



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board supports funding package for improving Priest Lake outlet dam, breakwater

BOISE - (Jan. 30, 2018) – The Idaho Water Resource Board has endorsed spending \$2.4 million to make several improvements to Priest Lake as recommended in a recent study.

Combined with Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter’s recommendation of spending \$2.4 million in General Fund tax dollars in fiscal 2019 on Priest Lake improvements, about \$150,000 is still needed to cover the full cost of the estimated \$5 million project, officials said after the unanimous Board vote on Friday, January 26.

In November, the Bonner County Commission approved contributing \$50,000 for the project. Idaho Water Resource Board member Dale Van Stone of Hope said he would work with the Lakes Commission, Friends of the Thorofare and Bonner County to cover the remaining cost of the project.

“We’re really close, and I think we can get there,” Van Stone said. “Maybe the county could provide some in-kind support to help ensure we have the necessary funding.”

The \$2.4 million from the Idaho Water Resource Board would be drawn from a surplus in an account that had been reserved to help ground water users convert farmland to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the Eastern Snake Plain. Legislative approval is needed to transfer the funds to the Priest Lake project, but board members did not anticipate any opposition.

“We all support the project and want to see it completed,” Board member Peter Van Der Meulen of Blaine County said.

The Water Resource Board study concluded that about \$2.4 million is needed for substantial improvements to the outlet dam at Priest Lake, including modifying and strengthening the outlet gates. Another \$2.4 million is needed to make improvements to the breakwater and Thorofare channel that connects Upper Priest Lake to main Priest Lake, the study found. The existing breakwater would be replaced to improve sediment retention, and some dredging is planned.

The improvements will enable the dam operator to increase the surface level of Priest by a few inches in dry years to ensure that there is enough water in the lake to maintain adequate flows in Priest River. Lake operations would see no changes in normal water years.

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