Irrigation water on the move

Written by Gib Mathers
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Shoshone Irrigation District Manager Bryant Startin observes the Willwood Dam Monday. Water is now flowing through the Garland Canal and the Willwood Canal began receiving irrigation water last week. Tribune photo by Gib Mathers

The Garland Canal is up and running. By the time folks read this, the canal will once again be flowing through Powell and downstream to the Frannie Canal.

Driving to the Corbett Dam on Monday, ditch riders Don Eden and Dan Nordland discuss demands for water. Some farmers have planted crops and some are asking for irrigation water.

At Corbett Dam, Eden and Nordland crank up a motor to lift sluice gates that will allow the precious commodity to pour through the Corbett Tunnel and so release water to the Garland Canal.

The motor putters as the men adjust it. The Shoshone River resembles a narrow lake as it nears the Corbett Dam and Tunnel. The water is still, reflecting puffs of clouds as though they glide just below the surface of the smooth waterway. A lone goose honks plaintively to his mate just out of sight in an oxbow and upstream, a pelican floats placidly, apparently without a care in the world. It's lovely and tranquil, but then the water jets over the dam like a billion buckets of water, gushing into a river — and the scene is no longer so placid.

During the irrigation season, the canal will run 875 cubic feet per second. The Frannie Irrigation District will get 265 cfs, said Shoshone Irrigation District Manager Bryant Startin.

Bright and early Monday morning, 300 cfs from Buffalo Bill began its journey to Powell and all parts in between and beyond, Startin said.

Once in full flow, little water will be leftover.

"When things get busy," Startin said, "there is no extra, anywhere."

The Willwood District began receiving irrigation water last week. Heart Mountain District began receiving irrigation water Monday (yesterday) and the Frannie District will receive today (Tuesday), Startin said.