Association to pump out of the Columbia River in July 2019. The county had been in talks with the Westland Irrigation District for pumping capacity since obtaining that right.

The district was interested in acquiring an option to use a part of that capacity during the irrigation season. The county board approved that option, and agreements to acquire Westland’s canal crossing, and to use Umatilla River water through district facilities for recharge testing on the depot.

Engbretson said he foresees another year of work on the watershed plan studies. The district could receive funds at the end of next year. Construction might begin in two to three years.

“We’re still going through the watershed plan, making surveys of cultural, environmental and economic impacts,” he said.

And when the plan is complete, he said, Westland can apply for Natural Resources Conservation Service funding as well.



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