Post-Pipe on the Highline Lateral:

Fire Hazards & Community Safety Concerns for TID Patrons

Submitted by Ashley Karitis (Division 4, Tumalo Irrigation District)

October 13, 2026

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Ashley Karitis M: 213.712.3581 E: karitis@gmail.com
Beverly Karitis M: 541.388.1888 E: bkaritis@hotmail.com
64855 Collins Road
Bend, OR 97703

Attn: Board of Directors, Tumalo Irrigation District

I would like to request (to April Spath, Scribe) that this letter and the enclosed dossier of 43 pages be entered as an exhibit into today's board meeting minutes and into Public Record.

I'm reading this letter aloud today to express my strong concerns regarding the heavy fuel load* that sits on the TID easement within BLM land north-northwest of my property (Taxlots 1611280000600 & 700). The fuel load is dead timber and debris as a result of piping the Highline Lateral in 2019. I am strongly concerned that the current fuel load poses an extreme wildland fire risk to private property and human life (which includes other TID patrons in the vicinity).

Since 2020 and through spring of 2025, we have verbally expressed our concerns to District Manager Chris Schull regarding the remaining timber left behind and the associated fire risk. Our neighbor submitted a written concern to the Board in January 2026. We followed up with Mr. Schull via email in both January and February of 2026. There has been neither a response to our emails nor any meaningful action to remove the remaining dead timber and debris.

We are asking that Tumalo Irrigation District District Manager Chris Schull and the District's Board of Directors please:

1. **Prioritize, commit, and invest** in energy and resources needed to remedy this situation and others like it;
2. **Provide documentation** of a good faith effort to work with previous and current BLM foresters on this issue and others like it;
3. **Communicate** up-to-date maintenance policies and timelines that apply to TID easements within BLM;
4. **Apply project funds**, or new financial resources, or other available district finances to establish and maintain wildland fire buffers to patron property.

As a representative of the next generation of irrigators in Tumalo, I would like to express my cooperation on this issue, and hopes for collaborating on a resolution.

Enclosed is one physical copy of a dossier detailing the hazards in question. I am presenting this copy to April Spath so she may make physical or digital reproductions for each board member. I will also be emailing this dossier to the board later today.

Because of my professional commitments, I will not be present at a board meeting until January 2027. I am requesting that the Board carefully consider my dossier until then; and have provided contact information in the event that any kind of forward movement on this matter needs to be communicated to me.

Thank you to the TID Board members for your listening time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Ashley Karitis

* We consider "fuel load" as trees felled during the piping that were stacked in piles and left on the easement; and mature trees that have perished since the piping, many of which have toppled over as a result of wind events since 2020. In some cases, standing dead trees were felled purposefully, but remain as downed timber. There are a handful of mature trees still alive, but most are beginning to exhibit signs of forthcoming failure (e.g. dead crowns). Each instance of dead, dry timber within the easement, or that has fallen onto BLM land, is essentially firewood sitting in a forest.

Post-Pipe Highline Lateral

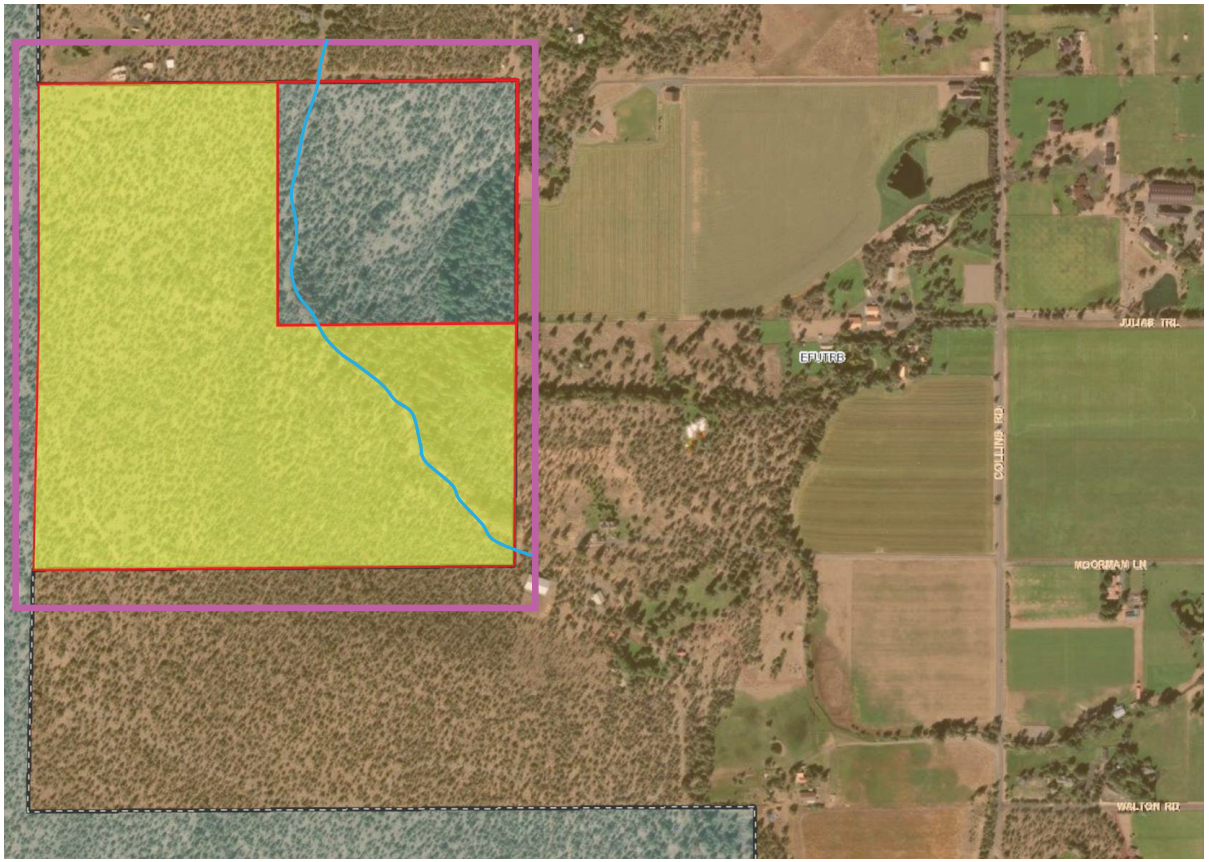
The enclosed materials exhibit hazardous circumstances and requests for mitigation on the Tumalo Irrigation District's (TID) easement within BLM land as a result of the piping of the Highline Lateral.

Materials are intended for the perusal and use of TID's Board of Directors to determine action and resolution.

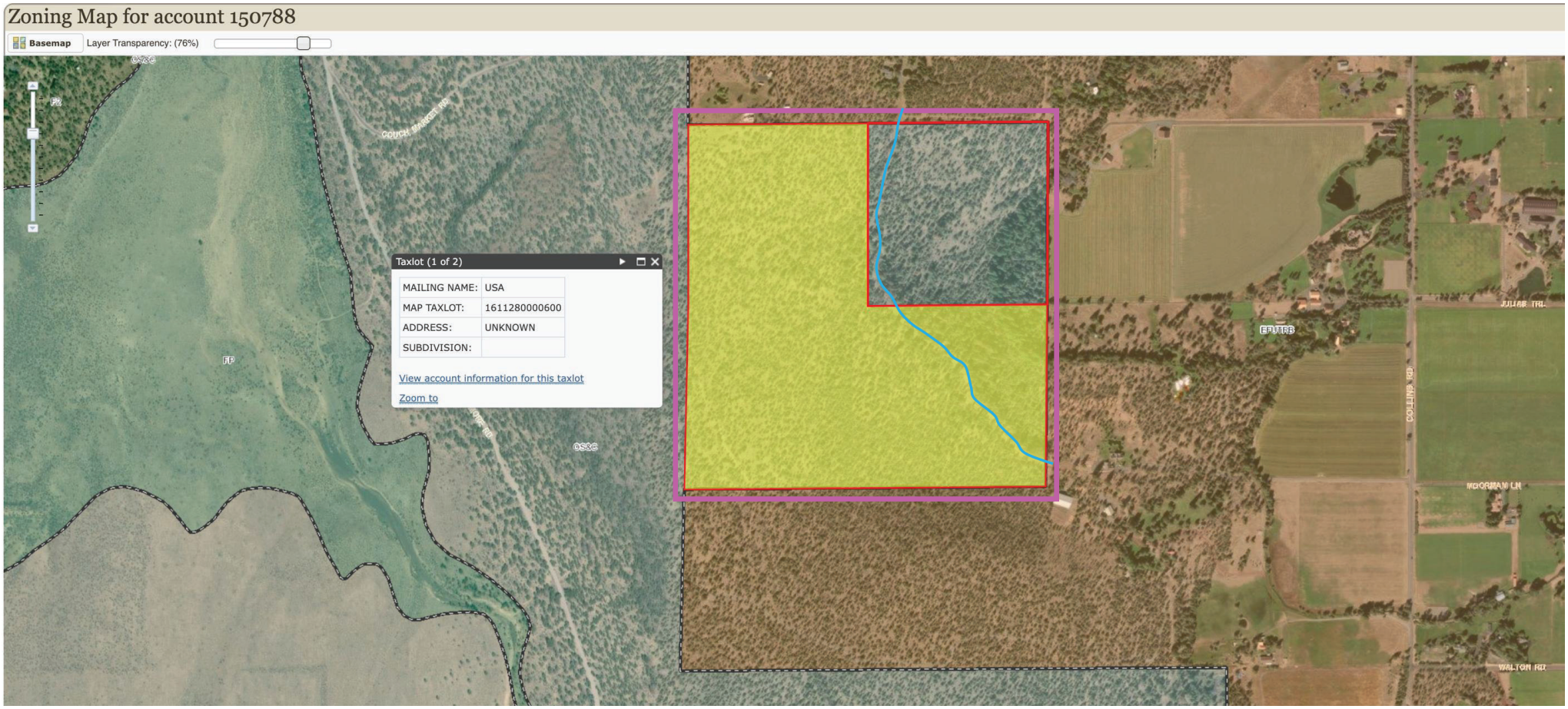
Highline Lateral, Taxlot 1611280000600 & 700

