



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board expects to set new record with up to 370,000 acre-feet of recharge into ESPA in 2018

BOISE - (Jan. 30, 2018) – The Idaho Water Resource Board may set a new record for recharging Snake River flows into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) in the winter of 2017-18, potentially going as high as 370,000 acre-feet, officials said.

Already more than 220,000 acre-feet of recharge water has flowed into the ESPA this winter, said Wesley Hipke, recharge program manager for the Board. The Board's goal is to recharge an average of 250,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA annually to offset groundwater level declines.

"We are way ahead of schedule this year," Hipke said. "We have two-plus months left in the recharge season."

Last year, the Board sent a record 317,000 acre-feet of recharge flows into the ESPA. With funding from the Idaho Legislature, the Board's managed recharge program was expanded in 2014 to restore water levels in the ESPA, which had been over-drafted by about 200,000 acre-feet per year. The Board pays canal companies and irrigation districts to distribute Snake River water through canals and to settling basins throughout the ESPA region, allowing water to seep into the aquifer.

The board benefitted from a quick start to recharge operations in late August with a contribution of 61,100 acre-feet of surplus water from the Surface Water Coalition, Hipke said. There also has been a big surplus of water stored in Upper Snake River reservoirs, which caused the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to release more water than usual below Minidoka and Milner dams this winter.

"We've seen a significant jump this year in what we've been able to do," Hipke said.

More than 104,800 acre-feet of water has been recharged in the Upper Snake region, and more than 113,700 has been recharged in the Magic Valley region, with multiple canal companies and irrigation districts participating, he said.

In other news, the Board learned that significant progress has been made on the Mountain Home Air Force Base (MHAFB) Sustainable Water Supply Project. Randy Broesch, project manager for the Board,

reported that a water utility service contract between MHAFB and the Board will be finalized in the coming months. It calls for the Board to deliver water from the Snake River to provide a long-term source of drinking water to MHAFB, which is a significant contributor to the local and state economy and plays a vital role in national security.

Plans also call for construction of a new pipeline to convey water from C.J. Strike Reservoir to the base, where a new water-treatment plant will be built. The Water Resource Board purchased senior Snake River water rights from the J.R. Simplot Co. to make the project possible. Broesch said the U.S. Bureau of Land Management has completed an environmental assessment on the project. The Board expects to award a contract to a design-build-operator by October and deliver water to MHAFB by 2021.

Meanwhile, the Board continues its work with the Bureau of Reclamation on a feasibility study of increasing water storage and flood control capacity in three reservoirs on the Boise River system – Lucky Peak, Arrowrock and Anderson Ranch dams. Over the next year, the Bureau will focus on a technical analysis of the options, focusing on identification of significant issues or fatal flaws, said Roland Springer, manager of the Bureau’s Snake River Area Office. “We have a very solid team on board. We’re screening alternatives at the present time,” he said.

Springer said recent policy directives from Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke require federal agencies to complete environmental impact statements in one year. As a result, the Bureau intends to focus on technical data analysis and collection before initiating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, he said.

For more information about the Idaho Water Resource Board, go to <https://www.idwr.idaho.gov/IWRB/>.

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