



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

June 20, 2017

1201 NE Lloyd Blvd.
Suite 900
Portland, OR 97232
503-414-3200

Dear Interested Parties:

The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), in cooperation with the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) as the project sponsor, is *proposing* to partially fund through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (PL83-566) three separate projects for the improvement of aging irrigation infrastructure in the Tumalo, Swalley, and Central Oregon Irrigation Districts. Watershed plans will be developed that will help irrigators conserve water, reduce energy consumption, increase irrigation delivery efficiency, improve public safety, and benefit instream habitat for threatened and endangered aquatic species.

As part of that planning effort, the NRCS and DBBC are hosting three agency and public open house meetings to discuss proposed irrigation system improvements and collect input from the community, stakeholders, and agencies.

You are invited to attend the agency and public scoping meetings for three proposed projects, where your input is requested. At these meetings, participants will have an opportunity to learn more about the proposed irrigation improvements and submit their comments, ideas and concerns. Each meeting focuses on watershed planning within a specific irrigation district—the Swalley, Tumalo, and Central Oregon irrigation districts:

- **Tumalo Irrigation District Public Open House: Thursday July 6, 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.** Location: Tumalo Community Church Meeting Room, 64671 Bruce Ave, Bend, OR 97703. In addition to providing comments at this meeting, individuals may also submit comments during the public comment period, which runs from **July 7 to July 20**. Submit comments to: wsp@tumalo.org.
- **Swalley Irrigation District Public Open House: Thursday July 6, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.** Location: Tumalo Community Church Meeting Room, 64671 Bruce Ave, Bend, OR 97703. In addition to providing comments at this meeting, individuals may also submit comments during the public comment period, which runs from **July 7 to July 20**. Submit comments to: swalleycomments@gmail.com.
- **Central Oregon Irrigation District Public Open House: Monday July 10, 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.** Location: Redmond Grange, 3152 SW Metolius Pl, Redmond, OR 97756. In addition to providing comments at this meeting, individuals may also submit comments during the public comment period, which runs from **July 11 to July 24**. Submit comments to: watershed@coid.org.

The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodations for persons with disabilities should be made at least 48 hours before the meeting to Margi Hoffman (503) 550 -3556.

Following the public comment period, NRCS and DBBC will use those comments to develop a draft watershed plan for each irrigation district in the form of an *environmental assessment*. The public will have another opportunity to review those draft plans and provide additional input before they are finalized.

Once complete, these watershed plans will enable NRCS to apply for funding to construct irrigation improvements through its PL83-566 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention program. Through this program, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to states, local governments and Tribes (project sponsors) to plan and implement authorized watershed project plans for the purpose of watershed protection, flood mitigation, water quality improvements, soil erosion reduction, rural, municipal and industrial water supply, irrigation, water management, sediment control, fish and wildlife enhancement, and hydropower.

Project Introduction

Aging infrastructure, growing populations, shifting rural economies, and changing climate conditions have increased pressure on water resources across the western United States (US). Within the Deschutes Basin, irrigated agriculture (one of the primary out-of-stream water uses in the area) relies on infrastructure that is over 100-years old to divert, store, and deliver water to farms and ranches across the region. System water losses and the need to minimize those losses have been an ongoing concern of the Tumalo, Central Oregon, and Swalley Irrigation Districts (herein referred to as the Irrigation Districts). Starting in the mid-1990s, the Irrigation Districts have pursued a water conservation program to provide a permanent solution to system-wide water losses. A significant portion of the water diverted through irrigation canals currently seeps into the area's porous, volcanic soil prior to reaching farms. Improving aging irrigation infrastructure offers an opportunity to enhance aquatic species habitat, reduce public safety risks, support and maintain existing agricultural land use through enhanced water supply reliability, and provide financial stability to irrigation districts in the Deschutes Basin.

Project Purpose and Need

The purposes of this project are to:

- Enhance habitat for aquatic species through increased stream flows through the storage season by creating senior instream water rights benefiting the Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Oregon spotted frog and other fish and wildlife;
- By restoring flows with water lost in transportation, habitat can be improved without taking water from small farms and reliability of irrigation deliveries can be improved;
- Providing farmers with pressurized water will encourage small farms to modernize irrigation systems to take advantage of the lower operating costs;
- Improve public safety by replacing dangerous open canals with buried pipes, which is particularly important as residential populations expand into areas that previously supported primarily agriculture;
- Support and maintain existing agriculture with improvements in water supply reliability, speed of delivery, and system durability; and
- Provide financial stability to the Irrigation Districts through reduced operation and maintenance cost, conserved energy and reduced on-farm expenses through reduction of irrigation, and energy generation through installation of small hydropower facilities.

Consistent with these purposes, the project would address the following needs:

- Enhanced habitat for fish and wildlife
- Support agriculture and family farms
- New opportunities for farmers to modernize irrigation infrastructure
- Improved public safety
- Increased reliability of water supplies to farms

Location

Tumalo, Central Oregon, and Swalley Irrigation District's service areas are all located in the Upper Deschutes Watershed (Largely in Hydrologic Unit Code [HUC] 17070301), north and northwest of Bend, OR. Central Oregon Irrigation District extends north and west of Redmond, OR, as well.

Agency/Public Participation

The participation of the agencies/public is a vital component of the project providing those who are interested in or potentially affected by the proposed project an opportunity to share their comments, ideas, and concerns regarding actions during the initial scoping period of the NEPA process. You are encouraged to attend the agency and public meetings and express your comments, ideas, and concerns. To be considered and become part of the public scoping record for the project, **comments must be received by close-of-business on July 20, 2017 for Tumalo and Swalley; and July 24, 2017 for Central Oregon.**

Comments may be submitted via email (see email addresses above next to meeting dates) or via mail to:

Margi Hoffmann, Community Relations Director
Farmers Conservation Alliance
11 3rd Street, Suite 101
Hood River, OR 97031
(503) 550-3556
margi.hoffmann@fcasolutions.org

Your feedback is valuable and we encourage you to attend the agency and public open house meetings. Additional information is available at www.oregonwatershedplans.org or the NRCS link for Public Notices:

<https://www.nrcs.usde.gov/wps/usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/or/newsroom/pnotice/>.



RONALD ALVARADO
State Conservationist