

IRRIGATION: Districts exploring all avenues for gaining additional water

Icicle/Peshastin Irrigation Districts struggling to provide enough water

By IAN DUNN
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The Icicle and Peshastin Irrigation District boards held an emergency meeting on Aug. 20 to make some decisions about getting through the rest of the irrigation season. In July, the Peshastin Board cut back all users by one-third, and now, the Icicle Board is asking their users to cut back their water by one-third.

Up to this point, all the high lakes used by the districts to augment water flows in the Icicle Creek have been drained as far down as possible. Trying to secure more water, the districts applied for a grant from the Department of Ecology's Drought Relief Fund to further pump water from Eight Mile Lake.

The districts did receive the grant, but right away, they identified problems with installing the pumps on Eight Mile Lake.

"All the Huey-sized helicopters are out fighting fires or otherwise obligated. There were no Huey-sized helicopters available in the Northwest. We needed the helicopters to fly in our pumps," said Tony Jantzer, Icicle/Peshastin District manager.

Without the larger helicopters available, Jantzer said they also would not be able to fly the pumps out if there were a big rain event. The pumps are inside the lake, so a big rain event could submerge the pumps in the lake.

Jantzer said they were not willing to risk that. "We weren't comfortable with the risk of having the pumps in there without a safe way to get them out," Jantzer said. "Basically, the board decided, even though we had the money available, it didn't make any sense to take that kind of risk. The next set of decisions had to do with how best to get by with what we have."

Instead of installing the pumps, the boards decided to dig out the inlets and outlets of Eight Mile and Colchuck Lakes.

Eight Mile Lake has been drawn down to a point where it is not producing any more water, he said.

The outlets, over the 80-to-100 years it has been in operation, have filled in with sediment. The plan is to remove the sediment from the outlets at Eight Mile and Colchuck Lakes. Jantzer said that should allow the districts to get another 260 acre feet of water.

With the extra water and rationing on the Icicle Canal, Jantzer said they should be able to get to the end of the season on Sept. 25. Icicle users are being cut back to 4.5 gallons per minute from 6.75 gallon per minute. Peshastin users remain at 4.5 gallons per minute.

Helicopters will still be needed to do the work, but not the larger ones being used by the firefighters.

"We have scheduled these little helicopters that aren't good for fighting fires. These are available, but the bigger ones that haul water are not. We have helicopters scheduled to go up to Eight Mile," Jantzer said. "We'll start on Eight Mile, digging that out. We'll move to Colchuck on Wednesday. I hope to get more water out of those lakes, then we should be able to make it to Sept. 25, if the farmers abide by the rationing."

All the work will be done the old fashioned way with picks and shovels. At Eight Mile Lake, Jantzer said they should be able to clear out four or five feet, which should produce another 160 acre feet of water.

The outlet at Colchuck Lake is down three feet. Once that is dug out, it should produce another 100 acre feet of water. It will be very hard work digging out the outlets, he said. They will be working 12-hour shifts over eight days.

Once that work is done, Jantzer said they

will focus on the users, making sure everyone is complying with the rationing.

"If they are not complying voluntarily, then we will adjust their weirs accordingly. We want to get everybody to turn off a third. If they are running six lines, they need to close two and just run four. Things are starting to cool off. There is some moisture in the air. We're hopeful people will comply," Jantzer said.

Even if everyone complies, Jantzer said they may not make to Sept. 25. If people don't comply, he is certain they will not make it. The Sept. 25 shut off date is a week earlier than normal.

It is working out for the farmers, because most are harvesting a week to 10-days early, because of the hot summer weather. Jantzer said most farms will be fine.

"It will be stressful for those with young trees. We did have some farmers that have some other crops. This is going to cause them some difficulties. This is the best we can do. Our lakes will be empty," he said.

There at 1,143 users in the Icicle Irrigation District, the bulk of which is residential. Over the course of the long, hot summer, Jantzer said the Icicle users have been using records amounts of water.

"It has been a killer. We have been pushing the canal as hard as we can push it. The Icicle Canal also feeds Peshastin Canal," he said. "Right now, Peshastin Creek is producing 18 cfs (cubic feet per second) out of the normal 48 cfs we need to run the canal. We've been sending across 20 cfs out of the Icicle Canal. Peshastin Canal has been getting by with 35-38 cfs."

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