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Idaho Water Resource Board approves funds for two additional projects to increase capacity to Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer recharge program

IDAHO FALLS - (Aug. 2, 2017) – During its bi-monthly meeting, the Idaho Water Resource Board voted to approve \$730,000 for two new projects that will increase the capacity of the board’s managed recharge program.

One of the projects to be built in the Mid-Snake region will include new turnout structures and head gates on the Richfield-Dietrich Canal. It will add an additional 100 cfs of recharge capacity from the Big Wood and Little Wood rivers, said Wesley Hipke, recharge project manager for the board. The water will flow into a 50-acre lava basin overlying the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). The estimated project cost is \$150,000, he said.

In the Upper Snake River Valley, the board approved \$580,000 to expand the Egin Lakes recharge canal, adding 60 cfs to the capacity of the project. The board was also briefed on a status of a hydropower bypass project under development that will increase the winter-time recharge capacity in the North Side Canal by 130 cfs.

Noting that the board’s goal is to recharge an average of 250,000 acre feet of water into the ESPA each year, Hipke provided a recap from the historic winter of 2016-17 in which the board recharged a record 317,714 acre feet of water at a cost of \$2.4 million in conveyance fees to participating canal companies and irrigation districts. The entities that convey recharge flow through their canal systems and into recharge sites are compensated based on the number of days and amount of water delivered.

“We are continuing to look for new recharge partners to expand our recharge capacity and provide flexibility and redundancy in the system,” Hipke said.

The board intends to develop enough system recharge capacity to maximize recharge diversions during high water years in order to offset periods when less water is available for recharge or when recharge diversion is limited due to canal maintenance or other Snake River system operational constraints, he said. The board can reach its average annual goal 250,000 acre-feet if at least 840 cfs is recharged for 150 days. This year, the board was able to recharge for over 221 days.

“This was a perfect example of the need for enough system capacity and recharge partners to make the most of a year with abundant water supply,” Hipke said.

In a related matter, Mike McVay, water resources engineer for the Idaho Department of Water Resources, gave a presentation on the estimated change in ESPA storage volume based on ground water level measurements through March 2017. Calculations from ground water level measurements indicate an increase in aquifer storage of about 660,000 acre feet. The increase can be attributed to board managed recharge, reductions in ground water diversions and managed recharge associated with the Surface Water Coalition Settlement Agreement of 2016, as well as an exceptional water supply year.

“This is good news for the ESPA. We are pleased to see improvements in the ground water levels, but we recognize that the effort to stabilize and recover the aquifer must continue into the future and must include participation from all water users,” said board chairman Roger Chase.

In other news, the board:

- Extended the term for a loan to 10 ground water districts in the Eastern Snake Plain for two projects that will help resolve water-use conflicts on the ESPA.
- Approved a \$20,000 loan to the Goose Lake Reservoir Company to perform a structural evaluation of the Goose Lake Dam. Company officials are seeking to repair or replace the south retaining wall at the dam.
- Took a field trip to Island Park Reservoir to view shoreline properties and infrastructure. The board has hired a consultant to evaluate the potential effects of raising the water surface elevation of the reservoir. The additional water would be used to improve recreation and fishery conditions in the reservoir and river downstream, and to provide additional storage water for use in the Henrys Fork Basin, on the ESPA, or to meet minimum stream flows downstream.
- Received a presentation from the City of Idaho Falls about its water supply system. The board toured a few of the city’s water system facilities including one of its ground water wells and one of its sewage treatment plants.

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