

Methow Valley News

Online

Long-term fix for river, fish, farmers and recreationists



By Joyce Campbell

Construction is set to begin on a \$1.5 million renovation project to improve river conditions for endangered and threatened fish species, restore the natural channel-forming processes of the river, improve recreation and make irrigating easier for farmers.

The Methow Valley Irrigation District's east diversion along Evans Road near the Methow Valley State Airport was scheduled for renovation starting Tuesday (Oct. 6). The three-phase project is a collaborative effort by the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, (MSRF), the Methow Restoration Council, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife and the MVID.

"There was enormous discussion about different ways to do it," said Ken Bevis, Watershed Stewardship biologist with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. "It took a lot of collaboration to get to this solution. It's a nice long-term fix to a chronic problem."

"I don't know anybody in the state that's done what we've done," said Vaughn Jolley, president of the irrigation district's board of directors. "This is a huge deal for fish and recreation and irrigation water is easier to divert. It has always been difficult to divert enough water."

An irrigation dam built before the historic flood of 1948 was removed in stages starting in December 2007 and completed in December 2009, according to the MSRF website. The project was designed to improve river conditions for Endangered Species Act listed spring Chinook salmon, steelhead trout and bull trout, help restore the natural river processes and improve the reliability of the irrigation system and minimize in-water maintenance.

“Each action benefits more than fish. It benefits local recreation, employment and quality of life,” said Chris Johnson, executive director of MSRF. “Increasing stream flow increases the ease of operation for farmers.”

The existing concrete headworks will be modified, including replacement of the existing headgates and wasteway. A trash rack and intake structure will be constructed and two 36-inch pipes 1,220 feet long will be installed in the existing intake channel.

Local contractors will be working on the project, including excavation and material placement by Lloyd Logging, concrete work by Ryan Surface Construction and metal fabrication by Methow Valley Industrial, according to Paula Mackrow, MSRF spokesperson. Methow Natives will provide plant restoration to the site for riprap stabilization and improving fish habitat.

The engineering for the project began with the Bureau of Reclamation and evolved into a design by HDR, a civil engineering company, according to Johnson. Engineers from Hammond Collier Wade in Omak will provide certified testing on the construction site.

Project funding comes from the Bonneville Power Administration, the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds). The Bureau of Reclamation also provided the engineering and surveying.

Evans Road will remain open during the six to eight weeks of construction. The project will not interfere with end-of-season irrigation or with airport activities. For more information call project manager Greg Knott at 997-0028.

Photo by Joyce Campbell

The fish rescue squad, Nick Glaser (Bureau of Reclamation), left, and Luke Brager (U.S. Geological Survey), use a backpack electric shocker and hand nets to collect and relocate juvenile Chinook salmon, whitefish, Pacific lamprey, and rainbow trout during the shutdown of the MVID irrigation canal this week.

Date: 10-22-2009 | Volume: 107 | Issue: 21