

News Release

Pioneer Irrigation District

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CANAL MAINTENANCE WORK BEGINS ON PIONEER IRRIGATION DISTRICT SYSTEM

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With its canals, ditches and drains empty of water, Pioneer Irrigation District employees are now focused on getting the irrigation system ready to carry water next spring. That means area residents will see a lot of cleaning, trimming and cutting going on along Pioneer's 350 miles of waterways.

It also guarantees that Pioneer Superintendent Jeff Scott is going to spend a lot of time on his cell phone trying to sooth ruffled feathers.

He's already gotten one letter signed by more than a dozen homeowners insisting that he not cut down trees growing on the banks of a Pioneer irrigation ditch. Trees the homeowners consider their own personal shade trees and privacy shield from neighbors on the other side of the ditch.

"This situation will be difficult, but not an untypical state of affairs for us. We need to remove the trees that have encroached into our easement to provide room for our water operation and maintenance activities. But the folks living there have come to regard the trees as their shade and privacy trees. I really understand why they are upset and can sympathize with them. But unfortunately it doesn't change the fact that the trees need to be removed if we are to meet our obligations," Scott said.

That responsibility is mandated under Idaho law which requires irrigation districts to maintain their water conveyance systems to ensure proper water flow, the integrity of ditch and canal banks and to minimize the potential risk of flooding during irrigation season.

To meet that responsibility, districts need access to the canal and ditch banks. They achieve that using easements, a legal provision that gives them access to an area on either or both sides of the canal or ditch. It's the same concept used by utility companies such as cable TV, telephone, etc., who have easements that give them access to private property.

The easement also makes it possible for irrigation districts to do weed control burning along canal and ditch banks. Scott says weeds are also a problem and Pioneer is increasingly encountering situations where property owners allow weeds to grow very tall around private fences and right up to the edge of the maintenance easement.

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Scott said Pioneer typically needs at least 25 feet of clear passage way from the edge of a canal or ditch to ensure room for maintenance equipment and other vehicles. Besides trees and brush, the District also sometimes situations in which fences and even sheds have been built in the canal maintenance easement areas.

“That can result in some really touchy situations. But even though we have the legal right to remove the items in the easement, we prefer to work with the individual property owner to find a resolution,” the Superintendent added.

Each year before maintenance begins, Pioneer also sends letters to residents living along ditches or canals scheduled for maintenance activities letting them know what is coming.

“People, especially newcomers to our area, often don’t understand what we are doing and why, especially if it has been some time since we worked in their area. So they get upset when they see us trimming or removing trees and shrubs that have encroached into our right-of-ways and easements, or bringing in a bulldozer and trackhoe excavator to clean sediment and debris out of the canal and deposit it on the banks,” Scott said.

Pioneer crews will be working full time on canal maintenance until next spring when it is time to turn water back into the canals.

For more information about Pioneer’s maintenance operations or easements contact the District at 459-3617. There is also information available on Pioneer’s website at: www.pioneerirrigation.com.

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