



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Idaho Water Resource Board lauds ESPA cities settlement agreement that contributes 7,650 acre-feet annually to help restore the ESPA

BOISE - (Jan. 31, 2019) – Idaho Water Resource Board officials lauded a recent agreement signed by 16 cities located in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region at its regular board meeting last week. In the agreement, the cities committed to contributing an average of 7,650 acre-feet of mitigation water to the board’s ESPA managed recharge program on an annual basis to do their part to restore the aquifer to sustainable levels.

Similar to the historic water settlement agreement forged between the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators (IGWA), the agreement with the cities was mediated by House Speaker Scott Bedke. All 16 cities signed the agreement in December. The terms of the agreement were presented to the board on Friday, including commitment by the cities to donate water to the board for the ESPA recharge program and compensate the board for managing its recharge water.

Cities participating in the agreement include Bliss, Burley, Carey, Declo, Gooding, Hazelton, Heyburn, Idaho Falls, Jerome, Paul, Pocatello, Richfield, Rupert, Shoshone and Wendell.

The City of Pocatello will administer the cities’ recharge water program through its water right in Palisades Reservoir, officials said. Each participating city will report the amount of water pumped from the ESPA to the board annually, said Candice McHugh, an attorney representing the cities.

The agreement is fair, and it provides room for all of the cities in the ESPA region to grow, McHugh said. Contributing 7,650 acre-feet per year is “very doable,” she said. The cities encourage the board to use the cities’ recharge water where it will be most beneficial, she said. The agreement also gives the cities safe harbor from any future legal water delivery calls. Other cities are welcome to join the group as time goes on, she said.

“We are really encouraged that the cities have come up with this plan. We are pleased to work with them on ESPA recharge,” said Water Board Chairman Roger Chase.

Chase also encouraged the cities to conserve water and create water-metering programs where that does not occur at the present time.

In related action, the board received an update on its ESPA managed recharge program for the winter of 2018-19. The projected recharge amount for the winter is expected to be about 190,000 acre-feet, said Wesley Hipke, recharge project manager for the board.

The board is not expected to reach its annual goal of 250,000 acre-feet of water because of construction and maintenance issues on participating canals that typically wheel the water to ESPA recharge basins, Hipke said. But there is a chance the increased flows may be available later in the winter, depending on precipitation and reservoir releases.

In other action, the board learned that it rented 70,000 acre-feet of water from the Water Supply Bank in 2018 to 103 water users throughout the state, according to staff. The top five basins from which water was rented were: the Snake River Basin between Milner Dam to the Murphy Gage, Henrys Fork, Blackfoot River, Raft River and Big Wood River. The board's Water Bank allows water users with surplus water to lease water to the bank, and then the board rents the water to water users who need extra water.

#####