

Joint Town Hall

Answers to Questions

March 20, 2024



During the Central Oregon Irrigation and North Unit Irrigation District Joint Town Hall on March 20, 2024, attendees asked several questions that we were unable to address due to time constraints.

We have provided answers to all of the questions. These answers are for general informational purposes only and are not intended to provide legal advice.

Acronym & Abbreviation Key

COID -Central Oregon Irrigation District

NUID - North Unit Irrigation District

OWRD - Oregon Water Resources Department

DRC - Deschutes River Conservancy

HCP - Habitat Conservation Plan

EIS - Environmental Impact Statement

NEPA - National Environmental Policy Act

O&M - Operations and Maintenance

POD - Past the Point of Delivery

LBC - Lake Billy Chinook Pumping Facility

SCADA - Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition

ET - Evapotranspiration

QUESTION: *Will the price be adjusted with flow rates? Will the cost be prorated when the water is lowered?*

NUID ANSWER: No. Water fees pay for the irrigation system's operation and maintenance (O&M) and are not based on water availability or consumption. The O&M fee schedule is also based on the District's debt repayment contract with the US Bureau of Reclamation.

COID ANSWER: The annual assessments are based on the operations and maintenance of COID's canals, not the volume of water delivered.

QUESTION: *Before reducing flow rates, will patrons be notified ahead of time?*

NUID ANSWER: The 2024 patron allotment was set on 3/29/24. NUID intends to reduce the allotment only if unforeseen circumstances arise during the irrigation season. NUID patrons can order water at the rate and time requested. Flow rates to patrons are only reduced if the patron requests it or unforeseen circumstances arise.

COID ANSWER: During a full season, flow rates are adjusted based on the current river flows. When the flows fluctuate and/or drop significantly in the Deschutes River, COID is required to adjust per Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRC). Therefore, COID then notifies the patrons at the time of the change. Water reduction occurs much quicker than water increases.

QUESTION: *Has COID's flow rate improved in the piped canals over the past two years? It is frustrating to receive less water at full price.*

COID ANSWER: Due to the decrease in natural flow within the Deschutes River in the last three years, COID has been unable to deliver full water allotments due to drought and low natural flows within the Deschutes River. The annual assessments are based on the operations and maintenance of COID's canals, not the volume of water delivered. Piping has allowed the water to travel faster to the patrons and the ditch rider to make accurate adjustments in less time.

QUESTION: *What programs and funding are in place to improve ditch cleaning in COID?*

COID ANSWER: COID offers a "Beyond the Point of Delivery" program to help patrons clean private ditches. We can provide a mini-excavator and operator for a nominal cost to help with on-farm projects. As far as district-maintained canals, we have over 400 miles and clean as much in the off-season as we are able.

QUESTION: *When will fences and gates on the L-1 piping project be installed?*

COID ANSWER: K&E, the contractor performing the work on the L-1 piping, will be working on restoration during the month of April.

QUESTION: *Can gate valves be installed in place of two weirs to increase the efficiency of our water delivery?*

COID ANSWER: Not currently because you are still within an open channel delivery system.

QUESTION: *What is the approximate start date to pipe the Pilot Butte Canal from the Redmond Hospital area south past Greens Boulevard?*

ANSWER: The approximate start date has not been determined yet. It depends on when funding is secured, EIS approval and piping materials are secured. The estimate is sometime in the next 5-15 years.

QUESTION: *How will groundwater for domestic wells be affected by the piping of canals?*

ANSWER: Environmental impact studies are conducted prior to the piping of canals. These studies analyze the minimal impacts from piping to groundwater as compared to the benefits to surface water, and conclude that overall, the impacts outweigh the benefits. Piping results in wet water instream during the time when fish need the water the most. The surface water recharge created by piping canals and adding to stream flows, can show up down-basin or at a later time.

QUESTION: *How do you plan to balance irrigation needs and environmental requirements to avoid becoming like Baja California?*

ANSWER: The irrigation districts work closely with all federal, state, county, city, tribal, environmental, and local entities to maximize the available water for all uses. This work and collaboration allow us to overcome obstacles and strive to meet all water needs.

