DBBC Town Hall
Questions & Answers
March 19, 2025

Q: Many residents in Central Oregon have reported their wells going dry after irrigation districts transitioned from open canals to piping systems. What studies or efforts are in place to address the impact on rural homeowners, and how can affected well owners get assistance?

A: While multiple factors influence groundwater levels such as drought, geology, and regional water use studies indicate canal piping may account for approximately 10% of the impact in some areas. Irrigation districts often conduct pre- and post-project well monitoring to assess potential effects.

State and regional partners are studying groundwater trends. Homeowners experiencing well issues should contact the Oregon Water Resources Department and their local district for assistance and information on available support programs.

Q: Will historical preservation efforts be included in the joint irrigation projects undertaken by the districts or agencies?

A: Yes. Any project using state or federal funding is reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Irrigation districts follow all SHPO and federal agency guidelines to ensure historical and cultural resources are identified and preserved.

Q: We were notified that you anticipated cost overruns for the projects this year. Why can't you stick to your budget like we do?

A: Cost changes depend on the district and are often driven by factors outside of their control, such as inflation, labor shortages, material costs, and permitting delays. Districts work to stay within budget but must adapt to changing conditions to keep projects moving forward.

Q: How do districts set rates?

A: Irrigation districts set rates to cover the cost of operations and maintenance. Rates are typically based on factors such as acreage, water delivery needs, infrastructure requirements, and long-term planning.

Q: Am I going to continue to see pricing increases like the last two years, or will it stop? When will it stop?

A: While price adjustments may continue in response to inflation, infrastructure needs, and regulatory requirements, the irrigation districts utlitize the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) to help control costs by sharing consultants, staff, and resources across districts.

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Q: Can you offer a payment plan to spread out the cost of water over a 12-month period rather than your current payment system?

A: Since most districts deliver water for only six months of the year, payment structures are typically based on that schedule. However, payment plans are a board-level decision and may vary by district. Patrons are encouraged to contact their district directly to discuss available options.

Q: I see that my district (COID), along with Arnold and Lone Pine, is doing a lot of work to help North Unit access conserved water. What is North Unit doing to be ready to take that water on a live flow basis rather than from storage?

A: NUID is creating policies to encourage patrons to take advantage of surplus water when it is available. This initiative will help patrons access water that would otherwise be wasted due to HCP requirements or wet weather events. Recently NUID completed upgrades to 11 diversion gates, enabling more precise remote control of the available water supply. Additionally, the district has finished phase two of a four-phase, 27-mile pipeline project, which enhances overall efficiency.

The board welcomes feedback and encourages patrons to share their ideas directly with the district.

Q: Why is COID charging North Unit when the districts are receiving federal money?

A: Federal funding supports specific infrastructure projects, not day-to-day operations and maintenance. COID charges for operational costs to deliver water to NUID that are not covered by federal dollars. Otherwise, COID patrons would be subsidizing NUID patrons for the cost of delivering water for their use.

Q: What are the counties, cities, and other groups doing to help relieve some of the burden put on us, as farmers, to pay for and "fix" the river, fish, and frogs?

A: Through the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative (DBWC), counties, cities, irrigation districts, and other partners are working together to identify shared solutions and funding strategies that balance agricultural needs with environmental goals. The state legislature continues to support this effort by providing funding for management of the DBWC.

Q: What consideration has been given to more free-market based inter-district movement of water among individual growers and landowners?

A: A legislative pilot project is exploring ways to allow more flexibility in water use across district boundaries. Increasing flexibility is seen as a key tool for improving overall water management in the basin.

Q: How do the districts make sure water is allocated fairly among all irrigators, especially in drought years?

A: Each district follows a state-approved Water Management and Conservation Plan, which includes provisions for drought years. The Oregon Water Resources Department, through the local watermaster, is responsible for regulating river flows.

Q: Why do we lose our water if we don't use it?

