



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board approves funds to install a new stream flow gage on the Priest River below the outlet dam on Priest Lake

BOISE - (Nov. 3, 2016) - The Idaho Water Resource Board voted to approve \$17,000 for the installation and operation of a new stream flow gage on the Priest River directly below the Priest Lake outlet dam on Wednesday as part of its regular bi-monthly meeting in Boise.

A \$7,500 FEMA grant will help with initial equipment costs and the cost of operating the gage in the future will be shared with the U.S. Geological Survey. The new gage will be installed in November, said Cynthia Bridge Clark, Water Projects Section Manager for IDWR, so stream flow data will be available during the next water season.

The gage will measure the amount of water discharged from Priest Lake into Priest River. It will help water managers balance statutory requirements to maintain specific lake levels during the summer while providing enough flow in Priest River to maintain fish and aquatic life. Previously, the closest stream flow gage on the Priest River was located about 45 miles downstream from the dam.

In other action, the Water Board is predicting over 100,000 acre-feet of water will be recharged into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) during the winter of 2016-2017. The actual amount will be based on available river flow and snowpack levels this winter, officials said.

Wesley Hipke, Recharge Project Manager for the Idaho Department of Water Resources, gave an update on ESPA recharge activities planned for this winter, as well as a progress report on recharge infrastructure projects currently under construction and under development. "Our target is to recharge 108,000 acre-feet of water if everything comes together," he said. "If things go well, we could beat that number."

The Water Board began recharge flows about 10 days ago after its water right for recharge came into priority on Oct. 25. The target flow represents an increase from last year's recharge flow of about

68,000 acre-feet. The long-term goal is to recharge 250,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA to help restore aquifer levels.

All of the recharge water this winter is expected to occur on Mid-Snake projects, Hipke said. The reservoirs in the Upper Snake River system are very low, so the board is not expecting surplus water to be available for recharge in the Upper Snake.

The Water Board also passed a resolution adopting a new Sustainability policy that will be added to the State Water Plan. The Sustainability Policy was adopted by the board after it held a series of public meetings around the state, during which a total of 120 public comments were received, including 58 oral comments in public meetings.

“The governor urged us to do this and involve the public throughout the state,” said Jeff Raybould, board vice-chair from the St. Anthony area. “It puts into place a lot of concepts that the Water Board has incorporated all along.”

In public meetings, the board heard comments from the public about balancing water consumptive use with the needs of fish, wildlife, recreation and water quality. Those items were addressed in the sustainability policy, which also protects existing property rights and water rights. The Sustainability Policy will be forwarded to Gov. Butch Otter and the Idaho Legislature for consideration in the 2017 session.

In other action, the Water Board:

- Adopted updated criteria for the award of ground water conservation grants. There is \$200,000 available for ground water conservation grants through April 1, 2017. Applicants can request up to \$20,000 for projects and \$10,000 for studies that lead to ground water conservation projects. Matching funds are required. For more information, go to <https://www.idwr.idaho.gov/WaterBoard/Financial%20program/Financial.htm>
- Received an update on the installation of surface water measurement devices in Water District #02 on the Snake River between Milner Dam and Swan Falls Dam. The project was funded by WaterSmart grants via the Bureau of Reclamation and by water users. Installation was completed in September 2016. “You’ve done a great job on this in a short amount of time,” said board member Vince Alberdi of Twin Falls. “A big component of managing water use is water measurement.”
- Approved funds for a Treasure Valley Recharge Feasibility Study. The Idaho Legislature directed the Water Board to conduct the study to assist in addressing aquifer stabilization and sustainability issues within the Treasure Valley. The study will look at the potential of utilizing recharge of surplus water as a water management tool throughout the Treasure Valley. The study is expected to go out to bid in November.

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