



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board tours multiple fish-enhancement projects in the Lemhi River area, approves \$232,930 in flood management grants

SALMON - (Sept. 21, 2017) – The Idaho Water Resource Board toured two fish-conservation projects in the Lemhi River Basin that restored water flows to Bohannon Creek and Big Timber Creek to allow Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout to spawn in those streams for the first time in nearly a century.

Using funding from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), the board implements the “Water Transactions Program” in the Upper Salmon River Basin, a program that allows for changing the point of diversion on streams for existing irrigation projects while enhancing fish habitat at the same time.

The board partners with the Idaho Governor’s Office of Species Conservation (OSC), among other agencies, to complete projects that restore water to the creeks to improve fish habitat for imperiled fish runs while protecting the local agricultural community, said Amy Cassel, coordinator of the Water Transactions Program for the board.

The Water Transactions Program also supports Idaho’s interest in improving flow conditions for Chinook salmon and steelhead, which are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Projects often involve changing the water diversion location from small tributary creeks to the larger Lemhi River, while also covering the costs of irrigation pumping, Cassel explained in the tour.

On Big Timber Creek, the board entered into 20-year contracts with two irrigators to move their points of diversion to restore 5.9 cubic feet per second of flow into the creek, and to allow fish to move through the previously de-watered section of the creek to reach spawning and rearing habitat upstream, Cassel said. The contracts include payment of new pumping costs, accomplished with funding from the BPA.

On Bohannon Creek, the board worked with two water users to change their points of diversion from Bohannon Creek to the Lemhi River under a 20-year contract that will sustain a flow of 5.58 cfs in the creek to benefit steelhead and Chinook salmon. The board’s portion of the project was also funded by the BPA, she said.

“For over 100 years, 150 years, there was no water in Big Timber Creek at this time of year,” said Leadore rancher Merrill Beyeler, who participated in the tour. “As ranchers, we wanted to look at some

ways to reconnect these tributaries to the main stem of the Lemhi River. I think that was a great win not only for ranching but for our environment. It's one of those things that makes you smile inside."

The board has also worked with the BPA and OSC to fund multiple stream-connect projects over the last decade. But Cassel said the low-hanging fruit has been picked, and future projects will be more complex and expensive. In addition, BPA Fish and Wildlife funding may get reduced in the future because of increasing costs for addressing main-stem dam impacts on threatened salmon and steelhead, she said.

Overall, Jeff Deluccia of Idaho Fish and Game commended the board for being a great partner in fish-conservation in the Upper Salmon River Basin. "The board's Water Transactions program has been vital in restoring fish habitat in the Lemhi River Basin," he said. "Many of these projects are complex with multiple partners playing an important role. We really appreciate your proactive work and your partnership in these in fish-conservation projects."

In a related matter, the board heard from members of the Lemhi Irrigation District regarding the importance of maintaining a longstanding practice of diverting high-water in the springtime to sub-irrigate pasturelands along the course of the Lemhi River to benefit surface water levels in the Lemhi River, fisheries and pasturelands, officials said.

In other action, the board voted to approve \$232,930 in flood-management grants to four different entities statewide, as recommended by the board's Finance Committee. Applicants were required to provide at least a 50 percent match and begin work by November 2018. The grant amounts were as follows:

- \$115,460 to the Nez Perce Soil & Water Conservation District and Nez Perce County to fix an erosion choke-point along Bear Creek next to a road that provides the only access to the community of Peck. The total cost of that project is \$556,681.
- \$85,340 to the Twin Falls Canal Company for a \$591,800 project that will reduce flood-damage to residential properties downstream of the East Perrine Coulee.
- \$26,105 to the City of Pocatello to implement a \$70,000 streambank stabilization and flow-control project along a 300-foot section of Pocatello Creek in Pocatello.
- \$6,025 to Riverside Village in Garden City to repair a damaged diversion structure. The total cost of that project is \$15,980.

In other action, the board:

- Voted to approve a 30-year Right-of-Way (ROW) secured from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a 14.4-mile water pipeline that will run from C.J. Strike Reservoir to the Mountain Home Air Force Base (MHAFB). The pipeline will be constructed as part of the MHAFB Sustainable Water Supply Project, which will provide a new long-term source of water to the base. The BLM completed an environmental assessment and identified a viable alignment for the pipeline which crosses inside the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). As part of the approved BLM ROW, the board agreed to provide a one-time \$58,129 mitigation payment to the Birds of Prey NCA Partnership in Kuna. Securing the ROW and pipeline corridor was a critical step in the project's development.
- Heard a presentation from the Idaho representatives in the Columbia River Basin Partnership Task Force, a group of stakeholders within the Columbia River Basin assigned to develop a

wholistic recovery plan for imperiled salmon and steelhead runs in the Pacific Northwest. Board members were supportive of the Task Force's progress and representation of Idaho's interests in the process.

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