

## **DEQ, Farmers Irrigation District Agree on \$3 Million Loan For Pipeline Work in Hood River Watershed**

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The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has agreed to provide a \$3 million loan to the Hood River-based Farmers Irrigation District for design and construction of a long-life pipeline to convey water throughout the district and replace the district's open ditches and antiquated pipes in the Hood River Watershed. The district serves about 1,700 users and covers 5,800 irrigated acres.

Installation of a high-quality pipeline is expected to significantly improve water quality and water availability for fish habitat and irrigators in the area. The open ditches and canals that the district currently uses are exposed to chemical contamination from farm and household runoff, and from airborne pesticide spray drift. In addition, the district's aging canals – some of which are more than 100 years old – are prone to slope failure, which could cause large amounts of sediment and debris to run off into the Hood River and its tributaries, degrading fish habitat and burying fish spawning grounds.

The \$3 million, low-interest loan, offered through DEQ's Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, is one of several that DEQ issues each year to communities and entities dealing with water quality improvement issues. Most of the funds from the loan will be used to install pipelines to replace remaining open ditches and canals throughout the district's collection and distribution system. Most design work for the project has already been completed. An estimated completion date for the project has yet to be determined, as it is dependent on the district obtaining additional funding sources.

Improving water quality in the Hood River Basin is a priority for DEQ. The agency's Hood River watershed pollution reduction plan (Total Maximum Daily Load) identifies the lowering of temperature and pH (acidity) levels in the watershed. Replacing the ditches with high-quality pipe will eliminate seepage and evaporation and will allow for more water to be returned to Hood River at a critical habitat section of the river; the increased water flow will decrease river temperature and improve habitat.

DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund program loans have ranged from \$7,000 to \$35 million, and DEQ has made loan agreements totaling more than \$600 million to borrowers since the program was established in 1990. The program is supported financially from annual grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), loan repayment and state-issued bonds.