



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board expects to recharge 524,000 acre-feet into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer in winter 2017-18

BOISE - (May 22, 2018) – Idaho Water Resource Board officials estimate they will reach a new record of 524,000 acre-feet of water flowing into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) by the end of the winter 2017-18 recharge season – more than double the annual recharge goal of 250,000 acre-feet.

The Water Resource Board set a record with 317,000 acre-feet of recharge flows into the ESPA last year. The Board had recharged approximately 520,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA with about a week remaining in the recharge season, said Wesley Hipke, the Board's recharge program manager.

As of last week, the Board worked with irrigation districts and canal companies in the Upper Snake River region to recharge 235,275 acre-feet of water into the ESPA, as well as 278,184 acre-feet in the Magic Valley area.

Hipke said surplus water in the Upper Snake reservoir system and additional recharge site capacity developed by the Board and its partners has led to a very successful recharge season. The average recharge flow throughout the season this winter was 1,021 cubic feet per second, compared to 641 cfs last year – a 59-percent increase.

"You've done a great job for us," Board Chairman Roger Chase told Hipke. "We also really appreciate our partnerships with the canal companies and irrigation districts. Their cooperation and support have been absolutely vital to the success of the recharge program."

Because of the record recharge season, the Board voted to increase the budget to pay recharge partners up to a total of \$4.7 million for the winter of 2017-18. The Board had budgeted \$2.5 million based on the previous recharge season. Each canal company and irrigation district gets paid on an acre-foot basis for assisting the Board with recharging the ESPA. The recharge program is aimed at restoring the ESPA to sustainable levels after many years of over-drafting the aquifer by about 200,000 acre-feet per year.

In other action, the Board approved the FY 2019 Secondary Aquifer Planning, Management and Implementation Fund budget of \$17.8 million, including \$4.3 million for ESPA recharge operations; \$6.9 million for ESPA recharge infrastructure projects; \$1.8 million for Treasure Valley water projects; \$75,000 for water projects in the Camas Prairie; \$380,000 for water projects in the Big Lost River Basin; \$100,000 for the Palouse Basin; \$250,000 for the Bear River Basin, and \$2 million for other statewide water projects including aquifer monitoring and cloud-seeding.

The Board also approved three projects in its Water Transactions Program to benefit anadromous fish in the Upper Salmon River Basin. The first project, on Bohannon Creek, a tributary of the Lemhi River, pays ranchers \$1.3 million for increased irrigation-pumping costs over 20 years to change the point of diversion to the river, leaving more water in the creek for steelhead, salmon and resident fish. The second project on Big Timber Creek, a tributary of the Lemhi River, moves the point of diversion to the river, leaving more water in the creek for fish while paying water users \$117,937 for increased irrigation-pumping costs over 20 years. The third project involves buying a water right on Knapp Creek for \$775,322 related to the conservation purchase of a 159-acre ranch in the Stanley area. Knapp Creek is tributary to the Middle Fork Salmon River and supports wild steelhead and salmon. Funds for the transactions come from the Bonneville Power Administration and the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund.

In other action, the Board:

- Approved \$100,000 to work on modeling studies with the Utah Division of Water Resources related to a joint water-rights filing for water storage in Bear Lake.
- Received a presentation about a proposed \$18 million, 25-mile pipeline from the Snake River to the Raft River area to improve water supplies for Raft River ground water users and potentially recharge the Raft River aquifer. The Raft River aquifer has been over-drafted by at least 36,000 to 120,000 acre-feet per year, officials said. A team of water users behind the proposal indicated they would apply to use Snake River surface water for the project that would be junior – and therefore subordinate – to existing water rights. An environmental analysis will be prepared in the next year by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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