



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Idaho Water Resource Board contact: Brian Patton, Chief, Planning Bureau, 208-287-4800

Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer figures to get 280,000 acre-feet of water recharge this winter

BOISE - (Nov. 10, 2017) – The Idaho Water Resource Board heard this week that about 280,000 acre-feet of water is expected to be recharged into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) this winter. That's on top of more than 90,000 acre-feet of recharge since the end of August.

"We're off to a roaring start this year," Wesley Hipke, recharge program manager for the board, told the Water Resource Board on Wednesday. "We're doing better than we have in previous years at this time of year."

The Board's goal is 250,000 acre-feet of recharge annually into the ESPA. Last year, an extraordinarily wet winter enabled the recharge of more than 317,000 acre-feet of water. Recharge flows are intended to restore ground water levels in the ESPA, which has been declining over the decades.

More than 60,000 acre-feet of this year's total comes from a donation of water by the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) with most of the water being recharged in the Upper Snake River Valley. A recent water settlement between the SWC and ground water users also will help restore aquifer levels by reducing ground water pumping by 240,000 acre-feet per year.

Hipke said winter conditions such as ice in canals and other unforeseen issues can have an impact on delivery of recharge flows. To help offset those impacts and provide maximum flexibility to deliver all the water available, the board is working on adding capacity to the recharge program in multiple locations throughout the Eastern Snake Plain region.

In other business, the Resource Water Board endorsed recommendations of the Priest Lake Study and voted to proceed with improvements "if and when funding and legislative approval becomes available."

The Lakes Commission in northern Idaho also endorsed the study's recommendations. It is expected to cost about \$5 million to raise the summer level of the lake by 3-6 inches, make sustainable improvements to the Thorofare between Upper Priest Lake and Priest Lake, and enhance the outlet dam structure.

"The board's support will allow the Idaho Legislature to move forward with funding some portion of the project," said Board member Dale Van Stone of Priest Lake. Bonner County and the Idaho Water Resource Board also may contribute to the project, he said.

“I appreciate the Board’s endorsement of these important projects and their ongoing recognition of the state’s statutory responsibilities on Priest Lake and Priest River,” said State Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint. “We will be working diligently to try to find the funds and legislative support to help with the needed work.”

The Board also heard a status update from Idaho Department of Water Resources Deputy Director Mat Weaver about the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in Idaho, a program that has more than 8,000 enrollees insuring structures worth more than \$2.1 billion in the state.

Due to a conflict between state law and federal law regarding the “operation, maintenance and repair” of canals and flood ways, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has threatened to suspend the NFIP in Idaho, Weaver said.

Weaver, IDWR Director Gary Spackman and Paul Arrington, director of the Idaho Water Users Association, traveled to Seattle to meet with FEMA officials to discuss the issue. “We had a good meeting,” Weaver said. “We came away with assurances that FEMA would not surprise us with a letter suspending the NFIP program, and that they would give us fair warning if they intended to do so.”

A group of multiple stakeholders has been meeting in Idaho to resolve FEMA’s concerns about the practices used by canal companies, flood control districts and local governments to clean up debris on river banks and in canals. The group is preparing a document proposing solutions for FEMA’s consideration, Weaver said. “We’re attempting to put sideboards on maintenance guidelines,” he said.

In other action, the board:

- Selected three companies from a Request for Qualifications solicitation regarding a new \$70 million water pipeline and drinking water system for Mountain Home Air Force Base. The companies were CH2M Hill, McMillen Jacobs, and RSCI, all of which have offices in Boise. The design, engineering and construction companies will be asked to respond to an RFP in early 2018 to build the new pipeline and water-treatment plant, and then operate the facility upon completion.
- Affirmed that it “will not accept injury to its Big Wood River Basin minimum stream flow water rights by the sale or rental of water through the board’s Water Supply Bank.”
- Approved a \$20,000 loan to the Eagle-based Evans Water Corporation to upgrade its water system, including the replacement of a 1,000-gallon water storage tank. The water corporation serves 37 residences in Eagle.
- Received information about multiple projects underway in the Upper Salmon River area intended to benefit local landowners and ESA-listed salmon, steelhead and bull trout. Projects are located on tributary streams throughout the basin, including Knapp Creek, Bohannon Creek, Big Timber Creek, Morgan Creek, the Lemhi River and Goat Creek.

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