

Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association

Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association: Failed Water Management in the Odessa Subarea

Successful water resources management requires competence and honesty. Competence depends on comprehending sound technical and financial information; and honesty means not deceiving others, or worse, deceiving yourself. Neither the Pacific Northwest Region Office, USBR nor the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District has embraced this standard in "reviewing" the new System 1 Water Service Contract requested by Irrigators and CSRIA, for the Odessa Subarea. There are two issues at play here.

The first issue is the wise and effective use of water. It would take an extraordinary level of incompetence to not optimize, via state authorized water spreading and well established practice, the new surface water allocation for the Odessa Subarea, given that Western water resources are under great physical constraints and public demands. The lack of USBR sensitivity to these factors is, in this circumstance, mind-numbing.

The second issue involves basic financial literacy. The Irrigators have fully secured \$42 million of private sector financing to initiate System 1 construction; and up to about \$100 million is available to proceed with a broader systems package. Whereas the District the USBR/District's proposed "normative process" for project development and financing is a product of considerable self-deception. There is no cost advantage to having the District build the systems; more acres would be subjected to higher costs, actually discouraging participation; the total 30-year debt service costs would be substantially higher than the privates; and there is no tangible public sector revenue bonding package even on the table.

To the extent that the District is offering limited water contracts that include "normative development fee" costs, those costs are fictitious in substance, and likely fraudulent relative to state legal provisions that do not allow irrigation districts to access fees that exceed actual benefits to the ground served. The objective is to put water on the ground, not to put excessive funds in the District's coffers.

Unfortunately, the lack of District concern for Irrigator costs goes further. The District spurned CSRIA's efforts to secure additional state funding (\$20 million) to finish East Low Canal modifications below Lind Coulee, to allow for access to water for all South of I-90 systems. Allocation of this additional funding was contingent upon the USBR releasing the System 1 WSC, but the District preferred to increase costs to Irrigators rather than allow the Irrigators to proceed with system(s) construction.

Each day, it becomes increasing apparent that the USBR-District are disregarding reasonable standards for water resources management. This carries with it a patronizing disservice to the Irrigators, the broader Irrigated Agriculture Industry, and their dependent communities. The wells are going dry, farmers and communities suffer as the USBR-District folly continues.

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