



**Arnold Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project  
Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA)  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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**What is Arnold Irrigation District's (AID) proposed Infrastructure Modernization Project (the "Project")?**

If the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) decides to authorize the project, AID will pipe approximately 11.9 miles of the AID Main Canal, upgrade 88 turnouts, and install two Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) locations. The Project will occur in four phases over six years, with pipe ranging in size from 48 to 60 inches in diameter.

**What is the purpose of the Project?**

The Project will improve water conservation in District-owned infrastructure, improve water supply management and delivery reliability to District patrons, improve public safety, and enhance streamflow in the Deschutes River. These improvements will allow the District to operate more efficiently while conserving approximately 11,000-acre feet of water per season.

**What is the cost of the Project?**

Total estimated project costs are \$34,899,000, of which \$26,198,000 will be paid through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL-566) program funds and \$8,701,000 to be paid by AID and other non-federal funding sources. Non-federal funding requests are currently pending with several state programs.

**What is the purpose of a Watershed Plan – Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA)?**

A Plan-EA determines the significance of the proposed Project's environmental effects and looks at alternative means to achieve the same objectives. Environmental effects that are considered include social, cultural, economic, and natural resources.

**What is a Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA)?**

A Plan-EA is an official environmental review document required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for planning and carrying out projects under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (also known as Public Law 83-566) and to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A Plan-EA (or Environmental Assessment) is required for any project that applies for federal financial assistance through the NRCS Watershed Program.



### **How was the Plan-EA created?**

Prior to the Plan-EA, the project sponsor was responsible for researching the resources that would potentially be affected by the proposed Project (e.g., cultural resources, land use, water resources, wildlife). This is called the scoping process and AID, Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA) and the NRCS coordinated in issuing a Preliminary Investigative Report (PIR) in the fall of 2018. The PIR allowed for the evaluation of the most viable alternatives to meet the project's purpose and provided for other government agencies and the public to provide comments through a public scoping meeting and comment period. The PIR was then utilized to develop a Draft Plan-EA for the proposed Project. The Draft Plan-EA was completed in June 2021 with a public meeting and an initial 30-day comment period. In response to public comments, on July 8, 2021, NRCS extended the public comment period to end on July 23, 2021. Over 450 comments were received from the public and government agencies. These were then broken down by topics for over 1,400 individual comments. Following the end of the extended comment period, a response was written to every comment (see the Plan-EA's Appendix A), and changes to the Plan-EA were made as appropriate. The Final Plan-EA has now been sent to NRCS in Washington, DC for an authorization decision.

### **What was the process for submitting comments?**

Comments were submitted via email, mail, and phone during the public comment period and became part of the Administrative Record. Comments were submitted to Farmers Conservation Alliance, Attention Watershed Plan-EA, 102 State Street, Hood River, OR 97031, or [arnold.id.comments@gmail.com](mailto:arnold.id.comments@gmail.com). FCA, as part of the requirements of the Plan-EA process, provided responses in the Plan-EA's Appendix A to all comments on behalf of NRCS.

### **What alternatives were considered for meeting the Project's Federal Objective and Guiding Principles?**

In preparing the Plan-EA nine alternatives were initially considered for meeting the following Federal Objectives and Guiding Principles of the Project:

- Improve water conservation in District-owned infrastructure
- Improve water supply management
- Improve water delivery reliability
- Improve public safety

The alternatives considered covered the spectrum of doing nothing (No Action), conversion to Dryland farming or fallowing fields, use of groundwater either partial or exclusive, canal lining and piping or in combination. All of these alternatives were evaluated based on meeting NEPA and environmental review requirements specific to NRCS federal investments in water resources projects.



### **What is the status of the Project?**

The Arnold Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project passed a significant milestone with the completion of the Final Watershed Plan – Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA) and is now being forwarded to NRCS National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., for an authorization decision. In addition, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued for the Project by NRCS. If authorized, the Project will officially be able to move forward with the solicitation of bids for construction and proceed with construction of Phase 1 of 4 early this winter.

### **What Piping Alternative did NRCS select as the Preferred Alternative?**

After considering the data developed in preparing the Plan-EA, NRCS has selected the Piping Alternative as the Preferred Alternative. The Piping Alternative achieves the Federal Objective, to protect the environment, by protecting and restoring streamflow in the Deschutes River. By improving operational efficiencies, and thereby conserving water, and improving water quality in the Deschutes River, the Piping Alternative achieves the Federal Objective and Guiding Principle of sustainable economic development. Lastly, this alternative achieves the Guiding Principles of Healthy and Resilient Ecosystems by contributing to a more resilient ecosystem by conserving water during periods of drought. The Preferred Alternative Piping is the only alternative that meets the purpose and need, funding requirements, and National Economic Efficiency (NEE) Analysis benefit-cost ratio requirements. The District and project sponsors have agreed that the Piping Alternative is the Preferred Alternative.

### **How will AID's Project benefit farmers in Jefferson County (North Unit Irrigation District)?**

Following the completion of the Project and verification and measurement of the total water savings, AID will pass up to 10,862 acre-feet per year to North Unit Irrigation District (NUID) through the Deschutes River during the irrigation season. In return, NUID will release an equal volume of water minus losses in the Deschutes River between the AID and NUID diversions (up to 10,446-acre feet per year) from Wickiup Reservoir into the Deschutes River during the non-irrigation season. Streamflow and habitat conditions along the Deschutes River will benefit from this protected water and assist in meeting Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) requirements.

### **What is the timing for the construction of the Project?**

Construction of the Piping Alternative will occur over six years in four phases. Each phase is expected to take one or two years to complete, with some construction phases overlapping in years. Construction will begin on the eastern end of the Main Canal with Phase 1 and generally move toward the west.



Construction activities will most likely be limited geographically to one or two phases at a time. Construction will be conducted during the non-irrigation season (October to April), and construction will begin as early as the 2022 non-irrigation season.

### **What is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)?**

NEPA was the first major environmental law in the United States, signed by President Nixon on January 1, 1970. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. The goal of the NEPA process is to foster action that protects, restores, and enhances our environment. This is achieved by using Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) to provide public officials with relevant information and allow a detailed look at the potential environmental consequences of each proposed project. Read more about the NEPA process from the Council of Environmental Quality.

### **Who is the lead agency?**

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Oregon

### **Who is the Sponsoring Local Organization?**

Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) (lead sponsor) and Arnold Irrigation District (AID) (co-sponsor).

### **What is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) role in the proposed projects?**

NRCS is the lead federal agency responsible for writing the Plan-EAs to ensure compliance with NEPA. In the case of the Project, NRCS has issued a decision known as a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI). The issuance of the FONSI means that the NRCS has determined that the Project provides sufficient watershed conservation net benefits to receive federal financial assistance.

### **What is the role of the Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA)?**

NRCS is partnering with FCA to prepare this Plan-EAs and manage the public participation process.

### **How can I learn more about the Project?**

Visit [Arnold Irrigation District](#) and [oregonwatershedplans.org](http://oregonwatershedplans.org) to learn more.