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***Federal Grant Awarded to
Lugert-Altus Irrigation District***

OKLAHOMA CITY— A \$300,000 federal grant has been awarded to southwest Oklahoma's Lugert-Altus Irrigation District to improve the efficiency of its water delivery system.

The grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is just one of 43 such grants for \$9.9 million recently approved for 13 western states. The funding was announced last week by Interior Secretary Gale Norton as part of the Bureau's Water 2025 Challenge Grant Program for water conservation projects. Including the matching contributions of non-federal partners, the selected projects represent a combined investment of more than \$27 million in water improvements.

"Western states are facing some hard realities," Norton said. "Explosive population growth, chronic water shortages -- particularly during this time of drought -- environmental needs, over-allocated watersheds, and aging water facilities -- all combine to create opportunities for crisis and conflict. These competitive grants support realistic and cooperative local approaches to stretch existing supplies and improve aging facilities and help prevent conflict over our limited water resources in the West."

Specifically, Lugert-Altus Irrigation District will use the grant to expand its remote irrigation monitoring and automation sites, improve flow measurement, and replace and rehabilitate farm turnouts throughout the delivery area. District officials anticipate water savings of up to 10,000 acre-feet per year. [One acre-foot of water is equal to 325,851 gallons.] The total project cost will be in excess of \$600,000.

"The board of Lugert-Altus Irrigation District is committed to aggressive improvement of the water system's infrastructure, with the ultimate goal of maximizing water availability to patrons," says Tom Buchanan, general manager of the District. "The initial phase of this infrastructure modernization, at a cost of about \$200,000, is nearing completion. The Bureau's grant provides us with vital funds that are necessary to implement phase two of our board's directive."

"District members are very cognizant of the need to conserve water and become better stewards of our natural resources," Buchanan adds. "Landowners are making the financial commitment on their own land to achieve these goals, and now Lugert-Altus Irrigation District is taking similar steps on a regional level."

"The Bureau of Reclamation's grant to Lugert-Altus Irrigation District validates the commitment of those water users to intelligent management and preservation of their resource," according to Duane Smith, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. "The District's board and customers should be commended for past, present and future actions to maximize availability of often limited water supplies."

Lugert-Altus Irrigation District and other agencies and groups receiving grants will now work with the Bureau of Reclamation to secure cooperative agreements and complete regulatory processes. Groundbreaking on all projects is anticipated before the end of the fiscal year; they must be completed within 24 months.

The Challenge Grants Program focuses on meeting the goals identified in Bureau's Water 2025 initiative, which encourages voluntary water banks and other market-based measures, promotes the use of new technology for water conservation and efficiency, and removes institutional barriers to increase cooperation and collaboration among federal, state, tribal, and private organizations.

For more information on the Water 2025 initiative, visit www.doi.gov/water2025.