QUESTION: *With North Unit pumping out of Billy Chinook, will the North Unit canal be abandoned, and will the water be returned to the Deschutes?*

ANSWER: If NUID successfully constructs the Lake Billy Chinook Pumping Facility (LBC), there will still be a need to divert water from Bend to service the upper one-third of the District. Additionally, NUID's main canal will continue to serve as the primary diversion to meet patron demand. The LBC pumping facility would act as a supplemental source of water.

QUESTION: *How do you distribute the natural Deschutes flow to which District when you have determined there will be a shortfall?*

ANSWER: Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) distributes by priority date until the natural flow runs out. Then, the districts that did not receive natural flow are charged storage.

QUESTION: *Arnold Irrigation District has a history of running out of water in September. Can you explain if they take all their allotment or if running short is based on District inefficiencies?*

ANSWER: Historically, NUID was always on the edge of natural flow and stored water, and we only ran out of natural flow for Arnold, like two years in one hundred years, but now, with natural flow at historically low levels, Arnold is on the edge of natural flow and storage. Because their storage account is so small (unlike NUID), when Arnold runs out of natural flow, their storage account is gone in a couple of weeks, and then they get shut off.

QUESTION: *If the upstream districts have more senior water rights than NUID, why can't other districts voluntarily share a portion of their rights during an emergency drought declaration? Is there a water law that prevents them from being able to share?*

ANSWER: Prior appropriation already allows this; when a senior district uses less water, it is automatically passed to the next appropriator; however, if COID uses less water, then it goes to Arnold, not NUID, per priority date, unless we do a transfer and move the water to NUID.

QUESTION: *Is leasing instream considered a junior water right? If water is curtailed, shouldn't that water be sent to NUID first?*

ANSWER: That is not how the process works. When a water right is leased instream, it retains the District's priority date and has to go by the junior District's diversion. If the districts do not like this process, they can opt out of the leasing program and do temporary transfers to NUID as both programs offer the same beneficial use protection.

QUESTION: *Do districts make revenue from instream leasing?*

ANSWER: No, districts do not make revenue from instream leasing. Patrons who enroll ten or more acres into the program are compensated for the Operations and Maintenance by Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC). DRC also compensates the Districts for mapping fees.

QUESTION: *Will farmers in other districts have to leave their land idle? Why do NUID farmers have to pay their full water allotment to receive only half of their needs?*

ANSWER: We have yet to learn of other districts' farmers following their land. We recommend reaching out to those districts to ascertain that information. NUID's Fee schedule is based on the debt repayment contract with the US Bureau of Reclamation. It primarily revolves around the District's operations and maintenance. NUID patrons do not pay for water; they pay for the delivery of the water, whether that is a full allotment or partial allotment. That is the downside to prior appropriation; junior districts get less water in times of shortage. Working as a group to conserve water by senior districts continues to be the best path.

QUESTION: *What is the best way to get a question answered by the Board or the Districts?*

NUID ANSWER: Public question and answer times are included during every Board meeting. If the Board does not have an adequate answer, an expeditious response will be provided later. Board meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month. You may also contact the District directly. Additional information can be found at WWW.NorthUnitID.Com.

COID ANSWER: Central Oregon Irrigation District Patrons are always welcome to attend Board meetings and ask questions during the open forum section at the beginning of every meeting. Questions can also be emailed to info@coid.org with the subject line "Board of Directors." The questions will be provided to the Board and addressed at their next meeting.

QUESTION: *What is the total acreage of COID water right acres that have been urbanized since the District watered acres were mapped? Has the District transferred those rights to new acres in farm production inside COID or have these acres been used for instream leasing? Has COID considered transferring them to NUID?*

ANSWER: Certificate 76358, issued 12/6/1999, included 43,746.93 irrigated acres. Certificate 94956, issued 3/6/20, includes 41,993.17 irrigated acres. The District has transferred those water rights on farm within COID as well as instream. COID will only transfer temporary water to NUID through approved pilot programs.

