



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A&B Irrigation District completes pumping station and pipeline to reduce ground water withdrawals from Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer; new interest in CREP to reduce pumping from the ESPA

BOISE - (March 25, 2016) - Contractors worked "fast and furious" over the winter months to build 19 miles of pipeline and a new pumping station next to the Milner Pool to deliver surface water this growing season to 1,500 acres of farm land near Burley currently served with ground water, officials with the A&B Irrigation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service said recently.

In a briefing to the Idaho Water Resource Board, A&B District Manager Dan Temple said contractors worked at "lightning speed" to get the pipeline and pumping plant built in only six months time. The project will serve 6,000 acres of farm land in Minidoka County north of the Snake River. Approximately 4,500 acres in the project area are already served by surface water.

Project funding was provided from multiple sources. The NRCS contributed \$3.8 million to 29 producers in the A&B Irrigation District through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill. The NRCS also provided technical assistance in the form of project design and engineering. The Water Resource Board approved a \$7 million loan to the district to cover project costs, which was backed by a \$7 million bond passed by the District's water users.

The A&B Irrigation District is a federal irrigation project under the Bureau of Reclamation which added to the complexity of the project. No new water rights were required. The new pipeline was developed to help address the significant ground water level declines in the A&B District area, Temple said. "Now we're on the right path to get this situation turned around."

Beyond a reduction in pumping from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA), the project may have benefits for aquifer recharge, Temple said. The A&B district plans to drill injection wells in the project area to "recharge water back into the aquifer when water is available in the shoulder seasons."

Water Resource Board Member Vince Alberdi of Kimberly noted that he toured the project last week and was impressed with the results. "You did a great job," he told Temple and NRCS officials.

Added Jeff Raybould, Water Resource Board member from the Rexburg area, "My hats off to you. That's pretty incredible to get the project done that quickly."

In other action, the Water Resource Board learned that interest in a Farm Service Agency program called the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is receiving more attention from farmers in light of the new settlement agreement between ground water users and surface water users, said Chuck Pentzer, CREP coordinator for the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The CREP program is designed to take marginal farm land out of production in the Snake River Plain.

There are currently 155 contracts enrolled in the Idaho CREP, covering 16,533 acres in the ESPA area, Pentzer said. Any acres enrolled in CREP reduce ground water irrigation use, which is part of the goal of the water settlement agreement.

"If we were to get an additional 33,000 acres enrolled in CREP, that would yield 67,000 acre-feet of savings," Pentzer said, noting that this would help ground water pumpers meet the obligation to reduce consumptive use by 240,000 acre-feet under the agreement.

The Idaho Ground Water Appropriators are supportive of more CREP enrollments and would like to seek an increase in CREP payments to more closely align with commodity prices, executive director Lynn Tominaga told the Water Resource Board . "We'd like to get more people into the program," he said.

In other action, the Water Resource Board :

- Received an update on ESPA recharge in the winter of 2015-2016: More than 60,000 acre-feet of water has been recharged into the ESPA so far this year. The recharge season is winding down as irrigation season approaches in April.
- Approved several projects under the Idaho Water Transactions Program to benefit native fish, Chinook salmon and steelhead in five streams, Badger Creek on the Teton River, Pole Creek on the Salmon River, Bohannon Creek on the Lemhi River, Little Mud Creek on the Pahsimeroi River, and Pratt Creek on the Lemhi River.

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