The dossier contains the following:

- History of Vegetation along Highline Lateral
- Examples of Vegetation Failure & Fire Hazards
- Communication Timeline with TID
- “Call to Action”



Highline Lateral through Taxlots 1611280000600 & 700



2018 Watershed Agreement O&M Agreement

We are seeking clarity and documentation regarding the Operation and Maintenance agreement as a result of the 2018 Watershed Agreement among the DBBC, TID, & USDA/NRSC:

Page v – "**14. Operation and Maintenance (O&M).** The sponsors will be responsible for the operation, maintenance, and any needed replacement of the works of improvement by actually performing the work or arranging for such work, in accordance with an O&M agreement. An O&M agreement will be entered into before federal funds are obligated and will continue for the project life (100 years).

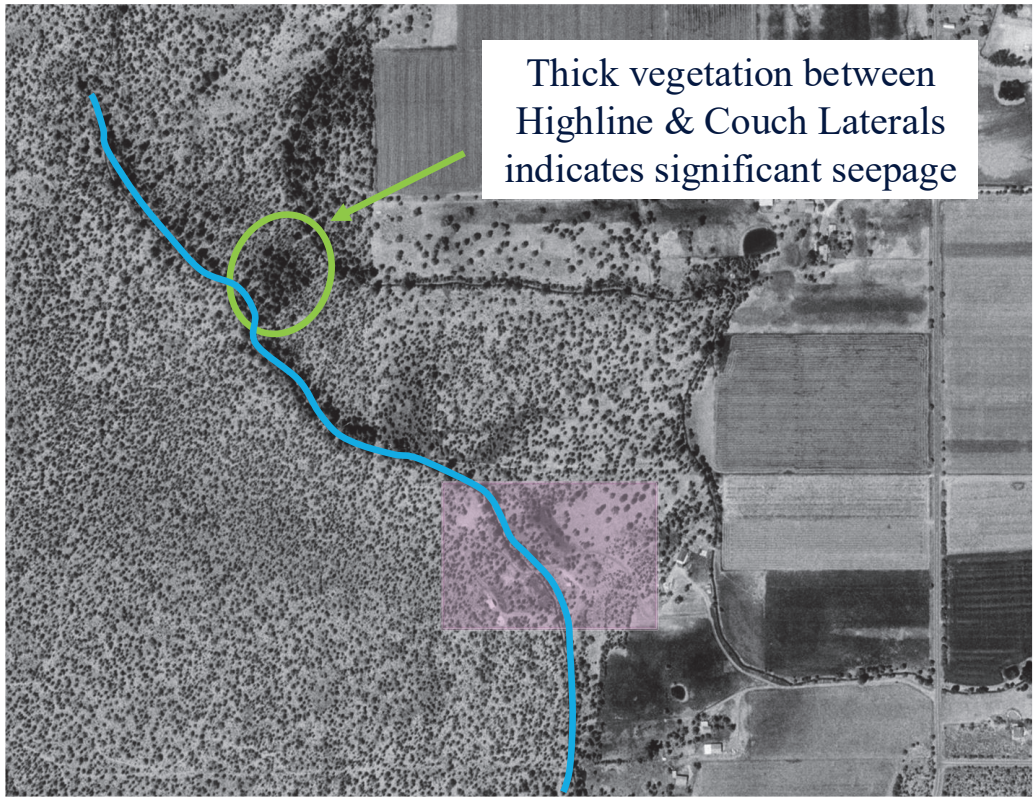
Although the sponsors' responsibility to the Federal Government for O&M ends when the O&M agreement expires upon completion of the evaluated life of measures covered by the agreement, the sponsors acknowledge that continued liabilities and responsibilities associated with works of improvement may exist beyond the evaluated life."

History of Highline Lateral Vegetation

The following slides exhibit aerial imagery demonstrating the Highline Lateral as an open canal that allowed for proliferation of significant vegetation within the TID Easement on BLM land.

