

# Irrigation Water Management

Thanks to the foresight of early settlers, the Hood River Valley is served by a network of ditches and pipes that provide irrigation water to most of the countryside. Dug by hand in the late 1880s, these ditches carry irrigation water from streams and rivers located higher in the basin to farms and rural residences. A large percentage of all irrigation water in the Hood River Valley is delivered by one of the local irrigation districts.

Irrigation water rights are appurtenant (attached) to individual parcels of land. Irrigation districts provide the infrastructure to deliver the water, and therefore assess annual charges to maintain their systems. Hood River County has five main irrigation districts: the Middle Fork, East Fork, Mt. Hood, Dee and Farmers. If you have water rights, find out which district delivers your irrigation water.

## Water Rights and Management

Irrigation water rights should be disclosed on the sale of a property. You can also contact the local Watermaster to verify a water right. He can tell you which irrigation district provides your irrigation water and answer other questions related to your water rights.

If your land does not have an irrigation water right, you can apply for a permit through the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD). Some activities are exempt from the water right permitting process, such as using a well (groundwater) for domestic use and the irrigation of no more than ½ acre of lawn or non-commercial garden. However, you need to obtain a water right before you divert any water from a stream, even if the stream crosses your property.

Beyond the ins and outs of having irrigation water is the important topic of irrigation water management. Surface water for irrigation can only be applied during irrigation season – April 15 to October 1. There may be other restrictions specific to a water right, such as the rate at which water can be diverted, the

*Workers install a 6 foot diameter pipe to replace the East Fork Irrigation District's central canal. This pipe will deliver irrigation water diverted from the East Fork Hood River to valley orchards.*



duty (total volume that can be applied during the irrigation season), metering and water use reporting requirements. Read your water right permit or certificate carefully. Contact your irrigation district or the Watermaster if you have any questions.

## Water Conservation

For small acreages, these limitations often mean that you cannot use impact sprinklers or water large sections of your property without exceeding your allotment. Assistance is available at each irrigation district to help you determine how much water you can apply at any one time. The local irrigation suppliers can also guide you to efficient micro-sprinklers or drip systems that apply water at low rates.

Many sections of local streams and rivers exceed state water temperature standards in the summer and fall, in large part due to irrigation diversions. It is vitally important to endangered fish species that irrigation water be used judiciously.

How can you determine if your trees, shrubs and lawn need water? There are guides available through OSU Extension Service that can help you determine how much water different plants need and how much water is lost to evaporation. Soil moisture sensors or probes can help you determine if there is water available in the soil to meet plant needs. More information on water conservation techniques can be found in the “Gardens and Landscaping” chapter.

*This article written in cooperation with Steve Castagnoli, OSU Extension Service, Bob Wood, Water Resources Department, Dave Compton, Middle Fork Irrigation District, John Buckley, East Fork Irrigation District and Jeff Cook, Farmers Irrigation District*

## Resources

Strategies for Reducing Irrigation Water Use:  
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/em/em8783>

Oregon Water Resources Department:  
[www.oregon.gov/OWRD/](http://www.oregon.gov/OWRD/)