

Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer Comprehensive Management Plan Funding Mechanisms

January 16, 2009

The Idaho Water Resource Board was tasked and funded by the Idaho Legislature in 2007 to develop and submit a comprehensive plan to manage the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA). The Board has been working through an Advisory Committee to create a plan and is on schedule to submit a plan to the 2009 legislature as required in the authorizing legislation. The overarching foundation of the proposed plan which should be submitted for legislative action, February 1, is that water supply and demand for the ESPA are currently out of balance and that specific targeted actions need to be taken in order to provide for current and future water needs.

The plan sets forth specific management strategies and includes short and long term targets for change. The plan also proposes a multi-pronged approach to funding for the short term efforts which are estimated to require \$7,000,000 to \$10,000,000 per year for a 10 year period. The funding is needed mainly for various capital projects and water acquisition associated with the proposed strategies. What the plan does not include are specific mechanisms needed to collect the necessary funding from the various water user entities. The approach identified in the plan is to allocate funding contribution amounts to the water user groups. The user groups and annual contribution targets are:

1. Irrigated Agriculture - \$3,000,000 (based on \$2,000,000 from ground water users and \$1,000,000 from surface water users, acreage amounts about equal for both at about 1,000,000 acres)
2. Power Companies-\$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000
3. Municipalities - \$700,000
4. Spring Users - \$200,000
5. Industrial/Commercial - \$150,000
6. State of Idaho - \$3,000,000
7. Federal - opportunistic, no target
8. Recreation/conservation – opportunistic, no target

In order to provide more specific recommendations regarding the funding mechanisms the Water Board formed an advisory sub-committee. The sub-committee has determined that voluntary participation would not be successful and the mechanisms need to be mandatory. At this time the sub-committee has identified two options that hold the greatest promise. Option one is through the formation of a separate water conservancy or water management district that has taxing authority to collect the necessary funds. Option two is for the Idaho Legislature to establish necessary legislative authority to the counties for the collection of the funds by the county assessors to be provided to the Water Board. Both options would require legislation to provide the necessary authorities.