

NEWS FROM:
EAST COLUMBIA BASIN IRRIGATION
DISTRICT
GRANT COUNTY CONSERVATION
DISTRICT
NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY'S OFFICE
OF COLUMBIA RIVER

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Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program Watershed Planning Approved and Funded

Othello, WA. – Regional partners have announced that the Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program (OGWRP) has been approved and funded for watershed planning through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL-566). The allocation of \$775,000 in federal funding will come through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and be used to develop a watershed plan to assist in obtaining future funding for the design and construction of the OGWRP's remaining large infrastructure projects.

Since 2004, the State of Washington has invested more than \$126 million, and the Bureau of Reclamation more than \$45 million, in the development and early implementation of the OGWRP. The East Columbia Basin Irrigation District (ECBID) has also sold \$16.8 million of landowner-funded municipal bonds to fund the construction of OGWRP delivery facilities. The OGWRP Watershed Planning Project will build on these significant contributions.

"This NRCS funding illustrates beautifully how we can partner to achieve sustainable water resource solutions for farmers, industries, communities, and the natural environment," said Melissa Downes, Washington State Department of Ecology financial and projects section manager for the Office of Columbia River.

"The OGWRP represents a great opportunity to rescue an aquifer from decline by finding an alternative Columbia Basin Project water supply for existing withdrawals. This will secure more water for our local communities and ensure sustainable agricultural production that many of those same communities rely upon for their economic prosperity. It is fantastic to see our State Conservationist, Roylene Comes At Night, support this endeavor and to have USDA and NRCS agree with its value by including it in the IIJA investments. The boost that a watershed plan will bring to achieving our Program's goals can't be overstated," explained Craig Simpson, Secretary-Manager of the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District.

Partners in this effort are the NRCS, Bureau of Reclamation, Dept. of Ecology's Office of Columbia River, the Washington State Department of Agriculture, the Grant County Conservation District (GCCD), and ECBID, with tremendous support from our elected officials, the Columbia Basin Development League, and local producers.

"This funding approval marks a significant milestone along our long journey toward improving water quantity for our producers in Central Washington," said Roylene Comes At Night, NRCS-Washington State Conservationist. "We are very excited to continue working closely with our partners and producers to create a watershed plan worthy of securing the funding needed for construction."

“We’re pleased to see continued progress in bringing water to these communities and farms,” said Derek Sandison, Washington State Department of Agriculture Director. “It is particularly gratifying to have established a formal partnership with the US Department of Agriculture to create a pathway for the completion of this project.”

The next steps will be organizational and informational meetings with agencies and producers to develop the watershed planning process and to provide information on organization and producer participation. The meetings will be announced via the [Odessa Watershed Program website](#) and ECBID website.

“Close coordination will continue to be key,” said Harold Crose of GCCD. “We fully intend to keep partners, stakeholders, and landowners informed of the OGWRP Watershed Planning Project every step of the way.”

About the Columbia Basin Project & Odessa Groundwater Replacement Program

The federally designated Columbia Basin Project (CBP) is the water source for thousands of farmers. Decades ago, the Department of Ecology issued farmers in central Washington temporary permits to use groundwater to irrigate over 100,000 acres. This cropland irrigates the land that produces food shipped across the United States and internationally.

Groundwater has been declining in the Odessa Subarea for many years, putting the region at risk of losing this vitally important supply. Farmers who rely on water for their livelihoods and communities who depend on the aquifer for drinking water are at risk of losing this critical resource. This impacts the domestic, commercial, municipal, and industrial water supply for over 180,000 people and more than a dozen communities.

OGWRP is a regional effort to implement the [Odessa Subarea Special Study FEIS \(2012\)](#), which is building the necessary infrastructure for farmers to exchange valid, state-issued Odessa groundwater rights for Columbia Basin Project water.

About the Partners

The Grant County Conservation District is a political subdivision of the State of Washington with powers and authorities identified in the RCW 89.08. The organization is led and operated locally by an elected and appointed Board of Supervisors who oversees staff. The GCCD serves all of Grant County and the irrigated portion of Adams County, with a main office located in Moses Lake.

Located in central Washington State, the ECBID is the largest district in the state, with authorization to irrigate 472,000 acres. Currently, 169,000 acres are developed and managed by 4,500 landowners within the federal Columbia Basin Project. Additionally, the District is involved in the development of 87,000 acres associated with OGWRP. The District provides a reliable supply of water that irrigates the cropland that produces food shipped domestically and internationally.

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