

News Release

Pioneer Irrigation District

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PIONEER'S STORM WATER RUNOFF, ENCROACHMENT ISSUES ADDED TO AGENDA OF NATIONAL CANAL SAFETY MEETING

For Immediate Use
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Pioneer Irrigation District's battle to deal with illegal canal property encroachment and the unauthorized dumping of urban storm water runoff into its canals and drains will move from a local to a national forum in May, Pioneer officials announced today.

Pioneer's canal urbanization encroachment and storm water runoff dumping situation has been added to the agenda of a Bureau of Reclamation national meeting on canal management issues set for May 14 in Denver.

Pioneer recently filed suit against the City of Caldwell to stop developers from building municipal storm water sewers dumping urban runoff directly into the District's canals and drains. In September 2006, Caldwell adopted a revised storm water management manual that gave developers a mandate to build municipal storm water drains that dump directly into Pioneer canals and irrigation drains without permission of the District. Idaho law expressly prohibits encroachment into private property of irrigation entities.

The Denver meeting was originally planned to only evaluate and discuss canal safety issues in light of a recent canal failure that resulted in flooding in Fernley, Nevada. However, after hearing an explanation of Pioneer's situation by Norm Semanko, Executive Director of the Idaho Water Users Association, the Bureau of Reclamation decided to add a special segment on storm water runoff and urbanized canals to the meeting.

"We are really pleased that the Bureau would give us this national forum to talk about what's going on in Idaho because of the growing urbanization of lands surrounding canals and drains. The Pioneer situation is very similar to those now being faced by other irrigation organizations here in Idaho and in other parts of the nation. Our presentation is designed to highlight the problem and hopefully start the process of finding solutions," Semanko said.

Semanko and Scott Campbell, an attorney who represents Pioneer, are both expected to attend the Denver meeting to detail the serious nature of canal encroachment by municipalities and other local government entities impacting Idaho irrigation entities. Other representatives from Idaho irrigation entities may also attend, Semanko said.

Campbell is expected to focus in detail on the serious public health, liability and flooding risks forced on Pioneer by the encroachment and urban runoff dumping during the 75-minute presentation.

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More information about the meeting is available the Bureau of Reclamation internet web site: www.usbr.gov/canalsafety

Pioneer's canal system was never intended to handle the huge volume of urban runoff generated during a heavy summer downpour that will be dumped into a canal already full with irrigation water. The resulting potential flooding could easily result in Pioneer facing civil liability resulting from illegal actions sanctioned by local government, Campbell noted.

Additionally, the encroachment-dumping issues pose health risks to the public. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found that urban storm water runoff can include such dangerous elements such as petroleum products, toxic vehicle chemicals; pesticides and fertilizers from lawns and gardens; viruses, E. coli bacteria and other products from animal and pet waste and failing septic systems and heavy metals.

Pioneer Irrigation District has provided irrigation and agricultural drainage services to Ada and Canyon County land owners for more than a century. The District currently maintains about 7,000 accounts providing irrigation water to 34,000 acres of residential and farmland in Canyon and Ada Counties..

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