QUESTION: *If COID were to release water, would the Deschutes River minimum stream flow requirements or ESA frog requirements get the first grab?*

ANSWER: COID only has 5,000 acre-feet of storage that can be released from Wickiup, and it is only available in the shoulder seasons, April 1 to May 14 and September 15 to October 31. The use of this storage is based on patron demand during those times. The rest of COID's irrigation water is based on natural flow into the Deschutes River. No, the Deschutes River minimum streamflow requirements or Endangered Species Act (ESA) frog requirements would not get the "first grab" of the water, but if COID released any storage, it would help boost flows within the upper Deschutes. The extra flow within the Upper Deschutes would help reach the minimum river and ESA frog requirements until it reached COID's river diversions.

QUESTION: *Has COID studied the cost of 24-hour delivery via headgates to its farmers?*

ANSWER: No, that would be a change in COID's certificate and violate the "ready, willing, and able" clause within the certificate to take your water 24/7.

QUESTION: *Is US Fish and Wildlife paying COID or the Deschutes Basin Board of Control for the use of the Crane Prairie Reservoir?*

ANSWER: No, but the HCP allows for the continued use of irrigation water. With the protection of possibly incidental take of an endangered species.

QUESTION: *What does the public pay to protect the Spotted Frog? Is there a minimum number of frogs required before restrictions are lifted, and is there a current inventory of frogs?*

ANSWER: COID patrons pay an annual \$75 Habitat Conservation Plan fee. This fee helps COID operate under an adaptive management element to enhance survival of the Oregon spotted frog. Information about the species can be found at Deschutes River Basin Habitat Conservation Plan | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (fws.gov)

QUESTION: *What is the estimated timeline for COID to finish the piping of their canals?*

ANSWER: There currently is a 20-year plan in place for the Pilot Butte Canal, which is entirely dependent on funding options. The Central Oregon Canal piping will begin once the Pilot Butte Canal is completed. More information on piping can be found here: www.coidpiping.com

QUESTION: *Where is the 2000 acres of farmland water that has been removed from production in Deschutes County?*

ANSWER: Irrigated acres that have been urbanized are transferred on-farm within COID, instream, or used in an operational capacity.

QUESTION: *With the COID yearly rate increase for maintenance and administrative costs, what percentage of water saved by water efficiency paid by COID patrons was returned to COID patrons? What percentage will NUID receive?*

ANSWER: The Pilot Butte Canal Piping project is funded by federal funds. More information can be found here: www.coidpiping.com. The COID yearly assessment increases are based on the cost of delivering water.

QUESTION: *What is COID's current revenue loss from hydropower? Is the projected fee increase proposed in 2021 still accurate?*

ANSWER: Since 2012 the District has been using hydropower to supplement increasing operations and maintenance costs and offset patron charges by as much as 40%. By 2026, the District is anticipating a 60% revenue loss from hydropower. The lost hydropower funds that have supplemented operations and maintenance need to be replaced by patron assessments. The planned rate schedule went into effect on January 1, 2022, and the pricing structure is in place to meet COID's long-term obligations.

QUESTION: *What has COID done to find an alternative to offset the cost of hydropower to its patrons? Could abandonment or solar alternatives offset labor and maintenance costs?*

ANSWER: COID staff have explored fast-track solar projects and funding to offset purchase and installation costs but have not yet found a long-term option that fits the need. COID is also working on new hydro contracts, but that too is taking time as the markets change.

QUESTION: *How did the filling of Haystack Reservoir affect COID patron's water flow last year?*

COID ANSWER: The filling of Haystack Reservoir did not affect COID patrons last year. NUID filled Haystack Reservoir with winter flows.

QUESTION: *What percentage of water storage did COID and North Unit each use last year? Was there any water left over? If so, what District had left over water?*

NUID ANSWER: NUID's primary water storage facility is Wickiup Reservoir, which has a capacity of 200,000 acre-feet. Wickiup was approximately 66% full at the start of the 2023 irrigation season. Once the District shut off, approximately 12% of the 200,000-capacity remained. Approximately 54% of the available Wickiup storage was used. Additional water was used from other sources, such as live flow from the Deschutes and Crooked Rivers, stored water in Prineville Reservoir, and conserved water from other basin irrigation districts. NUID's 2023 allotment was 35% of the normal 2" to 2.5" per acre for the 2023 season.

