



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Idaho Water Resource Board contact: Brian Patton, Chief, Planning Bureau, 208-287-4800

Idaho Water Resource Board tours potential route for new Mountain Home AFB water supply project, hears community support

MOUNTAIN HOME - (Sept. 22, 2017) – The Idaho Water Resource Board provided an update during its meeting in Mountain Home last week on ensuring that Mountain Home Air Force Base has a long-term, sustainable water supply.

The new \$70 million drinking water delivery and treatment system will include a pump station and pipeline to the base from C.J. Strike Reservoir. Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) experts explained that the existing water system for the base relies on ground water wells, and the aquifer beneath Mountain Home is being over-drafted by as much as 30,000 acre-feet per year by irrigation, municipal and other water users.

“Sooner or later, that trend line will hit the bottom of the aquifer, and clearly, that’s not the preferred course,” said Nathan Rowland, an engineer with Mountain Home AFB. “Successful completion of this project is critical to provide a reliable alternative water supply to the base.”

The new water system will deliver surface water from the Snake River under senior water rights purchased by the board from the J.R. Simplot Co.

Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter, the Idaho Legislature, and the Idaho Water Resource Board support the base’s mission, recognizing its \$1 billion annual economic benefit to the state. The Water Resource Board will sell revenue bonds to finance the project up front, and the Air Force will reimburse the board over time after the new water system is operational.

“If states want to support and strengthen their military bases, they have to step up to the plate,” said Jack Peterson, a former government affairs consultant for the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Idaho Department of Water Resources. “This is a win-win project for all parties involved.”

“This is our highest priority project for the long-term viability of the air force base,” added Lt. Col. Elwood Henry of Mountain Home AFB. “We want to complete it as soon as possible.”

An environmental assessment prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Mountain Home AFB is expected to be issued in October. The assessment evaluated two pipeline corridors that cross BLM land from C.J. Strike Reservoir to the base. The most direct alignment is 7.5 miles long. The other option is 14.4-miles long and located adjacent to an existing road.

The board's consultants also are evaluating the quality of Snake River water near the potential pump station to identify appropriate treatment methods. The bid process for the project is expected to begin in January 2018 and construction is expected to begin in the fall of 2018.

In other business, the Water Resource Board learned that aquifer recharge operations already have begun for the 2017-2018 winter season in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). To meet the terms of the recent water settlement between surface and ground water users in the ESPA region, Idaho Ground Water Appropriators are required to provide 50,000 acre-feet of storage water annually to the Surface Water Coalition. Given the substantial water supplies in 2017, the Surface Water Coalition chose to donate this allotment of storage water to the board for recharge in the Upper Snake River region, along with an additional 11,100 acre-feet also provided through the settlement agreement.

The board began recharge deliveries on August 30. Wesley Hipke, recharge project manager for IDWR, is coordinating recharge of the donated water and working with canal company partners to move forward with what promises to be a good recharge season. With the existing infrastructure in place in the Mid-Snake region, Hipke estimates the board could recharge about 230,000 acre-feet during the winter of 2017-2018, provided enough surplus flows are available. However, this total may increase if there is significant precipitation this winter and water is available through flood-control releases. The board's goal is to recharge an annual average of 250,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA.

In other business, the board:

- Learned that the \$300,000 Priest Lake Water Management Study is nearly complete. The last public meeting is scheduled for Friday, Sept. 22, at Priest Lake Elementary School, from 4-7 p.m. The study includes development of alternatives to maintain required lake levels and maintain current minimum river flows through improved operation of the Priest Lake Outlet Dam, increased water storage in the lake, and potential modifications to the dam. The study also will include sustainable options for improving navigability of the Priest Lake "Thorofare." A final recommendation is expected in mid-October.
- Approved the expenditure of \$5,000 to cosponsor the upcoming Spokane River Forum Conference Nov. 15-16 in Coeur d'Alene. Water board staff and northern Idaho board members will be attending the conference.
- Received an update on future water storage options in the Boise River reservoir system with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The BOR recently requested funding through the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) to complete a feasibility study to evaluate increasing water-storage capacity in Lucky Peak, Arrowrock and Anderson Ranch reservoirs. The board supports the BOR's request and will consider whether to commit the required 50 percent cost-share required by non-federal partners if the BOR's funding is approved. BOR expects to know in October if it received funding.

#####