



NRCS - Assisted Watershed Projects North Unit Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project Jefferson County, Oregon

There are 2,100 watershed projects in the nation established by local units of government with the assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Program (Public Law 78-534 and Public Law 83-566). These projects consist of over 11,000 flood control dams and thousands of conservation practices that provide over \$2 billion in annual benefits in flood prevention, water supplies, recreational areas, and other benefits. The following is just one example of how the Watershed Program is benefiting local communities and the nation.

While many of the PL-566 Watershed Program projects include flood control dams the Program also provides assistance to local project sponsors for other measures such as irrigation water management.

The following is a Oregon Natural Resources Conservation Service news release about the project.

Madras, OR (January 11, 2023) - The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Oregon has released a Final Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (EA) and a Finding of No Significant Impact for the North Unit Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project.

NRCS Oregon has determined that the project will not cause significant local, regional, or national impacts to the environment. With a completed environmental assessment in place, the project is now eligible for federal funding and may move forward into final design and construction.

The project may be partially funded through the Watershed and Flood Prevention Program, administered by NRCS and authorized by Public Law 83-566. Through this program, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to local organizations (project sponsors) for planning and carrying out projects that help solve natural resource and related economic problems in a specific watershed. These issues can include watershed protection, flood prevention, erosion and sediment control, water supply, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, and wetlands creation.

The project will install 27.5 miles of gravity-pressurized, buried pipe; upgrade 153 turnouts; and construct four 1,000 cubic-yard retention ponds, each approximately 0.5 acres in size. The project will improve water conservation on District-operated laterals; improve water delivery reliability and drought resilience to NUID irrigators; reduce NUID's operation and maintenance costs; reduce operational spills into natural waterbodies; and improve streamflow, water quality, and habitat in the Deschutes River.

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By converting the open-ditch irrigation canal into a buried, closed-pipe system, North Unit Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project will reduce water loss from seepage and evaporation, saving an estimated 6,089 acre-feet annually and reducing operational spill returns to nearby natural waterbodies.

Following project completion, 4,567 acre-feet of the water saved annually by the project would augment water supplies for NUID's existing patrons, helping to fulfill existing water rights, and alleviate water supply shortages across the District.

The remaining 1,522 acre-feet of water saved annually would be allocated for instream purposes and released into the upper Deschutes River during the non-irrigation season. The project is a joint effort among NRCS Oregon, Bureau of Reclamation as a cooperating agency, North Unit Irrigation District, Deschutes Basin Board of Control, and Farmers Conservation Alliance, in coordination with other agencies, stakeholders, and the public.

The Final EA and other supporting documents for the project are available at: oregonwatershedplans.org/north-unit-id.

For more information about this and other irrigation modernization efforts, visit oregonwatershedplans.org or the NRCS Oregon public notice webpage.

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