



District Manager Update - September 12, 2025

To Our Valued Water Users, Partners, and Community Members,

With the 2025 irrigation season winding down, I want to take a moment to recognize the hard work, progress, and resilience shown throughout this first year following the Retreat Wildfire. It's been a season of challenges—but also of determination, collaboration, and meaningful recovery. Tremendous progress has been made, with more underway and ahead, as we prioritize protecting our water supply, restoring damaged infrastructure, and safeguarding the surrounding environment. Our focus now shifts to ongoing risk mitigation and long-term replacement planning to ensure future reliability and resilience across the system.

Water is life. In our basin, it sustains farms, homes, ecosystems, and local economies. It supports agriculture, domestic use, fire suppression, groundwater stability, and more. The needs are great, the challenges are growing, and with each passing drought year, the resource becomes more scarce. Protecting our water supply is essential to the continued prosperity of our community—and to the long-term health of the environment we all depend on.

This has not been an easy season. The Retreat Wildfire of 2024 left lasting damage across our entire 12-mile main canal corridor through the Tieton Canyon. Since then, our team has worked tirelessly to restore function, reduce risks, and plan for the future. The canal itself suffered severe structural wear—thousands of leaks, loss of timber structures, internal liner degradation, eroding hillsides, and dangerous, unstable terrain. These challenges have underscored the urgency of long-term solutions now underway.

And yet, despite the destruction, we kept the water flowing.

We completed nearly 13,000 linear feet of protective covering this year—an extraordinary feat by any measure. We deployed flow monitoring systems, flash flood detectors, remote telemetry, and safety cameras throughout the canyon. Our crews have worked long hours under intense pressure to stabilize the system and keep the water moving. And we've done this while managing unprecedented drought conditions and record-low reservoir carryover—during this third consecutive year of drought in the Yakima Basin.

We've operated under reduced capacity limits—holding the canal to no more than 90% of flow to avoid catastrophic failure and protect both infrastructure and public safety. Even under this constraint, we delivered water across agricultural lands, residential neighborhoods, businesses, and to fire suppression systems relied on by local responders. These efforts also helped prevent further environmental degradation in areas already impacted by the wildfire.

This year has not just been about survival—it's been about strategy. We're preparing for an early October shutdown (exact date to be determined) to allow for critical repairs and risk mitigation ahead of winter weather. The YTID Board will finalize the shutdown date next week (17th), and we ask that water users check our website for the official announcement.

We've been relentless in our pursuit of support—from Tieton to Washington, D.C. With the backing of our Board of Directors, we've engaged engineers, contractors, legal counsel, and program managers across multiple funding tracks. We're clarifying canal replacement alternatives to align with available funding, while concurrently advancing engineering design, refining cost estimates, developing schedules, and identifying permitting requirements for a potential full canal replacement project.

We've elevated our story through national media, public forums, and direct appeals to federal and state decision-makers. We've hosted agency partners, legislators, and community leaders in the field to witness both the damage and our resolve. And we've had many successes—securing millions in grants and appropriations, and building a team of champions around this cause.

This journey has demanded sacrifices—from our community, staff, and board. There will be more ahead. But I want you to know: **we are all in**. We do not take our roles lightly. Every day, I am reminded of the deep responsibility that comes with managing this historic district and vital public resource.

Our canal system has served this valley for 115 years—overcoming terrain, weather, increased demands for supply, and now wildfire. What we do today will determine whether that legacy continues for the next 115 years.

There is no shortage of need—only a shortage of supply, storage, and funding to solve the problem. But we're not waiting. We're responding, planning, and actively pursuing every potential funding opportunity. We're sharing our story across the county, because the future of this district matters—to agriculture, to families, to the environment, and to the long-term stability of our basin.

To the YTID crews—thank you for your hard work and dedication. To the local community—thank you for your patience. To the board—thank you for your leadership. To our partners—local, state, and federal—thank you for your encouragement and for joining us at the table. Your support has been invaluable.

It is an honor to serve as your District Manager. Not a day goes by that I don't feel the weight—and the privilege—of this calling. Together, we will overcome this obstacle, and future generations will tell the story of what we built, what we endured, and how we prevailed.

With sincere gratitude,

Travis Okelberry
District Manager
Yakima-Tieton Irrigation District