= *approximate property of TID patron Ashley Karitis*

1994


Thick vegetation between
Highline & Couch Laterals
indicates significant seepage

2003



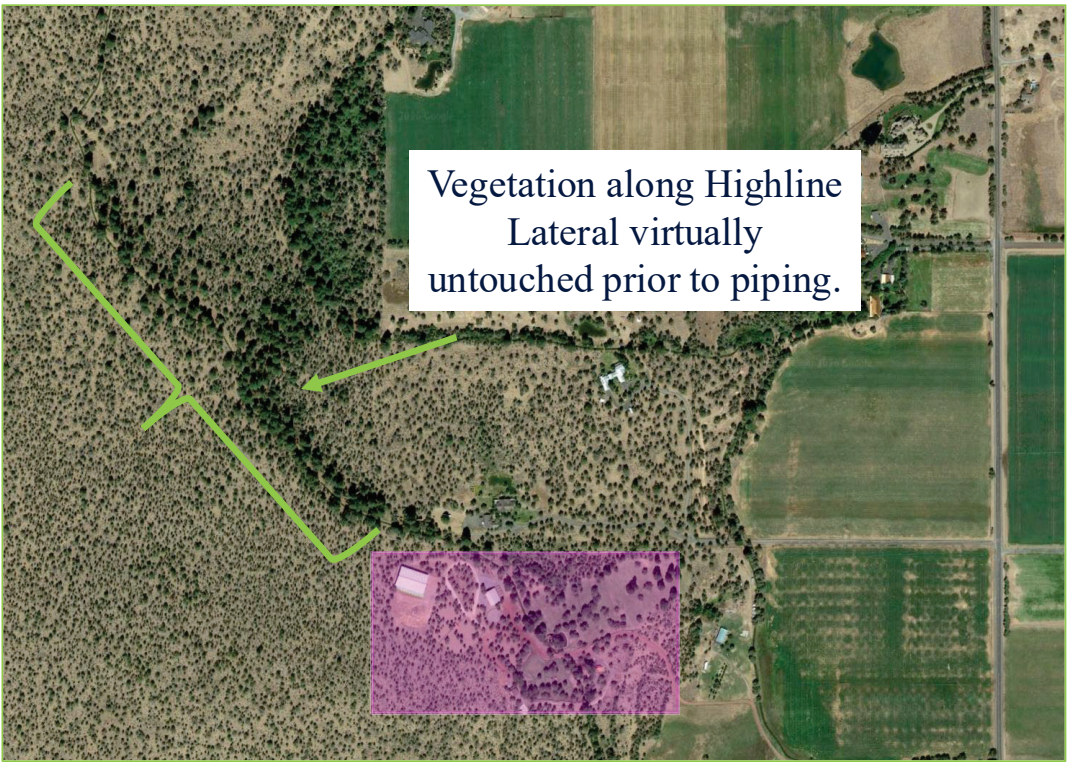
2006

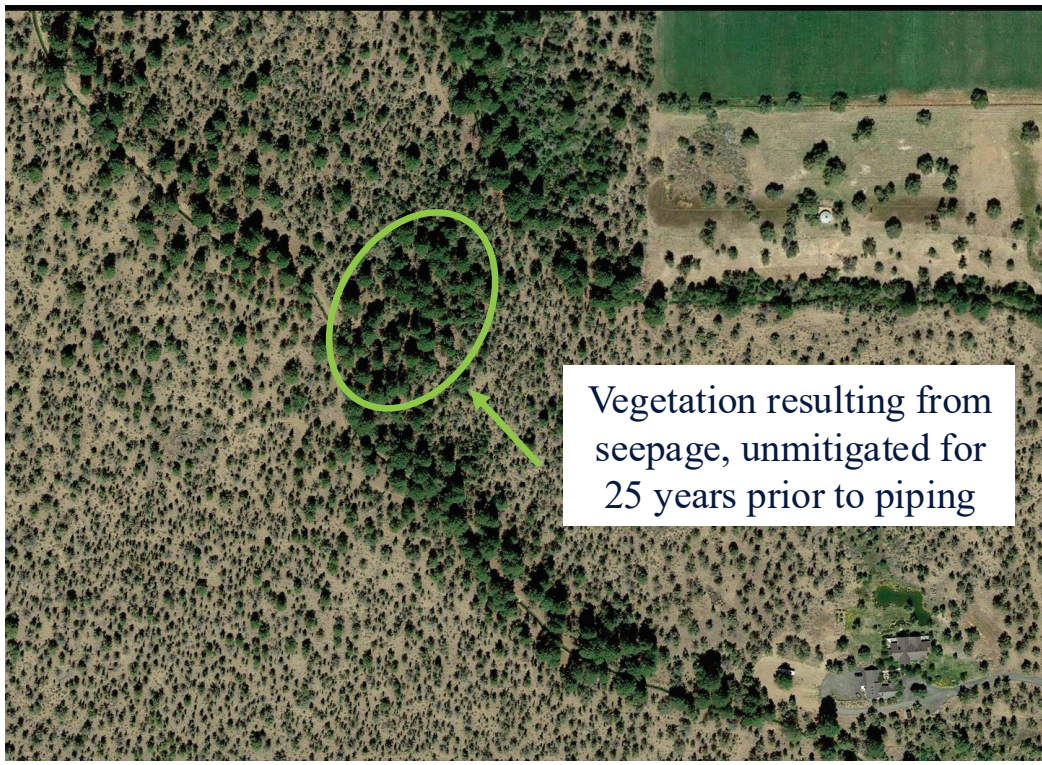


2012



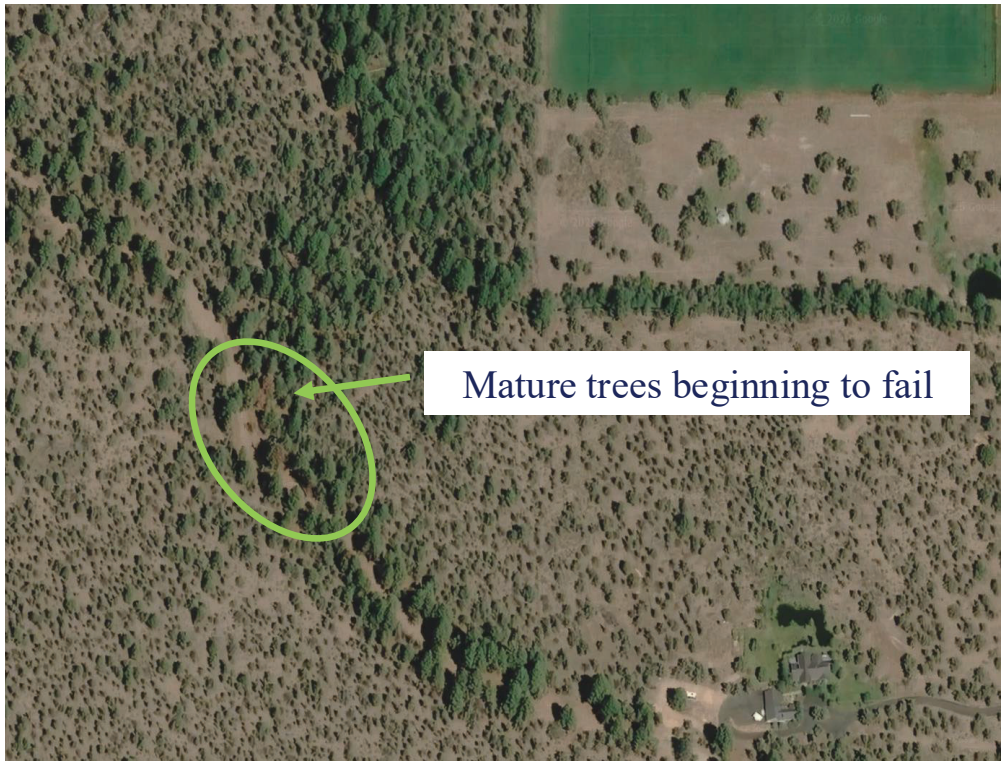
2018 (prior to piping) 2018





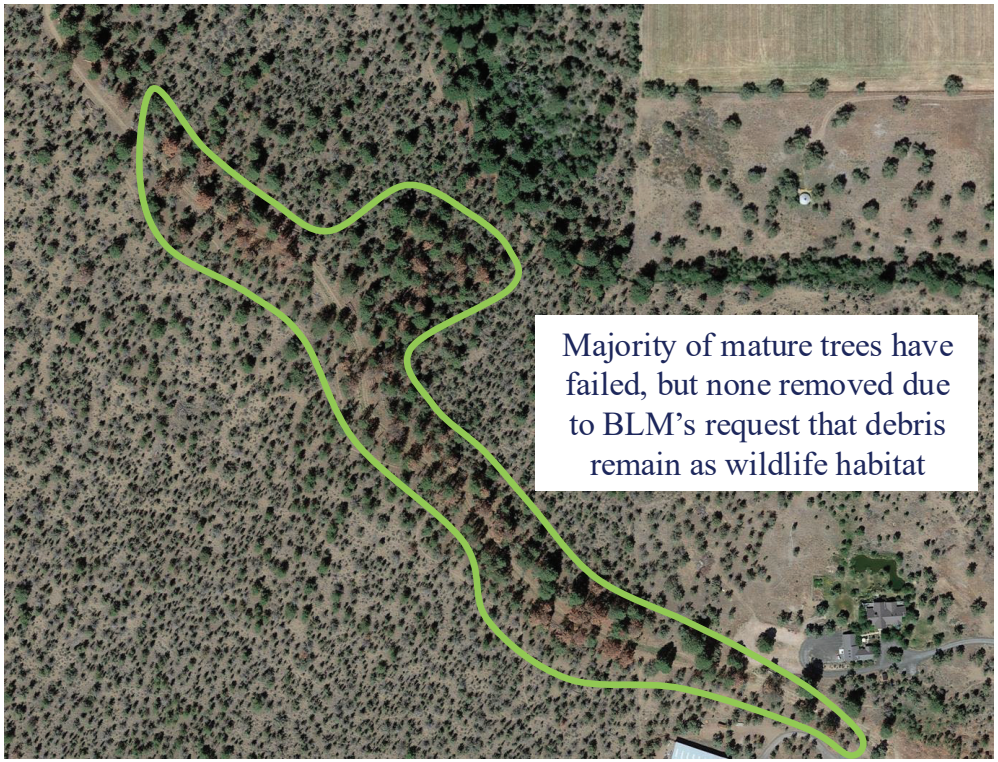
2020 (after piping) 2020





2022 – Mature trees showing failure





2024 – Most failed mature trees downed by wind





Post-Piping Vegetation Failure = Fire Hazard

- Highline Lateral piped in 2019, initial debris hauled out.
- Since 2019, most mature trees have failed. They are left to stand dead, typically blown over by wind.
  - *Mr. Schull has indicated that leaving trees was for wildlife habitat (per BLM's instructions).* ***We have never been provided with a record of these instructions.***
- After additional and sporadic removal efforts, significant tree debris and fuel load remains within the easement and alongside it.
- ***The remaining timber, debris, and weeds as-is presents a tremendous fire hazard to patron human life and property. As property owners, we are seeking advocacy from TID to work with BLM to rectify these circumstances.***



