



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board tours Lower Clearwater Water Exchange collaborative project with the Nez Perce Tribe

LEWISTON - (May 15, 2019) – The Idaho Water Resource Board toured the Lower Clearwater Water Exchange collaborative project during its bimonthly meeting here. Board members were impressed with the outcome of the project, which provides sustainable water flows to the Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District (LOID) and restores sustainable water flows to Sweetwater Creek for the Nez Perce Tribe, endangered steelhead runs and resident fish.

Historically, LOID relied on an elaborate system of small dams, storage reservoirs and canals in the Sweetwater Creek Basin for its water. A new 1,900 ground water well was drilled 2015 to provide an alternative source of water for LOID and the 18,000 patrons it serves, leaving natural flows in Sweetwater Springs and the Sweetwater Creek watershed on Craig Mountain for the Nez Perce Tribe and the fish runs. Drilling of a second deep-water well is planned in the coming weeks.

“As a member of the Idaho Water Resource Board, I was pleased to show the board the community-wide collaboration for the Lower Clearwater Water Exchange Project,” said Jo Ann Cole-Hansen. “The project has grown from embattled discussions to cooperative and engaged partners seeking solutions that truly work to meet the needs of the community.”

The project has been running smoothly for two years, LOID and Nez Perce Tribe officials said.

“It’s a great relationship,” said Bobby Hills, a fisheries biologist with the Nez Perce Tribe. “We were glad to be able to give the Water Board members a tour of the project. It went very well.”

The collaborative effort also includes the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the City of Lewiston, Nez Perce County, and the Lewis-Clark Valley Chamber of Commerce.

“Today, we’ve got a well-oiled machine,” said Jerry Klemm, a Lewiston resident who brought divergent interests together to solve a water conflict between LOID and the tribes. “I’m really proud of how people are going together on this.”

The board tour started at Lake Waha, which feeds Sweetwater Springs and Sweetwater Creek. It then visited Sweetwater Springs and finished at the location of a proposed channel to be constructed adjacent to Lapwai Creek. The proposed project is intended provide recreational opportunities and improve fish and wildlife habitat. The tribe is in the process of filing to a water right to support the

channel project, which is located next to a Long House the tribe is constructing for spiritual gatherings and ceremonies.

“I heard board members say they thought our water right application was smart and creative,” Hills said.

In other action, the board received an update from the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee, regarding plans to address a long-term decline in the Palouse Basin Aquifer. The committee has been holding public outreach meetings to gather feedback from the community on various water supply alternatives. Next year, the committee is expected to come before the board with a project proposal and request for funding.

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