COID ANSWER: COID has 5,000 ACFT of storage within Wickiup through an agreement with NUID. COID has not used stored water in the last two years. COID can only use the water during the shoulder seasons, from April 1 to May 14 and September 15 to October 31. Patron demand has not exceeded natural flow when stored water is available.

QUESTION: *How did COID patrons have their water reduced last year when other districts, plus the City of Bend had 100% water? Please explain COID's senior water right, how it was changed with the agreement made on 12/07/17, and how it affected COID patrons.*

ANSWER: All irrigation districts in 2023 had cutbacks or complete shutdowns, except Swalley. Swalley is first in priority rights off the Deschutes River. COID does not control or monitor what either Bend or Redmond uses for water. The senior priority right has stayed the same; the drought has caused a decrease in flows within the Deschutes River.

QUESTION: *Can COID be more transparent about water flows beyond text messaging flow rates that change immediately?*

ANSWER: During the full season, flow rates are adjusted based on the current river flows. When the flows fluctuate and/or drop significantly in the Deschutes River, COID is required to adjust per OWRD. Therefore, COID notifies the patrons at the time of the change. Water reduction occurs much quicker than water increases.

QUESTION: *Please explain why water flow changes take time due to the amount of time it takes to flow down the canal and river. However, it only takes one day's notice to reduce flow percentages immediately to their patrons during the irrigation season.*

NUID ANSWER: Water released from Haystack Reservoir takes approximately twelve hours to reach the furthest part of the District. If water is cut from Haystack Reservoir, the cut may take approximately ten hours to arrive. Another example: It takes approximately 20 to 24 hours for additional water released from Wickiup to reach the NUID diversion. If flows are reduced, the cut may arrive in 18 hours. The bottom line is that water cuts arrive faster than water pluses.

COID ANSWER: Curtailment within COID's system is faster because river flows have already decreased, and we need to balance our system with the new decreased flow into our canals from top to bottom.

QUESTION: *I am in the next phase of COID's piping project. What should I expect?*

ANSWER: At this time, there are several unknowns surrounding our project's funding procurement, Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) approval, and the manufacturing of piping materials. As soon as phasing details are known, COID will notify affected patrons.

QUESTION: *NUID is super-efficient on-farm. What is NUID doing for significant losses in their conveyance system? Can you use the water in Haystack differently with the water COID is delivering to NUID?*

ANSWER: NUID has partnered with the US Bureau of Reclamation to conduct a Haystack operations study to help utilize conserved water more efficiently. This study will also analyze operational inefficiencies. In addition, NUID has secured funding to line portions of the main canal, which will improve overall efficiencies. The district continues to invest in automation hardware such as Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) that enables water managers the ability to monitor and control NUID's vast infrastructure remotely. Finally, NUID has invested in automation upgrades, such as installing twelve new gates, motors, and SCADA hardware to manage our system better.

QUESTION: *What is conserved water?*

ANSWER: When water is moved through an earthen canal, water is lost to many factors such as Evapotranspiration (ET), "the process by which water is transferred from the land to the atmosphere by evaporation from the soil and other surfaces and by transpiration from plants." By piping earthen canals, you no longer lose water to ET and other factors. This conserved water can be supplied to Jr. Water Right holders, put in a stream, or stored for future usage.

QUESTION: *While we are waiting for COID to pipe the main canal, what's happening on farm being done to eliminate waste?*

ANSWER: COID recognizes the importance of on-farm irrigation system upgrades and strives to support landowners in this endeavor. While COID cannot enforce upgrades, we actively facilitate and incentivize on-farm improvements. In collaboration with our partner, Deschutes River Conservancy, the District purchased equipment to incentivize lateral piping and machine cleaning. COID offers this at a cost to all landowners. The District has a full-time employee who assists private landowners with available grants, incentives, and general consultation of irrigation system design/maintenance/upgrades.