Types of Fuel Hazards on the Piped Highline Lateral

1. Debris within TID Easement (left behind in 2019)

2. Trees toppled by wind events and saw work, left on the ground

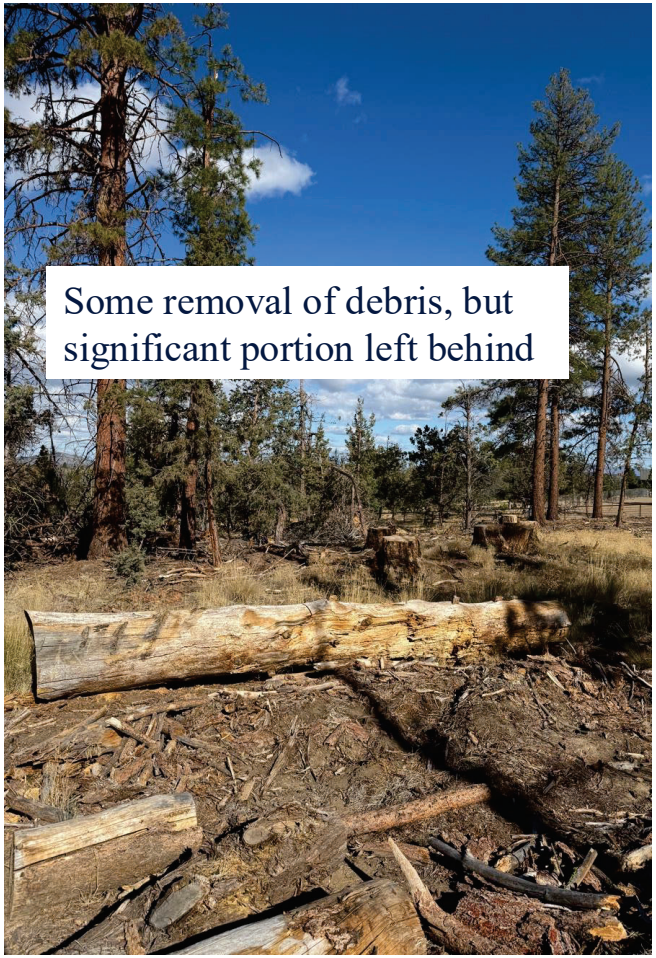
3. Noxious & Nuisance weed presence, competing with natural vegetation

4. Remaining dead mature trees and vegetation as a result of canal seepage

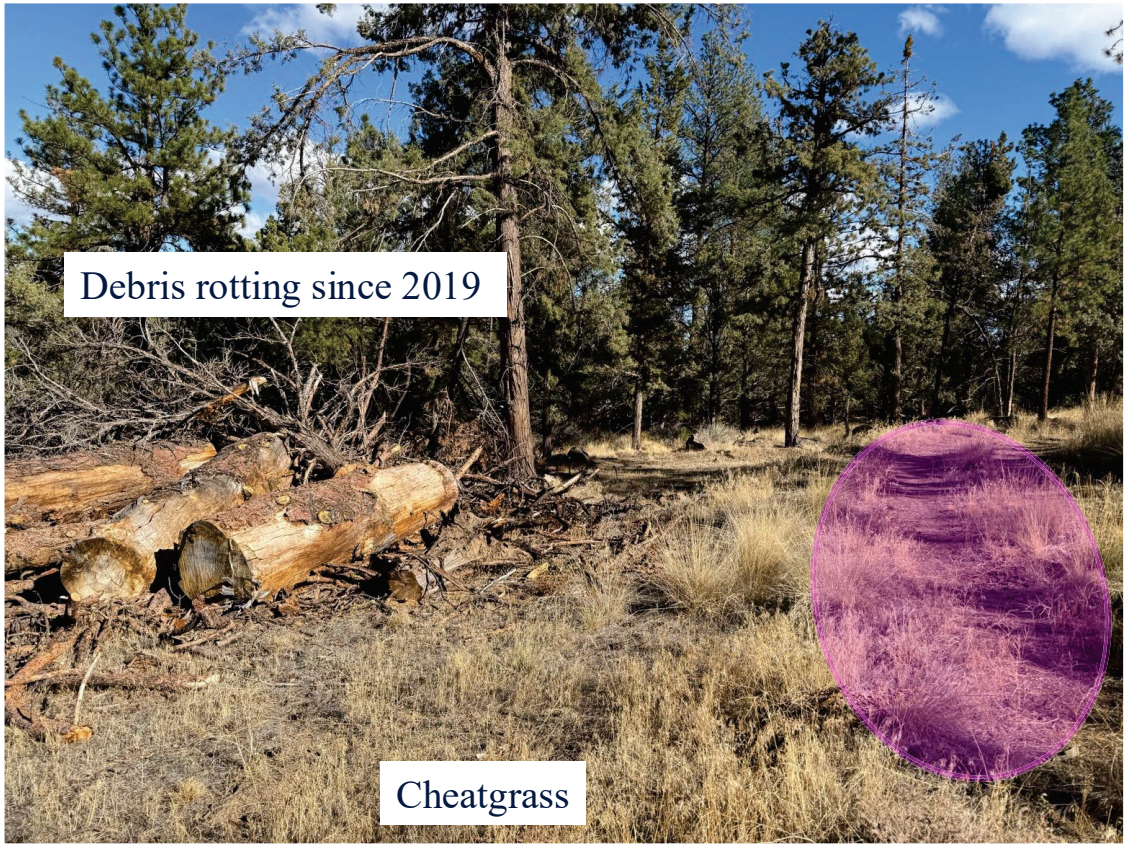
1. Debris within TID Easement (since 2019)







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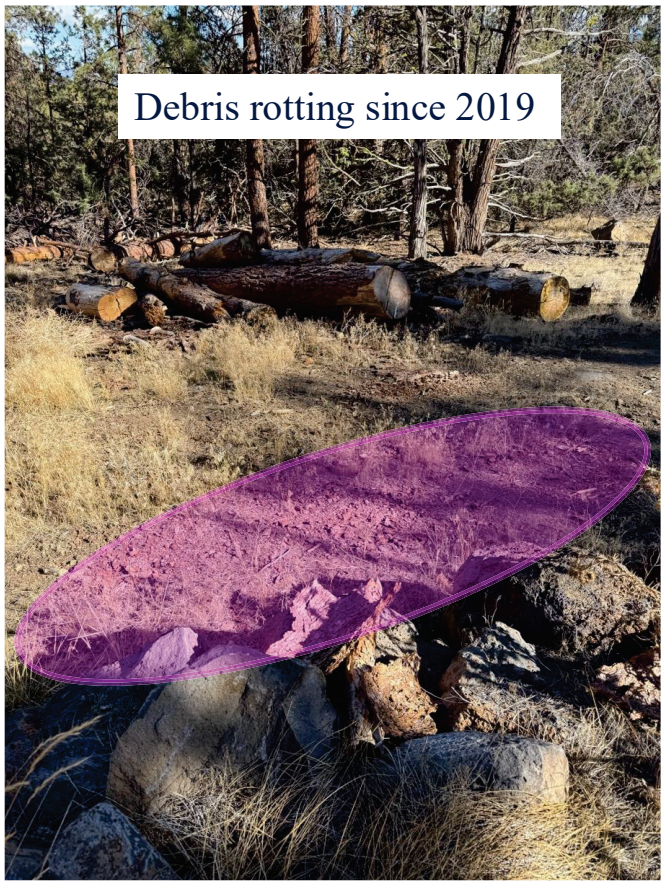


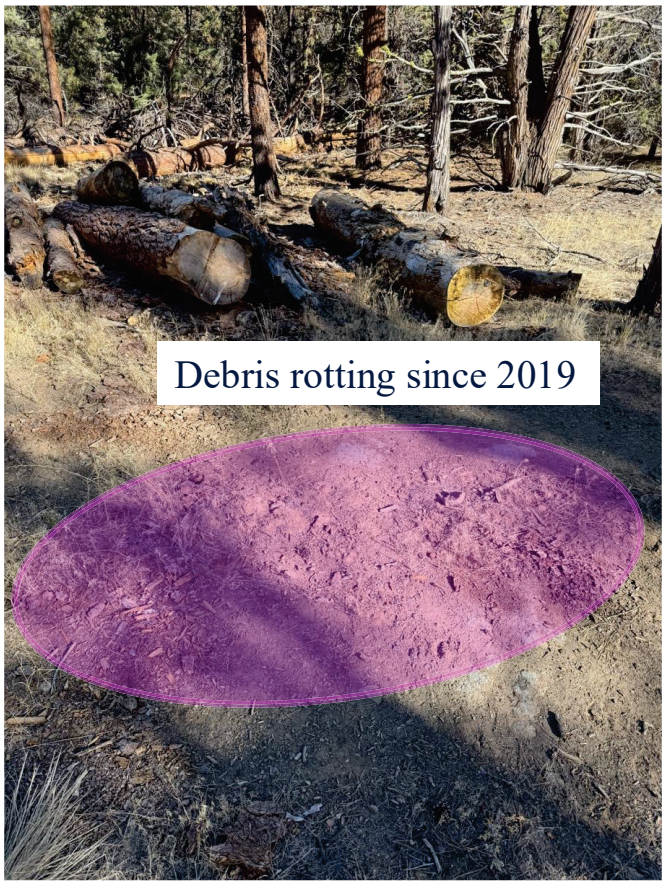
1. Debris within TID Easement (since 2019)





1. Debris within TID Easement (since 2019)







2. Downed Trees (natural or sawed), remaining on TID Easement



Recent downed mature tree, due to wind event.