A: Oregon Water Law requires water to be put to its highest and best use, which means using it for its intended purpose without waste. For irrigation rights, that means actively planting, irrigating, and producing a crop, pasture, yard, or other landscaping at least once every five consecutive years. Irrigating native vegetation or weeds does not qualify. Water rights that are not put to beneficial use as defined by the law may be subject to forfeiture. Such rules also deter speculative water right acquisitions. For more information, visit www.coid.org/water

Q: Upon completion of COID's EIS, what is the earliest expected date piping projects on the south end of Redmond, specifically south of Greens Boulevard, would begin?

A: Piping on the north end of Redmond is anticipated to begin in 2026. Work on the south end is dependent on securing additional funding, with a target timeframe of 2028–2030. However, preliminary planning and pre-construction work may begin earlier than 2028.

Q: Why are you using large-scale piping to reduce water use instead of cheaper options like piping private ditches, eliminating flood irrigation, or offering incentives to use less water?

A: Piping main canal systems - the backbone of the irrigation network - is the most efficient and cost-effective way to conserve large amounts of water quickly, especially with available federal and state funding. These projects also support and incentivize future on-farm improvements by creating reliable, pressurized systems that enable more efficient irrigation practices.

Q: What incentives, financial and technical, do small or hobby farmers have to change and use water more efficiently?

A: All water users are considered water right holders, regardless of operation size. Incentives and support may be available through your local irrigation district, the Deschutes and Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Deschutes River Conservancy, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

These organizations offer resources and programs to help improve on-farm water efficiency and support conservation efforts.

Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District
https://www.deschutesswcd.org/
Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District
https://www.jeffswcd.org/
Deschutes River Conservancy
https://www.deschutesriver.org/
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – Oregon
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/oregon

Q: Are there plans for new storage reservoirs or ways to increase water storage capacity in the basin?

A: COID and North Unit Irrigation District are working with the Bureau of Reclamation through a grant to explore ways to more efficiently utilize Haystack Reservoir. This includes evaluating options such as small pond or bulge storage to enhance overall water management in the basin.

Q. How do we balance water allocations for agriculture when urban and environmental demands are increasing?

A: Balancing these demands is a key focus of the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative. Districts are investing in conservation projects to improve efficiency, meet environmental obligations under the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), and support long-term water reliability for agriculture, cities, and rivers.

Q: I live on what was once Lake Sherwood in Terrebonne. Over the past year, the lake has completely dried up, and the vibrant ecosystem it supported is gone. How can this happen while golf courses remain green? Can anything be done to restore the lake and its habitat?

A: Lake Sherwood is an operational pond, not a natural pond, at the end of COID's delivery system, historically receiving excess water or operational spill. Due to the multi-year drought, very little to no overflow is reaching the pond.

We recognize the loss of habitat is deeply concerning, and restoration is a shared priority. As districts increase efficiency through conservation projects, including piping and system upgrades, the goal is to better manage and deliver water where it's needed balancing the needs of agriculture, urban areas, and ecosystems.

Q: In the January 14, 2024, meeting notes, it was stated that any future hydro revenue and potential power contracts would be used to repay the $2.5 million endowment loan. What was the loan for? And if power revenue has been decreasing, why is it now being used to repay a loan?

A: The $2.5 million endowment loan was used to pay off the hydro facility building. While power revenue has decreased in recent years due to lower flows and market conditions, the board directed that any future hydro revenue, should it improve, be used to repay the loan, rather than fund new spending. This approach is intended to reduce long-term debt and limit further impact on patron rates.

Q: My operation and maintenance bill keeps increasing, yet I never see my ditch being cleaned. How is ditch cleaning scheduled year after year? Is there a yearly maintenance plan?

A: Ditch cleaning and maintenance are scheduled based on priority, access, and system needs rather than on a fixed annual rotation. Some areas require more frequent attention, while others may need less frequent maintenance. If you have concerns about your specific ditch, we encourage you to contact your district directly so staff can review and address your location as needed.

Q: Does COID have an easement beyond the point of delivery? If a buried pipe is installed by COID, paid for by a patron, and crosses another landowner's property beyond the point of delivery, what easement rights apply - especially if none existed before the work began? How can a pipe be installed outside the original system without an easement?

