

# COLUMBIA BASIN

DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE

DATE: MARCH 23, 2011

TO: Editor  
FR: Vicky Scharlau, Executive Director  
RE: Odessa Special Study Environmental Impact Statement

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The Columbia Basin Development League submitted comments during the public input stage of a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Odessa Subarea Special Study. The Special Study is evaluating alternatives which would deliver Columbia Basin Project water to the Odessa Groundwater Management Area to replace deep wells. The wells in the area are in severe decline. A “no action” alternative is also being considered.

The League commented that the State of Washington relied on expected Project development in making the decision to allow deep well irrigation that effectively “mined” an aquifer which was not being recharged and is now declining.

Additionally, the League endorsed comments made by Adams County pointing out that: 1) Project costs are repaid by water users, 2) the draft failed to account for the loss of domestic farm water supplies, and, 3) impacts to Washington ports were not addressed.

The next step in the Special Study is for the Bureau of Reclamation and their study partner, the Washington Department of Ecology, to analyze comments and develop responses to substantive issues that were raised. The process is expected to take much of 2011 and following completion, a final Environmental Impact Statement and Planning Report and Record of Decision will be issued. The final EIS is expected to be released in early fall.

Since its inception in 1964, the League has supported the Federal Reclamation Columbia Basin Project. The Project is located in east central Washington and currently serves about 671,000 acres, or about 65% of the 1,029,000 acres originally authorized by Congress, in portions of Grant, Lincoln, Adams, and Franklin Counties, and some in Douglas County. The original 1945 feasibility report anticipated a 70-year period of incremental development to complete the Project and the first half was developed in the 1950's and 1960's, with acres added sporadically until 1985.

All principal features of the Project have been constructed except the East High Canal and the extension of the East Low Canal, which was interrupted in the 1990's by a 10 year moratorium on additional Columbia River diversions.

In the mid-1970's, anticipating that Project water would eventually get to the remaining Project lands, the Washington Department of Ecology permitted irrigation wells in the Odessa Subarea, a region of deep ground water underlying the eastern most portion of the authorized Project (east of and uphill from the existing East Low Canal).

The canal which would service these lands remains un-built and as a result, ground water pumping continues. The aquifer is declining to the extent that domestic, commercial, municipal, and industrial users are at risk not to mention the ability of farmers to irrigate crops. Water quality has also been affected.

The initial focus of the Columbia Basin Development League was on continued incremental development of the Project. The League's focus now is to prevent economic and environmental disaster by replacing Odessa Aquifer groundwater withdrawals with Project water.

When the moratorium was lifted in 2003 by the Bureau of Reclamation, the League began discussions on how to continue development of the Project to take pressure off the Odessa Aquifer. Bringing Project surface water to the Odessa Subarea requires following a strict series of complex rules and guidelines for development in a Federal Reclamation Project.

The League continues to play a strong role in facilitating discussion and action among stakeholders including Federal and State agencies as well as farmers, businesses, civic and economic groups and individuals interested in the Project.

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Since 1964, the Columbia Basin Development League supports the Columbia Basin Project and its future development. We protect its water rights and educate the public on the renewable resource and multiple-purpose benefits of the Project.