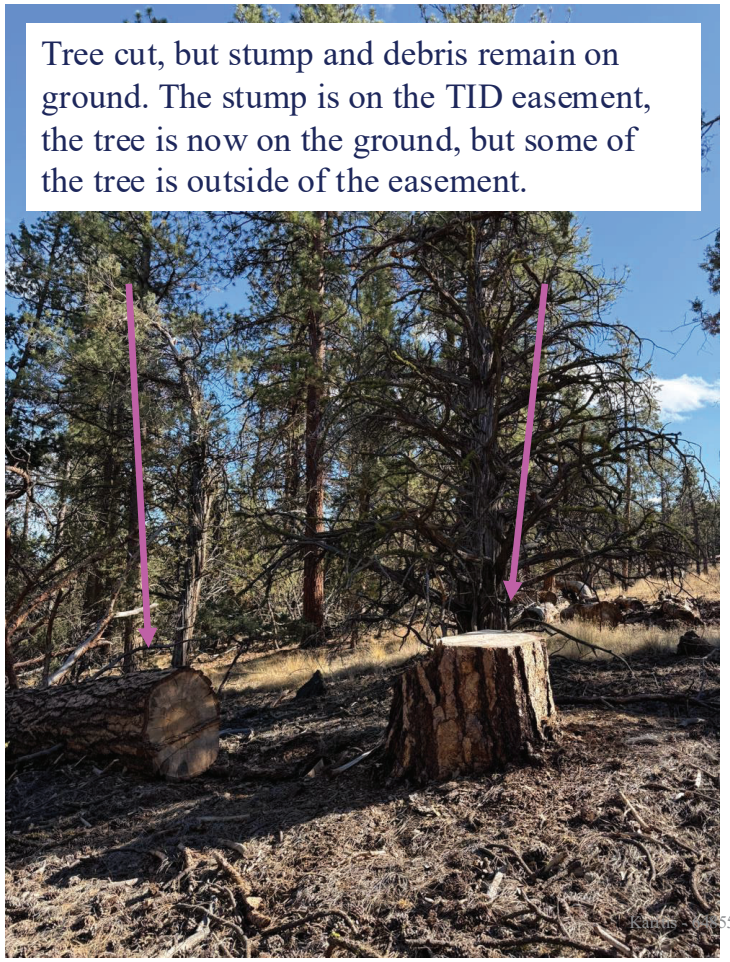
What is TID's responsibility for debris that originates on the easement, but falls outside of the easement?

2. Downed Trees (natural or sawed), on TID Easement & BLM





2. Downed Trees (natural or sawed), on TID Easement & BLM





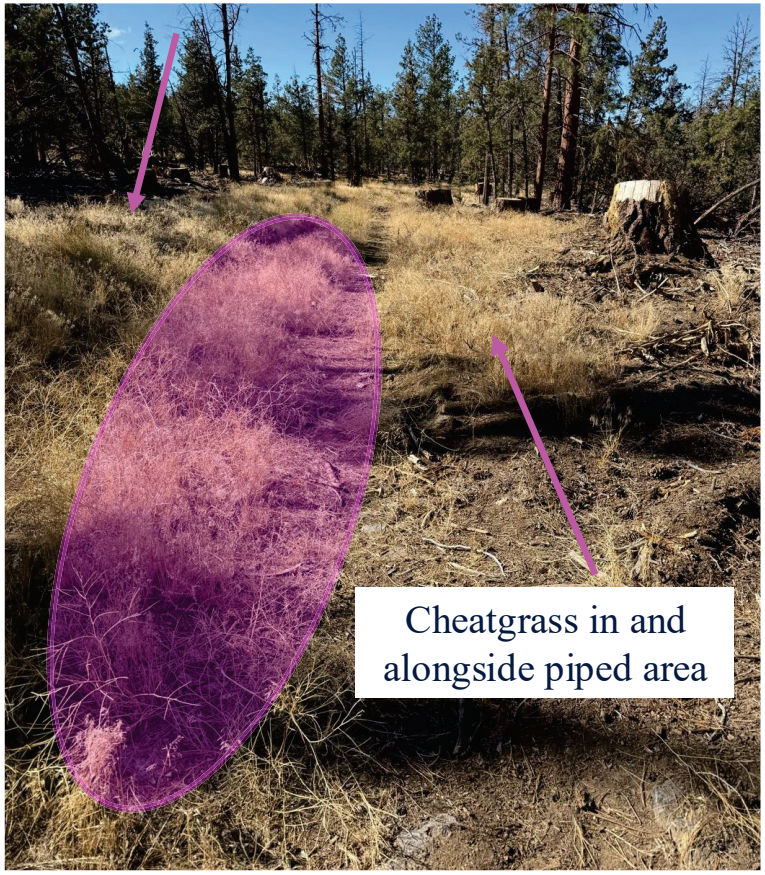
3. Noxious & Nuisance Weeds

- Nuisance and noxious weeds on an unobstructed pipeline act as a candle wick for starting fires:

https://extension.colostate.edu/resource/cheatgrass-and-wildfire/

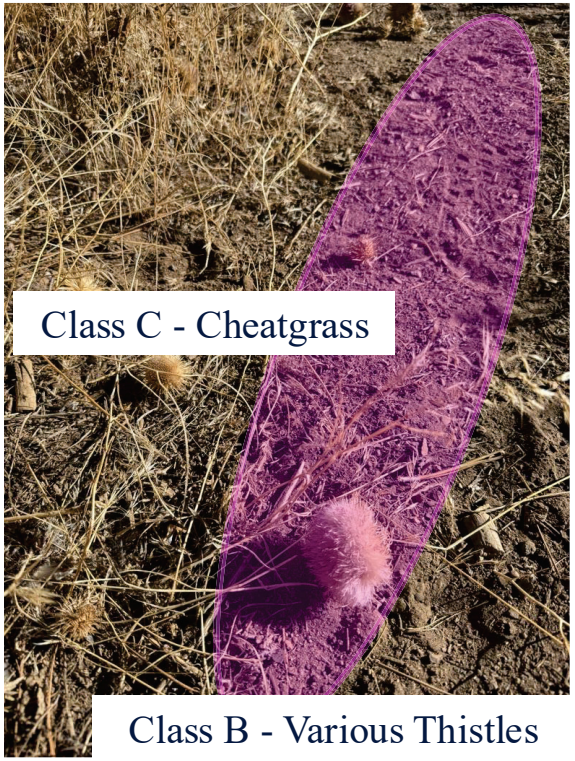
- Ignition of dried-out nuisance weeds such as Cheatgrass can spread fires ***farther*** and ***faster*** than typical timber fuel loads, making it more difficult to extinguish and prevent spread of a wildland fire.

- ***Please consider seasonally strong winds from the west in the Tumalo area that move along the Highline Lateral Pipe; AND that patrons typically no longer have summer-long access to irrigation as a result of low flow and rotational irrigation practices.***



