The nominated property is a segment of the Central Oregon Canal (COC), located in the Upper Deschutes River Basin, near the center of Oregon, in Deschutes and Crook Counties (Figures 1 and 8). The historic district begins 7.75 miles east of the diversion point and ¾ mile east of the Bend city limits in Deschutes County. The district is 3.4 miles long, crossing rural land between the Ward Road Bridge on the western edge and the Gosney Road Bridge on the eastern end. In the historic district, the canal ranges in width from 34' to 78', averaging around 50', and its depth varies from 1' to 9', averaging around 4' deep, depending on the amount of volcanic lava flows encountered, the terrain, and slope. The canal was built in irregular profiles, often wider and shallower than it was designed, in order to reduce expensive rock blasting and excavation. The canal through the historic district carries nearly the full amount of water diverted from the Deschutes River, 530 cubic feet per second during the irrigation season, April through October. The elevation of the canal on the western historic district boundary is 3,658 feet and water gradually drops about 15 feet per mile in the district, which is average for the entire canal. The historic district has unique rocky terrain, rolling hills and sudden drops in elevation mixed with flat stretches, over lava tubes. It runs through the southwest quarter through the northeast quarter of Township 18 South, Range 12 East, Section 1, W. M. (T18S, R12E, Section 1), from the northwest quarter to the southeast quarter of T18S, R13E, Section 6, through the southwest quarter of Section 5 and ends in the center of the north half of Section 6 (Figures 15-20). The historic district encompasses 50' on either side of the canal centerline to create a 100' corridor that includes the whole of the easement held by COID, and all the contributing resources. Most of the property owners in the district, where parcels range from 1 acre to 80 acres in size, maintain appurtenant water rights and use irrigation water (Figures 4a-4f). Much of the historic setting, including cultivated farms, a full range of irrigation system components, irrigation ponds and native vegetation, remains. The nominated canal, with its winding, character-defining, rocky, uneven canal bed and irregular slopes, cuts, and tail embankments is historic contributing. The historic design and materials, tool marks, and blazing drill holes are evident and tell the narrative of its construction through solid basalt rock flows that were blasted apart and moved with horse teams. The historic district has a high degree of all aspects of integrity. The 28 contributing structures include the historic main canal, a 215'-long concrete chute across a sink hole, 11 turnouts/headgates and associated headwalls (including Stearns Waste, a set of three headgates sharing a single headwall and counted as one resource), and 15 drops. The single contributing site is the remains of a 305'-long wooden flume (archaeological site 3BD1303, see appended site form). The 10 non-contributing elements within the nominated area include eight non-historic turnouts to ditches (outside the period of significance), a historic-period one-lane wooden bridge (outside the agricultural irrigation context), and a historic-period corrugated metal pipe that delivers water across the canal to a farm ditch (associated with the irrigation of a specific farm, and therefore outside the canal system, per the MPD) (Figure 5). This nomination conforms to the general registration requirements and the description and classification of structures in the linear water distribution system of man-made water conduit and conveyance structures, as set out in the MPD, Carey and Reclamation Acts irrigation Projects in Oregon, 1901-1978, listed in 2017.

The COCHD is significant at the local level under Criterion A, in the areas of Exploration and Settlement and Agriculture, with a Period of Significance of 1905 (initial construction) to 1937 (end of land sales along the nominated segment). The historic district meets the general and specific registration requirements set forth in the Multiple Property Documentation, Carey Act and Reclamation Acts Irrigation Projects in Oregon 1901-1978, Oregon (NRIS No. MC 100001302). It represents the extensive, ambitious open canal system that conveyed water by gravity between the Deschutes River in Bend and the Powell Butte area. It brought about widespread change in the arid region. The COC delivered irrigation water to 25,257 acres that enabled profitable agriculture and brought a surge of settlers to the area. It substantially affected settlement, agricultural production, population growth, and the commercial and economic development of Alfalfa, Powell Butte and Bend. The downstream cities, particularly Alfalfa and Powell Butte, significantly benefitted from the construction of this segment of canal, as without the segment the towns would not exist as the canal was integral to the settlement and growth of those communities. The for-profit development company’s successful, nationwide, private, marketing campaign attracted thousands of settlers to the arid high desert and resulted in the sale of most of the land in their segregations. The historic district is a segment of the COC, one of two canals developed by the Central Oregon Project that was the largest and most successful Carey Act irrigation and settlement project in the Northwest.
The nominated segment was constructed, and land around it was sold, as a for-profit commercial enterprise by the Deschutes Irrigation and Power Company, under contracts with the State of Oregon under the Carey Desert Land Act. It is directly associated with the provision of irrigation and development of agricultural output of all areas downstream of the nominated segment. The contract between the company and the State required the developers to reclaim the land by delivering irrigation water to the highest point on each parcel that had a water right. The nominated segment is a representative portion of the main canal with a concentration of secondary structures that adequately represent the irrigation project's function and historical significance. The segment was difficult, time-consuming to build due to the extraordinarily difficult volcanic terrain and was crucial for the entire canal to allow adequate water to flow to the remaining 35 miles of the 47-mile-long canal. Building this difficult segment was overcome not through novel engineering, but through a combination of large amounts of man and horse power and the deployment of a variety of typical approaches, including blasting, scraping, digging, and fluming, all of which had to be completed within a limited period set by contract with the State of Oregon. Due to the difficulty and short timeframe, this portion of the canal was originally underbuilt, and the segment was a bottleneck on the canal until 1914 and had to be relieved by expansion twice during the period of significance.

The nominated segment is a section of the Deschutes River Canal, a portion of the Deschutes Irrigation Project. It was constructed to deliver irrigation water to lands in Deschutes and Crook Counties, Oregon. The project aimed to reclaim arid lands and support agriculture in the region. The segment was underbuilt due to the challenging terrain, but it was expanded twice to meet the irrigation needs of the area. The segment is significant as it represents the engineering challenges and the human effort required to construct irrigation canals in volcanic terrain. The segment is part of a larger project that transformed a region from arid to productive agricultural land.