



1977 AND 2015 DROUGHT COMPARISON

A TALE OF TWO DROUGHTS

1977 and 2015 were terrible drought years in Oregon. In many ways 2015 was worse than 1977 but impacts to Whychus Creek were blunted by the proactive steps Three Sisters Irrigation District has taken to pipe and pressurize their irrigation delivery system. The difference that piping makes—both for farmers and for fish—can be illustrated through a comparison of these two years.

Whychus Creek is fed by snowmelt and runoff from the Three Sisters Mountains. The best indicator of available water is a gauge measuring snow-water content at the Three Creek Meadows site located southwest of Sisters, Oregon.

The thirty-year average snow water content on April 1 is 17" to 18."

- April 1, 1977: 8.0" Snow water content
- April 1, 2015: 0.3" Snow water content

1977 Drought Conditions:

- Whychus Creek went dry during irrigation
- Farmers received 10 percent of expected water

2015 Drought Conditions:

- 20 CFS maintained in Whychus Creek
- Farmers received 20 to 40 percent of expected water
- Many farmers were able have a second cutting of hay
- Farmers saved \$200,000 on energy bills due to pressurized water delivery
- Three Sisters Irrigation District generated 2.8 million kWh