3. Noxious & Nuisance Weeds

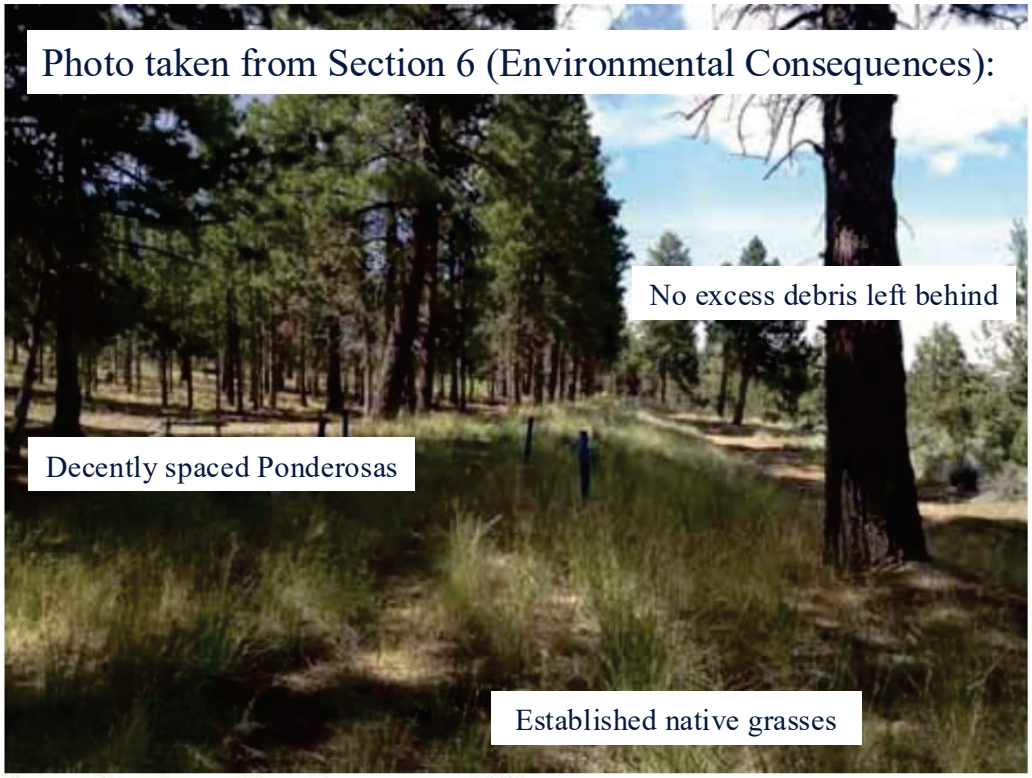






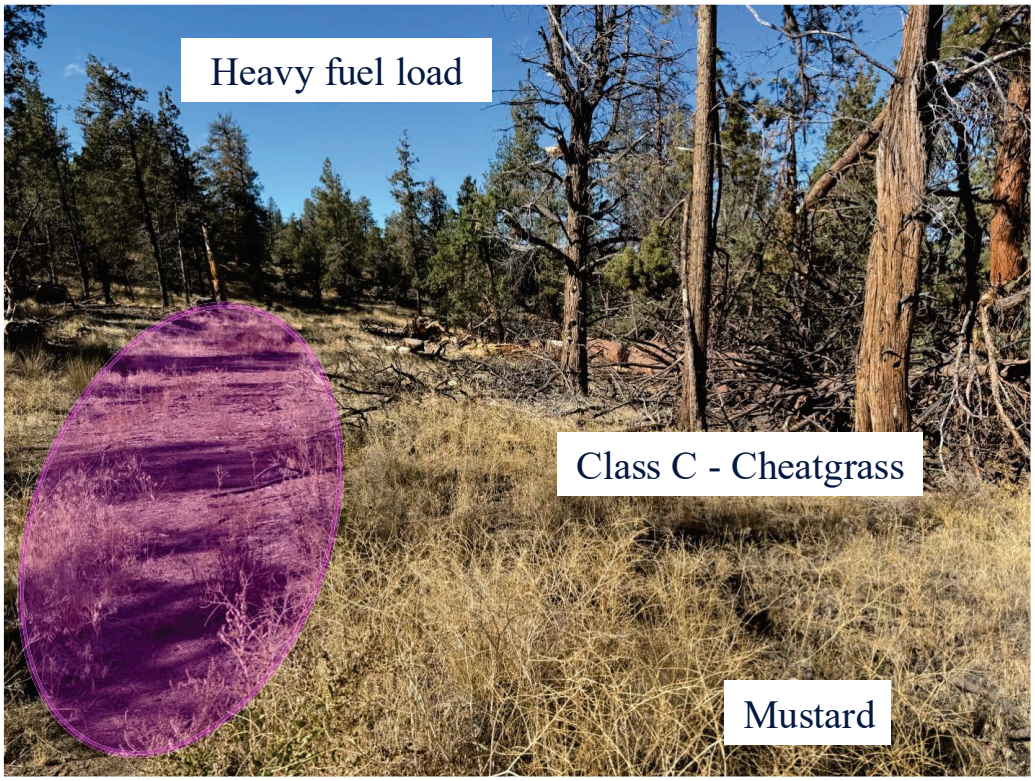
3. Noxious & Nuisance Weeds

2018 Water Assessment Plan as part of the Water Project Grant and Loan Application to ORWD. The plan cites ideal outcomes for vegetation on finished piped areas:



Source: Deschutes River Conservancy 2013

Figure 6-5. A Section of the Tumalo Feed Canal after a Piping Project.



3. Noxious & Nuisance Weeds

2018 Water Assessment Plan as part of the Water Project Grant and Loan Application to ORWD references:

Page xxiii - "After construction, disturbed areas would be graded and replanted with a mix of native grasses and forbs to reduce the risk of erosion and spread of noxious weeds."

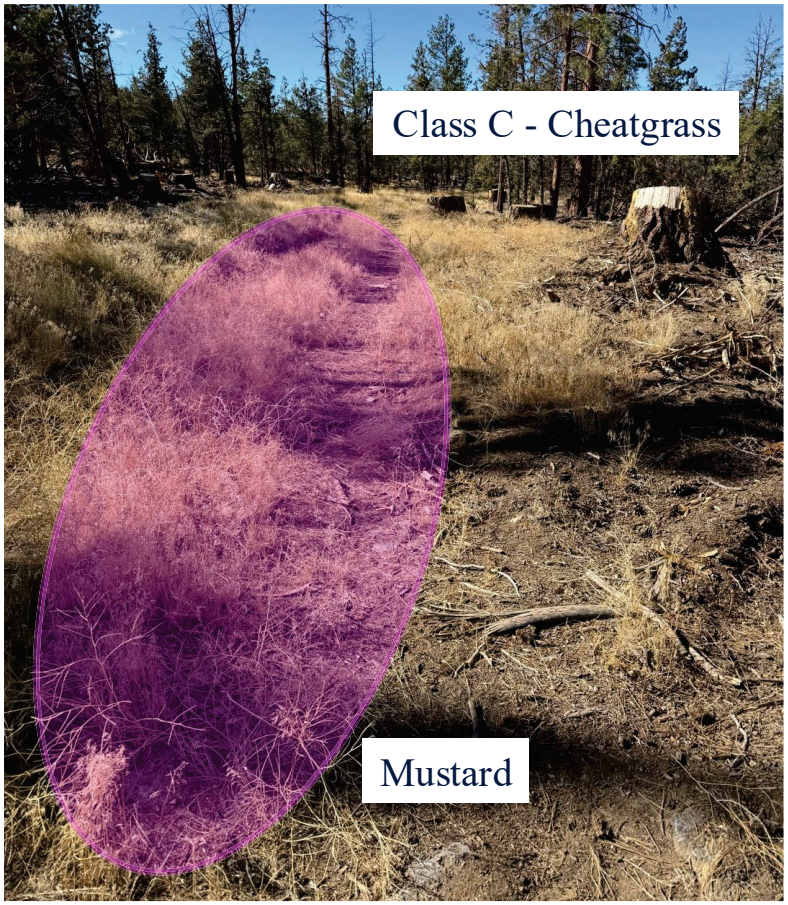
Page xxv – "…vegetated areas would be re-vegetated, effects to vegetations would be minor."

"Overall, the visual change from canal to buried pipe would be expected to have a minor effect…and the long-term effects would be vegetated corridor that would blend in with the natural landscape following revegetation."

Page 149 – "Following project implementation, appropriate reclamation procedures would be followed in order to revegetate disturbed areas as uplands while controlling noxious weeds."

Page 156-157 – Cumulative Effects by Resource – Section 6.14.3.8 "In addition, vegetation control activities generally include herbicide applications to control vegetation and noxious weeds, and mechanically cutting vegetation."

Additionally: throughout the document, several concerns are noted in regards to the failure of mature trees, and removal cost & responsibility for trees that do not survive the project.



Please consider assistance with Invasive & Noxious Weed Mitigation:

LAUREN STREET
Community Wildfire Protection Supervisor
Tel: (541) 322-7141
Lauren.Street@deschutescounty.gov

- Please contact Ms. Street for information and ideas regarding potential grant and project management of mitigating nuisance and noxious weeds on piped areas.

- Ms. Street has indicated an interest and willingness to assist irrigation districts to locate grants ***on the district's behalf*** to cover herbicide application costs on piped areas.

- Ms. Street has also expressed a possibility of the County assisting with overseeing the management of contractors and labor during the course of herbicide application.

- This seems like a win-win for TID and patrons, without additional burden to TID personnel.

