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Photo: Deschutes River Conservancy

Caption: Whychus Creek flows year-round through a landscape transformed by conservation partnerships and irrigation modernization.

Three Sisters Irrigation District Completes Final Piping Project— A Major Milestone in the Ongoing Restoration of Whychus Creek

SISTERS, OR — June 18, 2025— The final section of canal piping in the Three Sisters Irrigation District (TSID) has been completed, marking a major milestone in streamflow

restoration, on-farm efficiency, and renewable energy generation. Approved by the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) on April 22, 2024, this latest conserved water project adds permanent flow protection to Whychus Creek, a tributary of the Deschutes River.

The **Cloverdale piping project** installed **over 23,000 feet of pipe** north of Highway 126 and resulted in **0.33 cubic feet per second (cfs)** and **140.1 acre-feet** of water permanently protected in Whychus Creek just below the TSID diversion, approximately four miles upstream from the city of Sisters.

Two Decades of Conservation and Collaboration

With this final phase complete, TSID has now piped **64 miles** of its canals over the last 20 years, permanently restoring **30.3 cfs** and **11,938 acre-feet** of water to Whychus Creek. Historically, the creek ran dry two out of every three years due to the over appropriation of water rights and leaky, unlined canals and outdated delivery systems. Now, thanks to this sustained conservation effort, and complementary flow restoration programs, Whychus Creek flows year-round, providing vital cold-water habitat for redband trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon.

“This has been a long-term commitment by TSID and our partners,” **said Marc Thalacker, newly retired Manager of TSID.** “We're proud to have reached this point where we can support both our farms and the health of Whychus Creek.”

Benefits for Farms, Fish, and Energy

The completed piping system enables **pressurized water delivery** to TSID farms, reducing the need for on-farm pumping and resulting in significant energy savings—an estimated **9 million kilowatt-hours** of reduced power usage annually. Alongside these improvements, TSID has supported farm conversions to more efficient irrigation practices and installed modern metering at delivery points to ensure precise, reliable water use.

This project also includes **an in-pipe hydropower facility**, which can produce up to **700,000 kilowatt-hours** of renewable electricity—enough to power approximately **58 homes**. TSID now operates **3 in-pipe hydro projects**, contributing to clean energy goals while reducing strain on the power grid.

A Healthy River Takes a Village

TSID's work is part of a larger, collaborative restoration effort on Whychus Creek. The Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, U.S. Forest Service, Deschutes Land Trust and other partners have **worked to restore over 7 miles of stream habitat in Whychus Creek and removed all 6 fish passage barriers**, while the Deschutes Land Trust has protected 9 miles of the creek through conservation agreements, land acquisition, and land stewardship.

Together, these projects have reestablished streamflow, improved water quality, and reconnected critical habitat—but challenges remain. Summer water temperatures in lower reaches of the creek can still be high, stressing cold-water fish species. Restoration partners, including DRC, continue working to address these issues through habitat improvement, streamflow leasing, and new conservation partnerships.

A Model for the Region

“This is a true success story for farms, fish, and the community,” **said Kate Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of the Deschutes River Conservancy.** “TSID and its partners have shown what's possible through sustained collaboration, forward-thinking investment, and a shared vision for a healthier creek.”

Project Partners and Funders

This project was made possible through support from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Over two decades of restoration on Whychus Creek have been funded by a wide array of partners including: **Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Bonneville Power Administration, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, DEQ/EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund, Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation, Deschutes Water Alliance, Energy Trust of Oregon, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Resources Conservation Service, (Regional Conservation Partnership Program), Oregon Conservation Strategy, Oregon Department of Energy, Oregon Governor's Fund, Oregon Water Resources Congress, Oregon Water Resources Department, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Portland General Electric Pelton Fund, Southern Oregon State University, The Nature Conservancy/PGE, TSID through in-kind contributions, U.S. Forest Service, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.**

About the Deschutes River Conservancy:

The Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC) was formed in 1996 with a mission to restore streamflow and improve water quality in the Deschutes River Basin. The DRC has a multi-stakeholder board and, through collaborative efforts, has restored up to 350 CFS (equivalent to over 14 Olympic-sized swimming pools per hour) of flow in the basin with non-litigious, voluntary, and market-based programs. For more information about the DRC, visit www.deschutesriver.org.

About Three Sisters Irrigation District:

Established in 1891, Three Sisters Irrigation District (TSID) delivers Deschutes River water to approximately 7,600 acres of irrigated land near Sisters, Oregon. The district serves over 267 patrons and manages 64 miles of canals and lateral ditches. TSID is nationally recognized for its leadership in irrigation modernization and has implemented extensive conservation efforts, including piping and pressurized delivery systems, which improve on-farm efficiency, reduce energy use, and restore streamflow to Whychus Creek. TSID continues to work collaboratively with partners to support agricultural resilience, water sustainability, and ecosystem health in Central Oregon. Learn more at www.tsidweb.org.

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