

White Paper | 2020 USBR Budget: Columbia Basin Project Line Item Increase

as of May 9, 2018

Issue

The Columbia Basin Project (CBP), authorized to irrigate more than a million acres in central Washington State, is an existing line in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's budget. And to date, the CBP is not complete; 680,000 acres are irrigated leaving hundreds of thousands of acres waiting for CBP water supplies. While completion of the CBP is a future goal, federal funding is needed for the current phase of development: up to 87,700 acres in the Odessa Ground Water Replacement Program (OGWRP).

Impacts on Stakeholders

Anticipating CBP development by the federal government, the State of Washington issued ground water permits in the 1960's and 1970's until CBP water could replace them. When CBP development halted in the mid-1980's, pumping continued, and now, the Odessa Ground Water Management Subarea aquifer, on the eastern most side of the CBP, is declining from over-appropriation.

Since 1980, ground water levels in the Odessa Subarea have dropped about 200 feet. In some cases ground water is pumped from wells as deep as 2,400 feet. Pumping water from this depth is expensive and the water is poor quality, has high sodium concentrations, and often must be treated before use.

Already farmers, and some municipalities drawing from the same aquifer, have wells that are no longer productive, or produce water that is not useable. As the aquifer declines well failures will increase.

Depletion of the aquifer in the Odessa Subarea threatens over 100,000 acres of productive, irrigated farmland as well as the drinking water supplies for nearly 200,000 people. A significant portion of the aquifer service area is within the CBP. The CBP accounts for about a third of irrigated lands in Washington State with crops produced having an annual farm gate value of nearly \$2 billion and generating nearly \$6 billion in cumulative, annual national economic activity.

Studies examining the economic impact of aquifer decline have reported that 3,600 jobs and \$840 million in annual revenues could be lost if action is not taken.

Action Requested

The League asks Reclamation to increase the CBP line item to adequately include funding for OGWRP. Funding presents an opportunity for responsible federal investment in an innovative water infrastructure project in rural America. The League understands that success of OGWRP also depends on landowner participation. But landowners require affordable repayment options. Without federal investment, affordability is threatened, and OGWRP will not be successful.

Support

Since 2006, the State of Washington has invested over \$93 million in the OGWRP, including \$15 million for design and construction in FY2018. Additionally, East Columbia Basin Irrigation District is actively leading OGWRP implementation and OGWRP landowners are committing to their portion of costs as it becomes financially feasible.