4. Standing Dead Trees & Overgrowth Vegetation

- Canal seepage created overgrowth on and beyond TID's easement
- Trees along an open ditch can shade water (reducing evaporation) and roots can prevent erosion
- With a piped canal, this overgrowth vegetation is no longer necessary and presents fire risk to patrons



Nuisance weeds in and alongside piped area


Overgrowth as a result of seepage from the Highline Lateral

4. Standing Dead Trees & Overgrowth Vegetation

Overgrowth Vegetation

Dead & downed mature trees, partially on TID easement and partially on BLM land

Branches debris

Spotted Knapweed



4. Standing Dead Trees & Overgrowth Vegetation

Of the remaining mature trees, many are showing indications of forthcoming failure:





4. Standing Dead Trees & Overgrowth Vegetation

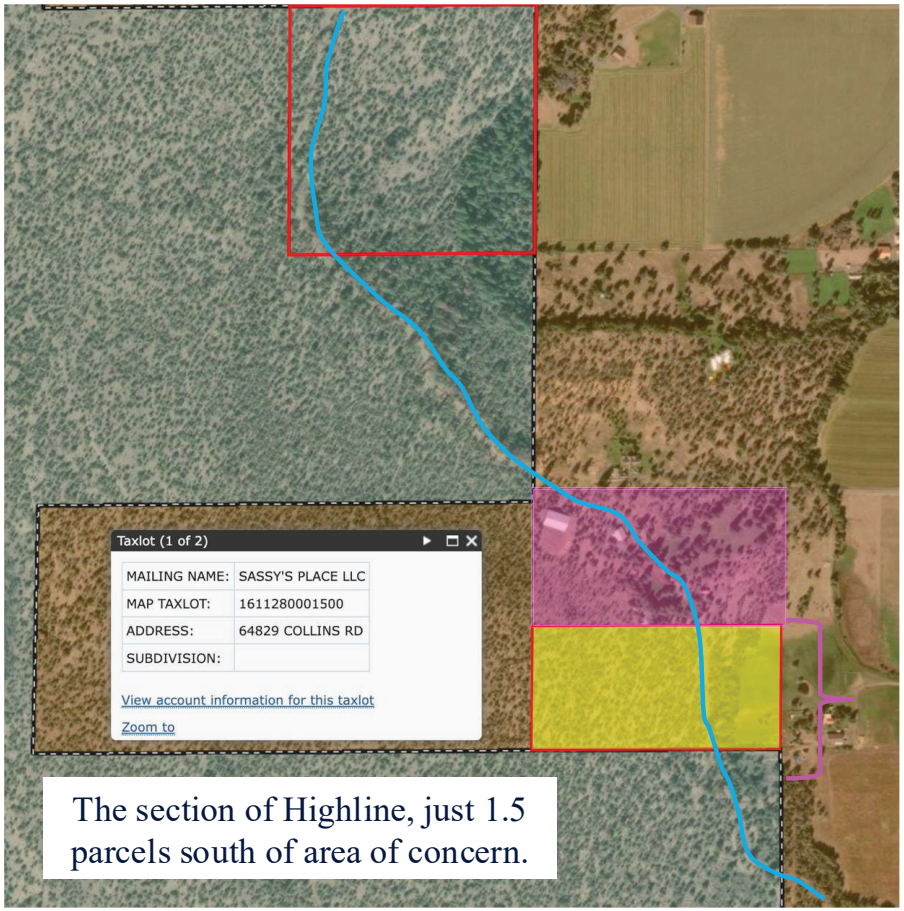
It appears that TID recognizes the need for additional removal, due to white markings on trunks of standing dead mature trees:





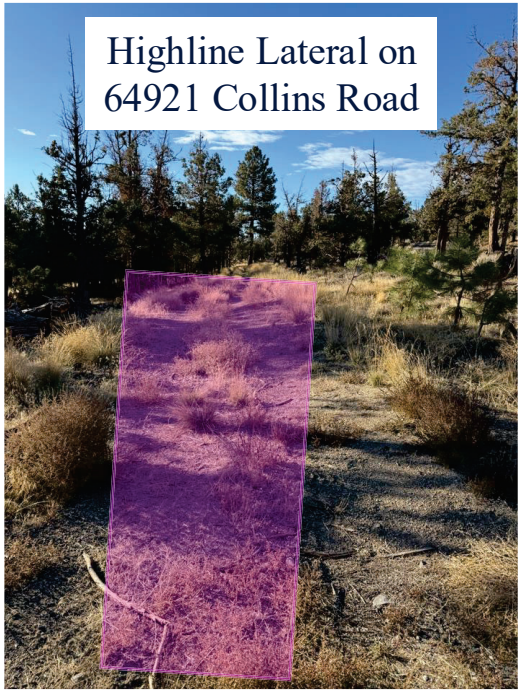


For comparison: the Highline Lateral

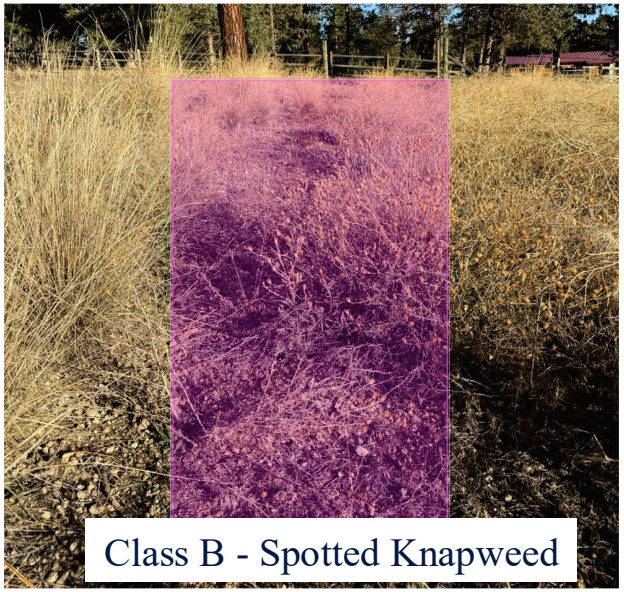


The section of Highline, just 1.5 parcels south of area of concern.

We encourage the Board to review other sections of the piped Highline Lateral in the vicinity, which are tidied, and without excessive debris or fire hazards beyond natural grasses and juniper groves typical of the area; and some encroachment of weeds.



Highline Lateral on 64921 Collins Road



Class B - Spotted Knapweed

Changes in Climate & Precipitation

This dossier does not comprehensively address notable changes in the following:

- Overall climate
- Increase in drought
- Decrease in rain and snowfall
- Increase in ferocity of wind storms

However, these changes further emphasize the immediate need that action be taken for ***community safety***.

As property owners, we are seeking advocacy from TID to work with BLM to rectify these circumstances.

History of Communications with TID

Please see enclosed timeline of our communications with the TID District Manager:

Timeline of Communications expressing concern:

1. June 2020

Chris Schull was on our property with ditch rider Mick Ingram to inspect possible damages to our irrigation system as a result of piping the Highline Lateral that bisects our property. A brief, informal discussion about "the mess" behind our property took place.

2. September 2020 - 2024

Over time, several large trees failed alongside the piped area on our property. We requested that TID come out and at least fell them to reduce human hazard. Sometimes they were able to fell and often buck the wood. We were given the option to keep the wood for woodstove fuel. In one instance where a large stack of branches was left behind, TID fulfilled our request to remove any remaining branches that were not considered viable firewood.

This maintenance led us to question: why is it that TID is willing to clean up dead trees and debris on private property, but not on their easements on BLM?

3. April 16, 2025

After the TID Annual Meeting at Cascades Academy, I approached Mr. Schull and verbally communicated to him my concerns about the dead vegetation on BLM land behind my property – dead vegetation that exists as a result of the piping project. I communicated that the fuel load on the property presents an extreme fire hazard to life and property in the vicinity.

I offered to contact the local BLM contacts in order to facilitate a dialogue or solutions to reduce the fuel load on and around the TID easement. Mr. Schull requested that I not contact anyone at BLM due to the changes in contacts at the agency "as a result of the new [federal] administration." He stated that he would proceed with communications, and that fuels hazards removal would commence after irrigation season in the autumn of 2025.

I received no follow-up on our conversation.

During the fall and winter of 2025-26, no action to reduce the fuel load on the BLM west-northwest of our property was taken until our new neighbors moved in and also expressed concern:

4. Letter from John Gilbert and Shelly Samples

John Giblert & Shelly Samples
64891 Collins Road
Bend, OR 97703
541-420-2648
541-213-1533

Submitted to the Tumalo Irrigation District ("TID") Board on 1/13/26

The Issue: After the piping of the canal, as located on the map below, dozens of large ponderosas died but remained standing. Over the past six months, TID cut down most of them and wind has blown over many of those that remained. TID subsequently cut. May trees at approximately the basement boundary and hauled out large logs (the portion between the stump and the easement boundary). However, a tremendous amount of timber and brush remains on the ground within the TID easement. Even more timber and brush remains on the ground outside of the TID easement (from TID felled trees previously stood within the easement). The downed timber is dead and very dry. Combined with the frequent strong winds from the west on this ridge, the downed timber and brush creates the conditions for a massive forest fire. This is extremely dangerous for the nearby homeowners.

