

Deschutes River Conservancy Grant Extension Request for the Smith Rock-King Way On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Project

ARPA funds were allocated to leverage water conservation work within Central Oregon Irrigation District's (COID) Smith Rock-King Way project area to complement the \$30 million federal investment in COID's first phase of main canal piping completed in 2022, and the \$2.6 million USDA investment in associated on-farm work awarded in 2021 through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). ARPA funds were allocated to work with private landowners adjacent to the completed piping projects to pipe private laterals and upgrade on-farm efficiency infrastructure from flood to sprinkler irrigation.

After completing COID's first phase of Pilot Butte main canal piping in 2022, the partners piped the J Lateral in the winter of 2023 and the L Lateral in the winter of 2024, while working to identify private laterals with willing landowners that would tie into one of those piped areas. The privately owned J-7 lateral was selected for piping, as it would tie directly into the piped section of the J-Lateral and it serves 15 landowners and 17 parcels with potential on-farm projects.

The partners were working closely with NRCS to obligate RCPP funding for the J-7 project to match the available ARPA funds, when early in 2024, Oregon's RCPP coordinator left his position with NRCS, leaving a vacancy that lasted a year, and greatly slowed down our project work.

COID also had some staffing changes that necessitated shifting project roles. Due to capacity limitations, COID was unable to spearhead outreach with the J-7 landowners, hold the contract with the engineer, and construct the piping project in-house as planned. This required DRC to shift into those roles, which included drafting and approving new DRC/COID and landowner contracts, re-bidding and re-signing a new contract with an engineer/project manager, taking on all landowner outreach, and bidding and overseeing the construction contractor. DRC staff moved swiftly into these roles, but nevertheless, project delays have resulted from these changes.

Because irrigation infrastructure must be constructed during the fall and winter months when the water is turned off; construction must be completed by March to enable COID to deliver water for the start of the irrigation season. With new RCPP coordinators in place, we were working closely with NRCS to obligate the remaining federal funding from the RCPP to construct the J-7 this past fall and winter (2025/2026), when the federal government shutdown occurred. During that time, NRCS asked us to cease all project work, and our funding for the J-7 was not yet secured. When the government reopened in mid-November, we were still not able to finalize our contracts with NRCS because the Federal budget had not rolled over yet. As a result, the funds were not available during the construction window and the project is now slated to be constructed in the fall of 2026/winter of 2027, which necessitates an ARPA grant extension. We have since secured the remaining NRCS RCPP funding to construct the project, and we anticipate construction will begin in October.

Smith Rock King Way Irrigation Efficiency Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Project Focus Area

