



## NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING PERIOD

### Joint System Canal Modernization Project

Project Sponsor/Lead Agency:

**Medford Irrigation District (lead sponsor)**

5045 Jacksonville Hwy  
Central Point, OR 97502

**Rogue River Valley Irrigation District (partner organization)**

3139 Merriman Rd  
Medford, OR 97501

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

1201 NE Lloyd Blvd; Suite 900  
Portland, OR 97232

#### Contacts

**Lead Agency Contact**

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Gary Diridoni  
[gary.diridoni@usda.gov](mailto:gary.diridoni@usda.gov)  
(503) 414-3092

**Primary Consultant**

Farmers Conservation Alliance  
Raija Bushnell, Watershed Planning Manager  
[raija.bushnell@fcasolutions.org](mailto:raija.bushnell@fcasolutions.org)  
(541) 716-6085

## Purpose of Scoping Meeting

The purpose of the scoping meetings is to inform the community and interested stakeholders about the Joint System Canal Modernization Project and to gather community comments and suggestions on the proposed project. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a scoping meeting is an early process used to determine important issues and necessary actions related to the project. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Oregon will be the lead federal agency for NEPA. Farmers Conservation Alliance is a consultant working on the project.

## Meeting Information

A Notice of Intent for the project was published in the Federal Register on July 19, 2023. A public notice for the scoping period was published on the NRCS website and in the Grants Pass Daily Courier on July 27, 2023. Two scoping meetings will be held for this project. One meeting will be held in-person on August 17, 2023 and another virtual meeting will be held online on August 22, 2023. Following the meetings, a recorded presentation will be available at [oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id](https://oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id). The times and locations of the scoping meetings are as follows:

### **In-Person Medford Public Meeting**

August 17, 2023

6 – 7 p.m.

Medford Library, 205 South Central Ave, Medford, OR 97501

### **Virtual Medford Public Meeting**

August 22, 2023

6 – 7 p.m.

Register for the online Zoom meeting at: [oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id](https://oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id)

## Project Location

The Joint System Canal is located in Jackson County, Oregon, approximately 4 miles east of Eagle Point and south of Highway 140. The Watershed Plan-Environmental Impact Statement (Plan-EIS) project area consists of the Joint System Canal and its associated infrastructure from the junction of the North Fork Canal and South Fork Canal to the Bradshaw Drop (approximately 13 miles; see Figure 1).

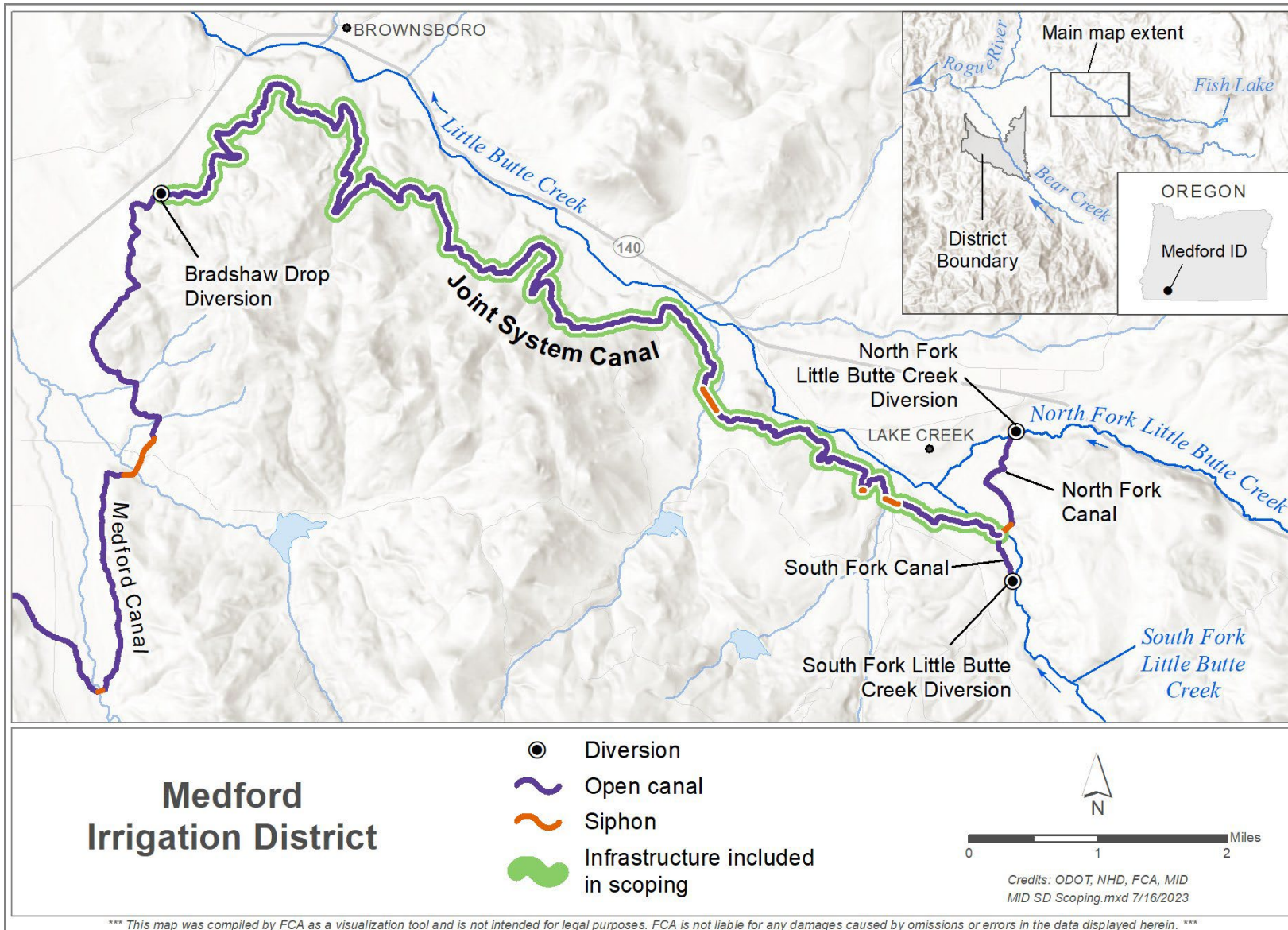


Figure 1. Infrastructure included in scoping for the Medford Irrigation District Watershed Plan-Environmental Impact Statement.

