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Idaho Water Resource Board approves \$4.3 million loan to N. Fremont Canal System for Phase 3 of Marysville gravity-pressurized irrigation pipeline project

BOISE – (Oct. 24, 2018) – The Idaho Water Resource Board approved a 20-year, \$4.3 million loan on Tuesday to the North Fremont Canal System for Phase 3 of the Marysville gravity-pressurized irrigation pipeline project, which will include a new diversion structure and about 16 miles of gravity-pressurized irrigation pipeline for farmers in the north Fremont County area.

The board held a special meeting by conference call on Tuesday to expedite the construction of the project.

The total cost of the project is slightly more than \$11 million. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently provided a \$6.8 million grant for Phase 3 of the pipeline project, and the Idaho Water Resource Board is financing the balance of \$4.3 million, or 39 percent of the total project costs. Construction is slated to begin this fall and is expected to be completed by spring 2019 in time for the next crop season.

The purpose of the project is to conserve 2,400 acre-feet of irrigation water that is lost due to canal seepage and evaporation, increase public safety by removing open canals in communities, and reduce power costs by 1,200 kilowatt-hours by removing existing pumping facilities. In Phase 3, about 17.8 miles of open canal will be converted to 16 miles of gravity-pressurized irrigation pipeline to serve participating irrigators across approximately 2,784 acres of farmland in Fremont County.

“To convert from an open ditch to a pipeline in a gravity-fed system will create a huge power savings to the participating farmers in our area,” said Sean Maupin, President of the North Fremont Canal System. He noted that about 40 large water pumps will be phased out that had been sending water to nearby pivot sprinklers. “You can spend \$7,000-8,000 just to start up those pumps,” he said.

Each farmer who is participating in Phase 3 of the system will pay an increased per-acre assessment to cover the loan cost, Maupin said, “but one of the beautiful things about the project is you can almost make your increased payment based on what you save in power costs.”

“We appreciate all that you do for the state and your community,” said Roger Chase, Chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board.

The efficiency of the pipeline project will “improve delivery of water to shareholders so they can receive their full allocation of water during the peak period of the irrigation season,” said board staff Rick Collingwood.

The project will cause no losses to the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, Maupin said. “The aquifer up there is holding steady.”

In terms of other project benefits, a portion of the open canal posed a safety hazard where a canal ran through the community of Ashton and borders a portion of the Ashton Elementary School, officials said. The new pipeline will eliminate that hazard, Collingwood noted.

Other benefits include improving water quality by eliminating irrigation return flows to the Henrys Fork of the Snake River, reducing a source of noxious weeds in the open canals and improving seasonal air quality by eliminating the need for burning vegetation along the canal and ditch systems, officials said.

The Idaho Water Resource Board has made multiple loans to the North Fremont Canal System since 2007 for Phases 1, 2 and 4 of the multi-phase project. North Fremont Canal System farmers are current in their loan payments, and at times, have accelerated payments to reduce accrued interest on the loans, Collingwood said.

There is still one more phase of the project expected to be built in the future. It is anticipated that Phase 5, the final phase of the project, will be constructed within 3-5 years.

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