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### **(Neb)-Good News, Bad News, Uncertainty In Canal Repairs Update**

By: John Axtell Posted at: 08/13/2019 04:04 PM

**SCOTTSBLUFF** - An update Monday in Scottsbluff on repairs to the Fort Laramie irrigation canal, which suffered a breached wall and collapsed tunnel July 17, offered good news and bad news.

Gering-Ft. Laramie Irrigation District Rick Preston said the good news is that the 1,200-foot breach in the wall has been repaired and workers have cleared the first collapse in the 2,200-foot tunnel.

The bad news: they still don't know if the second collapsed area damaged the sides of the tunnel or just the roof, crews are encountering water in the tunnel that could complicate repairs, and a Bureau of Reclamation inspection of 2 other tunnels found unspecified "issues" with both of them

Preston said SAK Construction believes the collapse extends 8-feet and won't know until it's cleared if plans can go ahead for a temporary fix that would allow water to start flowing soon or if an immediate permanent repair would be needed, keeping the canal down for the rest of the season.

Preston said water moving through the tunnel without concrete walls would carry sand and debris with it, compounding problems downstream, but he was quick to add the work that's already been done is needed for both a temporary or permanent fix.

The hoped-for permanent fix is installing a 13-foot diameter metal pipe inside the 14-by-21 foot tunnel as a "sleeve," with a clearer picture on which direction the work will have to go expected by the end of the week.

Preston also said that the Gering-Ft Laramie District and the Goshen Irrigation District, the other one served by the century-old canal and tunnel system, are putting together funding requests to the Bureau of Reclamation for both the temporary and permanent fixes.

He said the BOR has scraped together \$4-million in multi-agency funding, but that it will be up the districts and their customers to cover the rest of the cost - which is expected to likely be at least double that.

3rd District Congressman Adrian Smith of Gering was also at the meeting and said he's already been talking with federal agencies about funding, but won't be able to seek additional money from Congress until a final cost estimate is put together.

SAK Construction has three crews working 24/7 with 5 workers in the tunnel at a time and 3 others outside, making sure air and supplies get to them.