## Project Description and Purpose of Project

Medford Irrigation District (MID) is seeking federal funding through the NRCS Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, Public Law 83-566 (PL 83-566). This funding would be used to modernize the Joint System Canal to improve agricultural water management and water delivery reliability.

The Joint System Canal is essential infrastructure for MID and Rogue River Valley Irrigation District (RRVID). The two irrigation districts divert water from North Fork Little Butte Creek and South Fork Little Butte Creek and convey the water to the districts through the 13-mile Joint System Canal. Together MID and RRVID serve 2,225 farms and orchards on 21,758 irrigated acres.

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve agricultural water management by modernizing the Joint System Canal. The proposed project is needed due to existing operation inefficiencies, as well as the risk of canal failure. The current system inadequacies have reduced the water delivery reliability to water users who rely on the Joint System Canal for agricultural, residential, industrial, and recreational uses. The canal is at risk of failure due to its age and factors that affect its structural integrity (e.g., falling trees, flooding, rodent activity). Failure of the canal could lead to flooding of adjacent properties or environmental damage to Little Butte Creek and could require water deliveries to be stopped while the canal was fixed, which could have large impacts to agriculture and other water users.

Agriculture is an essential part of the Rogue Valley economy and agricultural production depends on reliable water deliveries. Drought conditions in recent years have limited water supplies and agricultural production in both MID and RRVID. The districts have not made water deliveries for the full length of the irrigation season in the past 4 years. Additionally, the aging Joint System Canal loses approximately 13 percent of the water it conveys to seepage and evaporation. The proposed project would address the deteriorating state of the Joint System Canal and associated infrastructure, including siphons, and would help to address ongoing agricultural challenges.

Three alternatives have been preliminary identified and are proposed to be analyzed during the EIS process. The alternatives include a no action alternative and two proposed action alternatives: piping the Joint System Canal primarily in the existing alignment, with potentially small sections in new alignments, or canal reshaping and lining in the existing alignment. These alternatives will be analyzed based on their ability to meet the purpose and need and program requirements, as well as effects to natural, cultural, and human resources. Any additional alternatives that are identified during the scoping phase will also be analyzed based on this criteria. In addition, non-structural alternatives will be given full consideration for inclusion in the analysis.

## Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (PL 83-566)

Federal investments through PL 83-566 need to comply with both the NRCS program requirements, as outlined in the Principles, Requirements, and Guidelines for Water and Land Related Resources Implementation Studies and Federal Water Resource Investments (PR&G), and the NEPA process. NRCS, as the lead federal agency, will be meeting requirements of both NEPA and the PR&Gs simultaneously through the watershed planning process.

## Project NEPA and PR&G Analysis

NEPA and other applicable laws require a complete analysis of the environmental effects of the proposed project, as well as the consideration of additional alternatives. The PR&Gs require additional analyses, such as an economic analysis and inclusion of effects to ecosystem services, to meet the requirements of the program. Public scoping is the first step in the NEPA process and is required under PL 83-566. Under this step, NRCS provides information to resource agencies, interested stakeholders, and the public to inform them of the need for NEPA and PR&G analyses, and to learn of any information or concerns relevant to the analyses.

## Potential Resource Concerns and Environmental Impacts

Potential resources concerns and potential environmental impacts will be analyzed as part of the Plan-EIS for the project. Potential resource concerns that may be analyzed in the Plan-EIS include:

- Cultural Resources
- Economics
- Soils
- Land Use
- Environmental Justice
- Endangered and Threatened Species
- Wildlife
- Hydrology
- Wetlands
- Vegetation
- Climate Change
- Ecosystem Services

## Public Involvement

As part of the Plan-EIS process, a public participation plan has been prepared, outlining outreach activities. Meetings and media outreach will be conducted to provide ample opportunity for public participation, including informational meetings and feedback opportunities. The scoping meetings are the first major opportunity for public participation.

## Scoping Period

This information and the associated scoping meetings meet NEPA and PR&G requirements for public participation. The scoping process is part of an approach to obtain input from stakeholders about the project. The scoping process helps to ensure that the level of analysis for the proposed project is appropriate, identifies resource concerns that should be included for analysis, provides an opportunity for feedback on preliminary alternatives as well as identifying other alternatives, and helps to anticipate any significant impacts that may result from the project.

Your input helps MID, RRVID, and NRCS make informed decisions and determine project funding. You are encouraged to participate in the planning process by attending meetings, reviewing project materials, and submitting questions and comments during official comment periods by email

([medford.id.comments@gmail.com](mailto:medford.id.comments@gmail.com)), online at [oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id](http://oregonwatershedplans.org/medford-id), left as a voice message at (541) 716-6085, or by mail addressed to: Farmers Conservation Alliance, Attn: MID Plan-EIS, 102 State Street, Hood River, OR 97031.