



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Board approves funds for Mountain Home aquifer study; two ground water conservation grants in the Blaine County area

BOISE - (Jan. 26, 2016) – The Idaho Water Resource Board has unanimously approved spending \$65,000 on a water supply study of the Mountain Home Aquifer and Elmore County area. Both surface and ground water supplies for the community have been running short.

The Elmore County Water Supply Study was supported by the Elmore County Commission, Mountain Home Air Force Base, Mountain Home Irrigation District, local legislators and the City of Mountain Home. Elmore County is contributing \$44,000 to the \$109,000 study.

"This means a lot to us," Elmore County Commissioner Bud Corbus said after last Friday's decision at the Board's regular bimonthly meeting. "We have to do something. We rely heavily on the Mountain Home Irrigation District, and they've seen a steady decline in well levels from the Mountain Home Aquifer. We need to find a way to recharge the aquifer."

The study by SPF Engineering will evaluate water demand from all types of use, quantify water supply deficits, determine the economic benefits of improving water supplies to meet demands, and estimate the approximate costs of developing additional water supplies to achieve sustainability.

"We wanted to recommend a course of action that lays out a road map for the future," said Brian Patton, chief of the Planning Bureau for the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

The Water Resource Board approved two ground water conservation grants on Friday – an \$18,000 grant to the City of Hailey for implementing a water conservation rebate program, and a \$12,212 grant to the Sun Valley Elkhorn Association for implementing a "smart irrigation" system at the Harker Center. Both grants require a two-for-one local funding match.

Under the new rebate program, the City of Hailey will offer a minimum of 20, \$2,000 rebates to applicants for removing turf and replacing it with landscaping materials requiring little or no water, such as drought-tolerant plants and xeriscaping. Rebates will be issued for up to half of the total cost up to \$3 per square foot. The overall goal is reducing irrigation demand in Hailey. About 70 percent of water consumption in Hailey comes from watering lawns and irrigation. The city's water system is fully metered; city leaders have been working on reducing water demand for about ten years.

These were the first two grants to be approved under a new Ground Water Conservation Grants program launched by the Water Resource Board in 2015. The first cycle of grant applications were due in December. A total of \$200,000 was

set aside for the program statewide to conserve ground water. Individual grant applications can range from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

Since only \$30,212 has been spent from the grant fund so far, the board expects to reopen the ground water conservation grant program again this spring for more applications. "These proposals were very complete, and they're an excellent kick off to this grant program," said Water Resource Board member Jeff Raybould of St. Anthony.

In other action, the Water Resource Board:

- Approved a \$100,000 loan requested by the Outlet Water Association at Priest Lake to drill a second well, improve an access road to the well site, enlarge the water supply line and upgrade the power station. It is a 20-year loan at 3.5-percent interest. The Outlet Water Association provides water to 88 residences and a Forest Service campground in the Outlet Bay area of Priest Lake.
- Approved spending up to \$95,000 to create an enhanced predictive tool for tracking surface water flows on the Snake River in the mid-Snake region and at the Murphy water gauge in particular, just downstream from Swan Falls Dam. Minimum flows of 3,900 cubic feet per second at the Murphy gauge April 1-October 31, and 5,600 cfs November 1-March 31 are required as part of the Swan Falls Agreement with Idaho Power Company.
- Received a briefing from Department of Water Resources' staff about water quality and water quantity monitoring of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. The Board approved \$200,000 last year to improve monitoring of groundwater levels in the ESPA. Two staff members have been hired to work on that effort. The hydrologists are tracking the amount of water being recharged into the ESPA as well as water quality at recharge sites. "We are using cutting-edge technology to monitor water quality at recharge sites and consider this to be a critical part of the recharge program," said Neal Farmer, special projects coordinator for IDWR.
- In reaction to Gov. Otter's announcement Monday that he increased the Executive Budget request for FY 2017 to accelerate funding for recharge of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer and water sustainability projects, Water Resource Board Chairman Roger Chase said, "The governor's and the Legislature's efforts to ensure that Idaho's water needs are met today and into the future are monumental. Future generations of Idahoans will look at this effort to sustain and protect Idaho's future water needs as one of the state's most important water decisions."

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