A: COID easements generally end at the official point of delivery. Any infrastructure extending beyond that point especially across private property requires a separate, recorded easement agreement between the involved landowners. Patrons with questions about easements or private delivery arrangements are encouraged to contact the district for clarification. In most instances, patrons should seek legal advice specific to their individual situation.

Q: I would like to see more attention by COID to piping private laterals and upgrading infrastructure beyond the point of delivery. Does COID have a private lateral system improvement plan similar to the main canal piping plan? If not, is one in development?

A: COID is exploring a range of economic based options through the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative to support improvements beyond the point of delivery. While there is no formal private lateral improvement plan at this time, many solutions will become more feasible as the main system is piped and pressurized. This foundational work is essential to enabling future on-farm and private system upgrades.

Q: How are the districts proactively addressing water conservation? I hear about some irrigators receiving more water than allocated or needed, while others like those in Arnold struggle during drought. How are districts using real-time information to trade, share, or leave water in-stream when it's not needed for beneficial use?

A: Districts are investing in conservation projects, modernizing infrastructure, and improving water measurement to better match deliveries with actual need. Many are adopting real-time flow monitoring and telemetry to track usage and improve efficiency. Efforts are underway through the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative and the Habitat Conservation Plan to expand tools for water sharing, trading, and voluntary leasing to protect flows during critical times. While each district operates independently, shared data and regional coordination are improving how water is managed across the basin especially during drought.

Q: Regarding news of a "new" aquifer: Is this truly a new source of water we could use, or just a better understanding of an existing aquifer that feeds rivers like the Metolius and McKenzie?

A: It's not a new source of water, but rather a refined understanding of an existing deep aquifer system. Scientific studies have improved our knowledge of how groundwater moves through the region and how it contributes to spring-fed rivers like the Metolius and McKenzie. Any use of this aquifer would still be subject to Oregon water law and careful regulation to avoid harming surface flows or senior water rights. This aquifer has been in use for over 100 years, and there is no 'additional water' available for appropriation.

Q: With the looming 2029 challenge to meet federal guidelines for protecting the Oregon spotted frog, two questions: 1) **Can we achieve the standard without completing the piping project? 2) If we cannot meet the standard, can we operate without federal funding?**

A: Meeting the 2029 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) targets without completing key piping projects would be extremely difficult. Piping is the most effective way to conserve the volumes of water needed to improve streamflows and meet habitat requirements for species like the Oregon spotted frog.

Operating without federal funding would significantly limit the districts' ability to complete these large-scale conservation projects. Federal support is critical to financing infrastructure upgrades and meeting environmental obligations. Without compliance, districts could also face legal and regulatory challenges that impact operations.

Q: COID's five-year budget plan (2024-2029) calls for nearly doubling expenses , which equals the doubling of expense for the past 5 years. How do you believe this ever-increasing cost for the consumer is sustainable?

A: This question appears to be related to COID's ongoing irrigation rate planning efforts. COID rates are built on a cost recovery approach. Rates are set annually to cover the district's expenses tied to running COID's infrastructure to deliver water to patrons. COID has engaged a consultant to create a multi-year strategy to assure financial solvency of the district in the long run and to provide resources needed to keep services at a desired level.

COID, like all utilities, faces increased expenses due to cost of labor, vehicles & equipment, fuel, materials, and other items. In light of the question above, it must be noted that the rate planning exercises don't anticipate a doubling of expenses. Rather,

an important factor in setting rates is the expected reduction in hydro-electric revenue COID is paid for generating electricity at the Siphon Power facility and the Juniper Ridge Hydro facility. In the past, this revenue has subsidized irrigation rates up to 50%. With the anticipated reduction in hydro revenue, rates were appropriately set without relying on uncertain hydro revenues.

Although the district has a multi-year plan to assure rates cover operational realities, the COID board sets rates annually that can differ from the strategy. This year, the COID board increased rates by less than half of what the multi-year plan had identified to address affordability concerns.