

Water Supply Committee Meeting: February 13, 2015

Comments regarding drought in Idaho/David Hoekema, Hydrologist, IDWR

- 1) The “red kidney bean” in the central Snake River Plain has been removed. The region it covers is irrigated by the North Side Canal Company and the King Hill Irrigation District. There are no water limitations in either region at this time. Perhaps, since this region contains the stretch of the Snake River that affects the Swan Falls minimum flow it was labeled as drought, since that minimum flow is being approached and the only solution to maintaining the flow will be mitigation or curtailment. However, mitigation for the Swan Falls minimum flow is not likely to occur within the immediate region. The mitigation would likely mostly affect irrigators upstream of King Hill (predominately groundwater pumpers).
- 2) The Owyhee Basin has been experiencing one of the most severe droughts in their history. In the absence of a good storm system, this basin is not likely to recover from drought this year as their carryover storage in the reservoir was heavily depleted last year. However, the Owyhee basin is very flashy and conditions can change quickly. The boundary of the Extreme Drought was moved east to incorporate the land irrigated by the Owyhee Reservoir. Alternatively, across the Snake River from Oregon, things are looking great for the Boise and Payette basins. There are currently no concerns of drought as far as I am aware.
- 3) The southern fringe of the Snake River Basin, irrigated from the Snake River is looking to have a good irrigation year. Reservoir Storage is higher than normal and snowpack is near the median of the last 30 years (1981-2010).
- 4) However, the hills south of the Snake River, which have a near median snowpack contain a number of severely depleted reservoirs that need above average runoff to recover from the last couple of years of drought.
- 5) I’ve shown the Southwest Irrigation District and the groundwater irrigated region of and around the A&B Irrigation District as being in Severe Drought. Groundwater depths have been plummeting with no sign of recovery for over a decade. While not an “extreme” crisis yet, this is a region of significant concern. Unless the groundwater conditions are stabilized I would keep this region under the label of at least moderate drought, but would feel more comfortable with a severe drought label.
- 6) The main region of the east Snake River Plain should probably be in a permanent state of moderate drought as overall declines in the underlying aquifer have led to a number of curtailment calls. While mitigation has been provided in all cases so far, the cost of these mitigation measures and uncertainty created by these calls impacts the overall development and economic security of the region.
- 7) The Severe Drought encompassing the BWCC lands irrigated by Magic Reservoir, the Big Lost and some of the other closed basins seems reasonable as snowpack is lower than the median and these regions have faced several years of drought.

*Note: While these revised boundaries tend to breakdown some of the transitioning in the Drought Monitor Map so that Extreme and severe drought occur right at the boundary of non-drought regions, I think this represents the reality of water management in Idaho.*