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NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IDWR to hold 10 public meetings to gather public input on proposed formation of ground water management area for Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer

BOISE - (July 13, 2016) – The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) has scheduled ten public meetings in late July to give informational presentations and gather public input on the proposed formation of a ground water management area for the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA).

IDWR officials are contemplating the formation of an ESPA ground water management area to address declining water levels in the ESPA and water sources that are hydraulically connected to it. Water levels in the ESPA and the water supplies dependent upon the aquifer (spring discharge) have been declining since the 1950s, leading to multiple legal water calls by entities with senior water rights.

Potentially affected water users are invited to participate in public meetings to learn more about the issue and express their views. "The water calls have led to crisis management, and IDWR would like to work toward a more comprehensive management system," said IDWR Director Gary Spackman. "Water calls are a poor way to manage the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. We are looking to find ways to manage the ESPA in a more proactive fashion."

Public meetings are scheduled in the last week of July in cities and towns located in or adjacent to the ESPA, which stretches from St. Anthony to Hagerman. Here is the schedule:

Monday, July 25 - Hailey, 8:30-11:00 a.m., Minnie Moore Room, Community Campus Building, 1050 Fox Acres Road; **Arco**, 2:30-5 p.m., Butte County High School Auditorium, 120 N. Water Street; **Mud Lake**, 7-9:30 p.m., West Jefferson High School Auditorium, 1260 East 1500 North, Terreton.

Tuesday, July 26 - Rexburg, 8:30-11:00 a.m., America Inn Lodge & Suites, 1098 Golden Beauty Dr.; **Blackfoot**, 2-4:30 p.m., Blackfoot Senior Center, 20 E. Pacific; **Pocatello**, 7-9:30 p.m., Best Western, 1415 Bench Road.

Wednesday, July 27 - Downey, 9-11:30 a.m., Marsh Valley Senior Center, 21 S. Main Street; **Malta**, 3-5:30 p.m., Raft River High School Auditorium, 55 1st West; **Burley**, 7-9 p.m., Best Western/Burley Inn & Convention Center, 800 N. Overland Road.

Thursday, July 28 - Jerome, 9-11:30 a.m., Jerome Middle School, 520 10th Avenue West.

IDWR officials are looking for input from water users on two specific questions: 1) Is the ESPA approaching a condition where there is insufficient supply to meet existing water rights? 2) If yes, what should be the boundary of the ground water management area?

"The ESPA is a vital resource to the state of Idaho," Spackman said. "Its value cannot be overstated. Unless the trend that has existed since 1952 is halted, the current declines in aquifer storage and spring discharge will continue."

IDWR officials point out that the recent historic water settlement agreement between the Surface Water Coalition and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators could become the initial basis for a long-term ground water management plan for the ESPA. Under the agreement, participating ground water users have agreed to voluntarily reduce pumping by 240,000 acre-feet annually to mitigate their impacts to Snake River and senior water right holders in the Thousand Springs region.

The Idaho Water Resource Board's strategy of "stopping the drop" of the ESPA through ground water recharge projects, cloud-seeding, conversion of ground water irrigation projects to surface water irrigation, and voluntary reduction in ground water use through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) also are expected to contribute to a sustainable management plan for the ESPA.

Cumulative Volume Change of Water Stored Within ESPA

