



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Idaho Water Resource Board contact: Cynthia Bridge Clark or Brian Patton, 208-287-4800

Idaho Water Resource Board approves \$300,000 for feasibility study of Priest Lake Outlet Dam; \$90,000 for Lewiston deep aquifer investigation

BOISE - (March 25, 2016) - The Idaho Water Resource Board voted unanimously to approve two studies in northern Idaho during its board meeting on Friday – a \$300,000 feasibility study on the Priest Lake Outlet Dam and breakwater structure, and a \$90,000 study of a deep aquifer in the Lewiston area.

Following a hot and dry summer in northern Idaho, limited water supplies resulted in severely low flows in Priest River, making it difficult to maintain water levels in Priest Lake. Idaho Water Resource Board officials want to look for ways to preserve adequate flows in the river to support a healthy ecosystem while maintaining State-mandated lake levels during the summer recreation season.

"Especially after the experience we had last year, we need a little cushion," said Dale Van Stone, a Water Resource Board member from the Panhandle community of Hope. "Last year was an eye-opener."

The proposed studies will evaluate potential changes in operations and improvements to the outlet dam structure and support Bonner County's efforts to evaluate the 1,400-foot-long breakwater structure on the north end of the lake, protecting the Priest Lake "Thorofare."

State law requires the lake to be maintained at a level of three feet on the outlet gauge or 2,434.6 feet above sea level throughout the summer months. Water Resource Board members would like to see if it is possible to manage available water supplies through automation of the dam, storage of additional water and improved measurement. The objective is maintaining lake levels that are critical to the economy of the area and sustaining and enhancing Priest River flows below the dam.

The study will evaluate alternatives for modifying the dam and its operations and will address potential impacts and benefits to landowners. The effort will be coordinated with Bonner County, the Lakes Commission and other stakeholders, and public meetings will be held to get citizen input on any changes being evaluated.

In other action, the Water Resource Board approved a \$90,000 study to further investigate the Lewiston Deep Aquifer, a regional underground source of water for human consumption, agriculture and municipal uses. The Department of Water Resources designated the Lewiston Plateau Ground Water Management Area in 2013 in response to declines in the shallow aquifer. A management plan for the aquifer was approved in March 2015. But Dale Ralston of Ralston Hydrologic Services said more research is needed to understand the extent and sustainable level of withdrawal from the deep aquifer.

Ralston suspects that the Snake River may recharge the deeper aquifer, but more investigation is needed, he said.

Ralston said the shallow aquifer in the Lewiston area is overtaxed and any new wells or development proposals need to tap into the deep aquifer, which ranges from 660 to 750 feet deep or more.

"We need this study," Nez Perce County Commissioner Doug Zenner said. "We don't know how we should look at water supply issues or new development proposals without knowing more about the deep aquifer. We've had a number of calls from farmers about their well levels dropping."

Ralston Hydrologic Services will conduct the study along with the Nez Perce Tribe and the University of Idaho.

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