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For Immediate Release

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NEWS

April 3, 2019

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Swalley Irrigation District Modernization Project moving forward into construction

Piping project will keep more water in-stream for fish and sustain local agriculture

BEND, Ore. (April 1, 2019) – Plans to continue modernizing aging irrigation infrastructure in the Swalley Irrigation District recently have been approved to move forward into construction, marking yet another major milestone in irrigation improvements that will benefit farmers, fish, and local communities in the Deschutes Basin.

The final watershed plan and environmental assessment for the Swalley project was officially authorized on March 12th by Matt Lohr, Chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The plan was developed in partnership with the Swalley Irrigation District, the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC), and the Farmers Conservation Alliance.

The Swalley Irrigation District has been awarded \$11.2 million in federal funds through the NRCS Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. Swalley will use the funds to modernize and pipe 16.6 miles of their remaining open canals to improve water conservation, water delivery reliability, and public safety, as well as contribute to increases in streamflow in the middle Deschutes River. The project will occur in phases over seven years.

“To date, Swalley has piped 45 percent of their water delivery system and has made the single largest conserved water transfer in the state, providing critical support to habitat along the middle Deschutes River,” said Jer Camarata, Swalley Irrigation District general manager. “The District also produces enough renewable energy to power about 250 homes and businesses near the Old Mill and Southern Crossing neighborhoods in Bend, thanks to a partnership with Energy Trust of Oregon.”

"Piping our remaining canals is just a continuation of many years of effort by many people and many organizations, and we expect that these remaining large projects will offer huge gains for the community at-large," Camarata added. "New infrastructure is being engineered with a 250-1,000 year lifespan. Pioneers and the federal government invested in our future 130 years ago and this is no different except for now we have a larger community to take care of. These projects are being designed to be truly robust."

The first anticipated project phase will be the Rogers Lateral Piping Project, which will install 16,045 feet of pipe and reduce water loss by up to 20 percent. The first phase is expected to be completed in early 2020.

Funding for this phase comes from \$1.3 million in federal funds and \$646,000 in state funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). OWEB works with communities across Oregon to help protect and restore healthy watersheds.

"OWEB is pleased to participate in projects that improve irrigation infrastructure and make more water available in stream, while also demonstrating the effectiveness of collaborative efforts at the federal and state levels," said OWEB Executive Director Meta Loftsgaarden.

The modernization of Swalley's remaining open irrigation infrastructure will conserve up to 6,172 acre-feet of water annually for instream and agricultural use. The improvements will also reduce the irrigation district's operation and maintenance costs, as well as reduce electricity costs and consumption from pumping. Swalley Irrigation District currently serves 668 patrons, which includes Bend Parks & Recreation District, Bend-LaPine Schools, the City of Bend, Avion Water, the US Forest Service, and many others.

After several years of planning and considering public input through the development of an environmental assessment, the NRCS and project sponsors determined the project will not cause significant local, regional or national impacts to the environment. The FONSI and other supporting planning documents for this project are available for public view at www.oregonwatershedplans.org/swalley-id

This modernization project is a team effort between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Deschutes Basin Board of Control, the Swalley Irrigation District, Farmers Conservation Alliance, and Energy Trust of Oregon to help Oregon irrigators conserve water, reduce energy consumption, increase irrigation delivery efficiency and renewable energy potential, improve public safety, and benefit instream habitat for threatened and endangered fish species.

"We're proud of the strong partnerships and collective work we've accomplished to help modernize Oregon's irrigation infrastructure," said Julie Davies O'Shea, Executive Director of Farmers Conservation Alliance. "It will take continued investments from the

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government, irrigation districts, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector to continue supporting this important work."

This project builds on a history of collaboration and water conservation in the Deschutes Basin. "We are proud of the partnerships we have had over the last twenty years with irrigation districts across central Oregon to improve the water delivery systems that sustain agriculture. Irrigation modernization is essential to water conservation and a key component to ensuring a healthy, restored Deschutes River Basin," said Ron Nelson, Executive Director at Deschutes River Conservancy. "The additional resources that the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farmers Conservation Alliance and Energy Trust of Oregon have brought into the basin will increase the pace and scale of these projects in districts across central Oregon, amplifying the benefits for agriculture and for our rivers."

For more information about other central Oregon irrigation modernization efforts, visit www.oregonwatershedplans.org

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The Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) is comprised of eight Irrigation Districts in Central Oregon, including Arnold, Central Oregon, Lone Pine, North Unit, Ochoco, Swalley, Three Sisters and Tumalo Irrigation Districts. Through the DBBC, the Districts coordinate and share their respective resources and management assets to conserve water, improve their services for farm and ranch families, and enhance river conditions for wildlife species and recreational opportunities.

Energy Trust of Oregon is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping utility customers benefit from saving energy and generating renewable power. Our services, cash incentives and solutions have helped participating customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas save nearly \$1.9 billion on their energy bills since 2002.

Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA®) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that is championing irrigation modernization strategies to achieve agricultural resilience and conservation benefits. Formed in 2005, FCA is currently partnering with farmers throughout the west to install fish screens and develop and implement customized approaches for broad-scale irrigation modernization. Learn more at fcasolutions.org

The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** provides financial and technical assistance to voluntary farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to implement conservation practices on private lands. By working collectively with partners and stakeholders, NRCS helps maintain healthy and productive working landscapes, benefitting both environmental and agricultural needs.