

Irrigation plan in the works

District working out how to deliver water



Jill Aho - About 50 people attended a meeting of the Klamath Irrigation District board Wednesday in Merrill. KID Director Dave Solem said the district has been working with the Bureau of Reclamation to begin releasing some water before the official turn-on date of May 15.

By JILL AHO

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Klamath Irrigation District is working with the Bureau of Reclamation to allow some water to be released from Upper Klamath Lake before the projected irrigation start date of the beginning of June.

KID Manager Dave Solem said if KID and the Bureau of Reclamation come to an agreement, irrigators must not be tempted to start taking water from ditches before the official irrigation start date. The early releases will be needed to prepare the canal system for water deliveries.

Public meeting



H&N photo by Jill Ahc

Klamath Basin irrigators listen intently Wednesday as Klamath Irrigation District Director Dave Solem explains how KID is developing its irrigation plans for this year.

Solem and the KID board addressed more than 50 people who attended a public meeting in Merrill on Wednesday afternoon. Attendees expressed concern about how water would be allocated, the land idling program being constructed by the Klamath Water and Power Agency, and water theft.

Solem said KID will have to carefully match inflows to Upper Klamath Lake to what is being released because the Bureau of Reclamation has stated it will shut off all irrigation if the lake reaches the biological opinion's minimum.

"There is going to be a hard minimum we absolutely cannot cross," Solem said. "We have to match our diversion with inflow and that is going to be very unpredictable."

The water allowed out the headgates will be split among users and irrigation districts, Solem said. No plan has been developed as to how that will be achieved. KWAPA has been accepting bids for its land idling program, and those acres, wherever they are, will be subtracted from the total acreage that will require water deliveries, he said. Additionally, those participating in KWAPA's well water program will not receive surface water deliveries.

"We don't have it pinned down where that well water will be," Solem said.

Managing outflow

Once the irrigation water begins flowing, it will be up to the districts to manage the outflow from the lake and ensure lake levels do not drop below the minimums. KID is not predicting there will be any surface water to back up failing wells, or any water left undistributed.

"I'm more concerned about getting shut off mid-season than having water left over," Solem said. "The anticipation is we are taking the lake as low as we legally can take it."

If inflows unexpectedly drop off, Solem said, it is likely water deliveries will cease for the season. Solem also said if an irrigator drains the lateral canal adjacent to his or her property, it may be weeks before it can be refilled.

Solem said although the district has little control over how much water irrigators take, it is looking to the water users to be good neighbors. The system isn't rigged with flow meters at every distribution point.

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