The current dangerous conditions have been directly caused by piping the canal, and of course, were known to be a potential hazard beforehand. Failure by TID to mitigate the effect of the canal piping project is irresponsible management and could expose TID to a liability claim similar to the claims faced by power companies in Oregon and California recently.

The Request: We are asking TID to remove all downed trees and debris (trunks and branches) that are within its easement area on Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") land as shown on the map below. Many truckloads of timber have been removed over the past six months, so permission from the BLM does not seem to be required. However, if such removal requires permission from the BLM, we are asking TID to make a documented good faith effort to seek such authorization. We are confident the BLM would approve such request.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Gilbert Shelly Samples

5. January 2026

In January 2026, Chris Schull, with Austin Tschida from BLM, visited the site in question at the request of property owners Gilbert/Samples.

My mother Beverly Karitis was present for this meeting, and recalls (paraphrased):

Chris Schull: "We'll have to get a plan…"
Beverly Karitis: "What about all the debris?"
Chris Schull: "We don't hand rake the small stuff; we only remove 'the big stuff'."

Between Mr. Schull and Mr. Tschida, it was decided that completing the project would take six months. Both individuals avoided committing to a specific timeline and no hard finish date was declared.

6. January 2026

When we received no action plan from the District Manager or BLM, my mother wrote the following:

On Jan 20, 2026, at 11:39, Beverly Karitis <bkaritis@hotmail.com> wrote:

To: Chris Scholl, TID, District Manager
Astin Tschida, BLM, Forester

It was a pleasure to meet Chris and Austin on the piped canal area last week, and thank you for letting me join your conversation. As a property owner observing that area for the last 5 years, I'd like the following context to be taken into consideration:

Five years ago (2020) I moved to 64855 Collins Road. The canal on our property was piped in 2019, and the majority of debris was hauled away. At that time, the neighbor to the south, Rick Stringfield, had coordinated a contractor to come onto his property and remove the remaining downed logs and slash on his property that resulted from the piping project. I know this as he had asked me for permission for the contractor to use my driveway so he could access the logs. The contractor was Max of Powell Butte Firewood (503.784.5337). This work was done in a timely manner; the piped canal area south of my property was tidied and free of debris, and my driveway left in original condition.

However, the piped canal between my property (also Gilbert/Samples property) and the Elson/Parker property at the other end of the canal that borders Couch Market Road, has been virtually untouched since its being piped in 2019. The logs that were felled for the original piping were neatly stacked, as were the slash piles, but have been sitting there ever since. This is problematic as they dry out, as they have simply become large stacks of firewood in the thick forest.

The majority of remaining trees, mostly very large ponderosas, have perished since the piping. Many remain standing dead, but many others have fallen due to wind storms over the last 5 years. Additionally, the 2-track road on top of the pipe and other areas are covered with new patches of Mustard, Spotted Knapweed, Thistle, and Cheatgrass. All of this fuel adds to an already thick forest, choked with juniper.

In seeing the piles of logs in 2020, I contacted TID and inquired about the log piles and remaining slash; and in doing so, provided them with Max of Powell Butte Firewood's contact information. When none of the stacked logs were removed, I contacted TID again and was assured that now the BLM would take care of the standing dead trees and log piles. Subsequently, Ashley (my daughter) approached Chris Schull in person, at TID's annual irrigation district meeting in April 2025, inquiring about why the stacked log piles and downed trees remain (and citing the growing hazard). She was advised by Chris to NOT contact BLM due to changes in the federal government and BLM; and was instructed to let TID work with BLM instead.

Before the New Year, we saw and heard tree work being done. While some of the trees have been felled and removed, a tremendous amount of material remains in the forest and presents significant wildfire hazard. I'd also like to point out that as the pre-existing open canal was on a hill, and presumably water percolated downhill with gravity. Looking at the patch of forest below the pre-existing canal and the open lateral below it, is also dangerously thick with vegetation.

And, considering the westerly winds we receive regularly every summer in Tumalo, if this area were to ignite in its current state, it would simply be indefensible!

Everything from the overgrown juniper forest (BLM's responsibility to maintain drylands forest) to the fallout of the piping project (TID's responsibility to maintain its easement with fallout and invasive weed control) presents a "loaded gun" situation to the entire community. Sadly, if our property were to ignite as a result of an uncontrollable fire in this section of forest, we would be TID patrons who, instead of benefiting from the piping project, would be harmed by it.

Bumping into everyone last week gave the impression that TID and BLM are once again in communication to address this huge project. While we wish it was dealt with 5 years ago as we encouraged, we'd like to express our support in anything that can be done. Please consider offering the job to the contact I have provided in Powell Butte; and thinning and cleaning up the area as soon as possible for everyone's health, well-being, and safety.

The surrounding property owners and community members would appreciate any updates you can provide.

Best regards,

Beverly & Ashley Karitis

7. **February 2026**

We received no response from Mr. Schull or BLM, and reached out a second time:

From: Beverly Karitis <bkaritis@hotmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 22, 2026 8:48 AM
To: Tschida, Austin J <atschida@blm.gov>; chris@tumalo.org <chris@tumalo.org>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Follow up Piped Canal

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Hello Austin and Chris,

I never got any response from my below email. I'm anxious to find out if any plan is in the works?
A project should never be started if there is not a plan to finish.

Tumalo Reservoir Road is under major upgrade, but already the contractor is clearing the mess! I expect the same from TID and BLM.

I would appreciate an update. Thank you, Beverly

From: Tschida, Austin J <atschida@blm.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2026 6:14 AM
To: Beverly Karitis <bkaritis@hotmail.com>; chris@tumalo.org <chris@tumalo.org>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Follow up Piped Canal

Hi Beverly,

We had a firewood outfit come in and remove what salvageable material he could (around 120 tons worth). The BLM does have plans to reduce juniper in that area and the whole Tumalo block (not just the area by the pipe), but we still have to go through our environmental process and start surveys etc. That work will depend on funding and other priorities, but generally mimic treatments we have done by Barr Road, Dusty loop and Fryrear rd.

Thanks,

Austin Tschida
Forester
Bureau of Land Management
Prineville District
3050 NE 3rd ST
Prineville, OR 97754
Office: (541) 416-6765
Cell: (458) 231-3575

From: Beverly Karitis <bkaritis@hotmail.com>
Date: March 4, 2026 at 12:19:26 PST
To: "Tschida, Austin J" <atschida@blm.gov>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Follow up Piped Canal

Thank you for your email Austin,

I do see some logs have been removed, but so much more still on the ground and stacked. Tumalo Reservoir Road having a major project. They removed trees and branches, but within the week they had completely removed everything! (think distance about the same as piped canal here) They had a hugs chipper and then took chips away (actually to my neighbors). Maybe contact Jay Johnson, K & E Excavating, 971.600.5077, to see he could cleanup mess on the ground here. I'm going to suggest the same to TID!

You mentioned you are looking to possibly take down more juniper, but I'm hoping you clean up existing fire hazard prior another project started.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Beverly Karitis

8. September 2026

As Mr. Tschida stated in his email from February 23, 2026, debris considered "salvageable" was able to be hauled out by a contractor in January-February 2026. It seems that it is in everyone's best interest to deal with marketable firewood before it is allowed to rot (for this site and future site with the remaining piping phases). Stacked debris is also more easily managed when not in full decay.

We are still without a response or action plan from Mr. Schull, TID, or BLM, and will present the circumstances to the TID Board of Directors on October 13, 2026.

Call to Action

We are asking that Tumalo Irrigation District District Manager Chris Schull and the District's Board of Directors please:

1. **Prioritize, commit, and invest** in energy and resources needed to remedy this situation and others like it;
2. **Provide documentation** of a good faith effort to work with previous and current BLM foresters on this issue and others like it;
3. **Communicate** up-to-date maintenance policies and timelines that apply to TID easements within BLM;
4. **Apply Project Funds**, or new financial resources, or other available district finances to establish and maintain wildland fire buffers to patron property.

Contact Information

Ashley will be present for the January 2027 Board Meeting (barring any family or medical emergencies).

Until then, we kindly request that all responses and updates are sent to the following:

Ashley Karitis	M: 213.712.3581	E: karitis@gmail.com
Beverly Karitis	M: 541.388.1888	E: bkaritis@hotmail.com

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