

# Mail Tribune

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## No veto expected for pipeline project

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Last year, Gov. Kate Brown vetoed \$1.8 million to help build 3.3 miles of underground pipes for the Rogue River Valley Irrigation District to provide more water for fish, farmers and the Agate Reservoir.

This year, the governor is expected to sign off on the project.

“It is not going to be vetoed,” Rep. Pam Marsh, D-Ashland, said. “Very clearly, she said she had no objections to the project. I’m quite confident we’re going to get the money and do it.”

Last year, Brown and Rep. Sal Esquivel had a political dustup that led Brown to retaliate by vetoing Southern Oregon projects that included the irrigation ditch. Esquivel had provided a key vote for a health care tax but later signed on to a referendum that led to a failed effort to overturn the tax.

Marsh backed House Bill 5201 during the short legislative session this year that provides the funding for the ditch project, which will place underground pipes for 3.3 miles of the 28-mile main canal for the irrigation district.

The project should save 900-acre feet of water that would be normally lost to evaporation and leaks.

Also, 13 farmers along the pressurized pipeline will have a pressurized water source that should lead to more conservation of water.

Marsh said other parts of the state have invested in underground pipes for irrigation districts.

“This part of the world, we’re just dipping our toes into modern irrigation practices,” she said.

With low snowpacks and the effects of global warming, conservation of water will become an even greater issue for this region, Marsh said.

Despite the setback last year, the irrigation district didn't lose hope.

"When we got vetoed last time, we never went to sleep on it," said irrigation district Manager Brian Hampson. "We took another run at it."

Until the bill is signed by the governor, Hampson said he's still a little unsure whether he can fully celebrate, but he said he believes Marsh when she tells him that the governor fully supports the project.

"I think we're good to go this time, but I'm hesitant saying that," Hampson said.

The entire project will cost \$5.9 million but has been on hold pending the final dollars from the state.

Hampson said this project will be the proof of concept to eventually put the entire 28 miles of main canal into pipes.

"We're going to do small chunks," Hampson said. "This is just the first stab at it."

While it appears to cost about \$2 million a mile to complete the project, Hampson said the most expensive portion being undertaken is the initial phase. The lower 1.2 miles of the 3.3-mile stretch has obstacles to deal with, including two streams.

The rest of the 28 miles is fairly straightforward, Hampson said.

In June, during spawning season, the pipeline will divert up to 420 acre-feet of water at 7 cubic feet per second into Little Butte Creek.

The project will provide pressurized water to 720 acres on either side of the 3.3-mile stretch of pipeline.

With the state's support, Hampson said, he hopes to begin construction on the pipeline at the beginning of summer, finishing by fall.

By next season, the irrigation district will begin seeing how well the pipeline delivers.

“That’s the beauty of this project,” Hampson said. “It’s a win-win for everybody: fish, the reservoir and farms.”

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