



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IDWR issues curtailment order to Eastern Snake Plain ground water users for 2019 irrigation season

BOISE - (June 13, 2019) - The Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) has issued a curtailment order predicting a 15,850 acre-foot shortfall will occur to water users with senior priority surface water rights in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region in the 2019 irrigation season.

The predicted shortfall means that certain ground water users may be subject to curtailment during the irrigation season if they are not already participating in – or are not in compliance with – an approved mitigation plan. A list of the junior users who are not participating in a mitigation plan indicates that approximately 85 water users may face curtailment.

The IDWR curtailment order states that junior ground water users with priority dates of April 12, 1994, will be subject to curtailment, and enlargement water rights with priority dates of March 14, 1971, will be subject to curtailment in the ESPA region, if they are not already participating in an approved mitigation plan.

Currently, there are six approved mitigation plans for the ESPA surface water delivery call. These plans benefit members of the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc. (IGWA), A&B Irrigation District, Southwest and Goose Creek Irrigation Districts, and certain cities referred to as the "Participating Cities."

"By law, we have to keep people with senior water rights whole, and we need to notify affected junior ground water pumpers that despite the recent historic settlement agreements between the Surface Water Coalition, IGWA, and the Participating Cities, if an affected junior ground water pumper is not already participating in an approved mitigation plan they will be curtailed this year," said Mathew Weaver, Deputy Director of IDWR.

Much water litigation has resulted over conflicts between Snake River surface water users who have senior water rights under the basic principal of Idaho water law — first in time, first in right — and ground water users with junior water rights in the ESPA. Consequently, the Director of IDWR is required to issue an order at the beginning of the irrigation season, determining any shortfall in water supply to

the senior surface water right holders, and determining the obligations of junior ground water pumpers to curtail water use or mitigate for depletions to water users with senior priority water rights.

Overall, the water conflicts have arisen because water levels in the ESPA have been declining since the 1950s. Declining aquifer levels have affected spring flows and surface water flows in the Snake River, particularly in the Blackfoot to Milner reach of the Snake River and the Thousand Springs region near Hagerman.

Although ground water levels have partially recovered due to state-sponsored recharge, ground water pumping reductions, and ample water years, aquifer water levels have not yet recovered to levels necessary to avoid conjunctive management. As a result, IDWR will predict shortfalls to the senior surface water right holders even in years such as 2019 , when federal storage reservoir operators forecast near-normal runoff and full reservoir supplies. The April 1 joint forecast prepared by the United States Bureau of Reclamation and the United States Army Corps of Engineers predicted 3.2 million acre-feet of runoff from April to July at the Heise gauge of the Snake River, which is 99 percent of normal.

The mitigation plans of IGWA and the Participating Cities allows participating ground water users to avoid curtailment this year and in the future, as well as avoid future litigation issues related to water use in the ESPA area that could affect cities, commerce, industry, agriculture and the Southern Idaho economy.

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