AGENDA

IDAHO WATER RESOURCE BOARD

Special Committee on Priest Lake Operations Meeting No. 3-26
Tuesday, November 10, 2026
2:00 PM (MT) 1:00 PM (PT)

Water Center
Conference Room 648A
322 E. Front Street
BOISE

Livestream available at https://www.youtube.com/@iwrb

1. Roll Call
2. Priest Lake Operations – 2026 Season
3. Public Comments Review and Discussion
4. Non-Action Items for Discussion
5. Adjourn

Committee Members:
Chair Pat McMahon, Jo Ann Cole-Hansen, and Dale Van Stone.

***** Action Item: A vote regarding this item may be made at this meeting. Identifying an item as an action item on the agenda does not require a vote to be taken on the item. ***Americans with Disabilities***: If you require special accommodations to attend, participate in, or understand the meeting, please make advance arrangements by contacting Department staff by email milin.ream@idwr.idaho.gov or by phone at (208) 287-4800.

Brad Little
Governor

Jeff Raybould
Chairman
St. Anthony
At Large

Jo Ann Cole-Hansen
Vice Chair
Lewiston
At Large

Dean Stevenson
Secretary
Paul
District 3

Dale Van Stone
Hope
District 1

Albert Barker
Boise
District 2

Brian Olmstead
Twin Falls
At Large

Marcus Gibbs
Grace
District 4

Patrick McMahon
Sun Valley
At Large

MEMO

To: Idaho Water Resource Board Special Committee on Priest Lake

From: Michelle Richman, IDWR Engineering Manager

Date: November 6, 2026

Subject: Priest Lake Operations – 2026 Season

INFORMATIONAL ITEM

Staff will provide an overview of Priest Lake Operations during the 2026 season, highlighting key activities, and operational updates.

Attachments:

- *PowerPoint Presentation*

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Priest Lake Dam 2026 Operations Update



Michelle Richman
Bill Cresse
November 10, 2026

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Purpose – To Discuss:

- Lake Level 2026 Dam Operations
- River Flow 2026 Dam Operations
- Stakeholder Engagement, Best Practices & Dam Safety

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Lake Level – Recreation Season - 2026

- Idaho Code §70-507
- Very dry year
- Maintain pool 3.0'-3.5'
- Bring lake up to 3.5' by Memorial Day
  - 2026 tactic due to snow drought

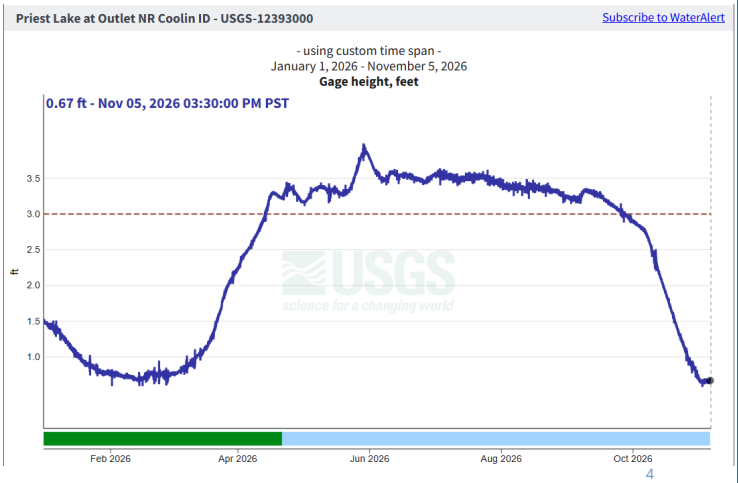


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Lake Level – Recreation Season + Fall - 2026

- Memorial Day: 3.5'
- Peak: 3.9' May 29th
- Days above 3.0': **165**
- Fall drawdown ends: October 31st (Kokanee)
- Minimum lake level estimate: 0.65'

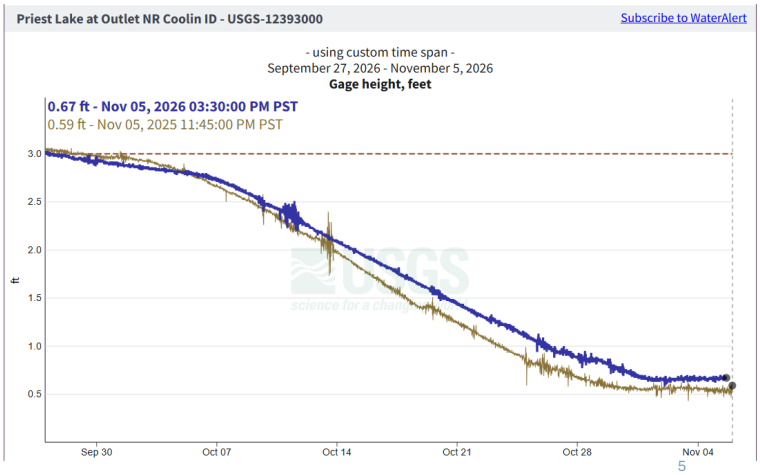


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Fall Drawdown - Lake Level Comparison - 2025/2026



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Priest River – Recreation Season + Fall - 2026

- Operational goals or targets
  - > 40 cfs didymo
  - > 200 cfs fish
  - Limit changes to 20% of flow
  - Cap fall drawdown: < 1,200 cfs



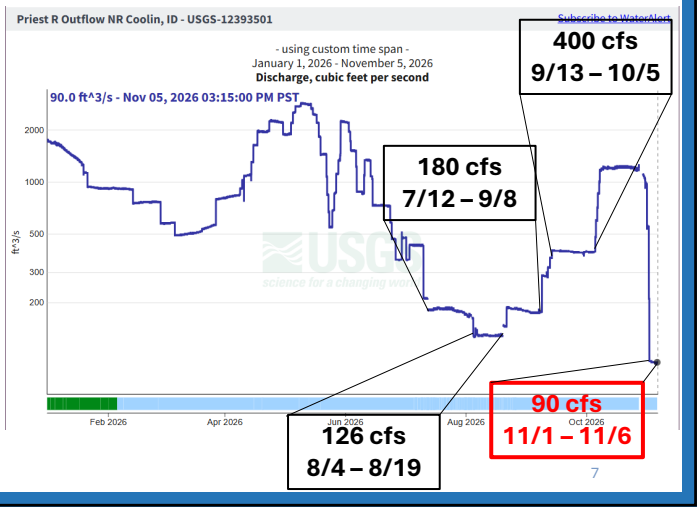
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Priest River – Recreation Season + Fall - 2026

- 2025 Peak: 3,800 cfs May 30
- 2026 Peak: 2,880 cfs May 9-11
- **Spring runoff ended 3 weeks earlier than typical**



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Priest River – Recreation Season + Fall - 2026

- Priest River **near Priest River**
- 199 cfs-206 cfs: 8/6 - 8/21
- Touched low of 191 cfs 8/20



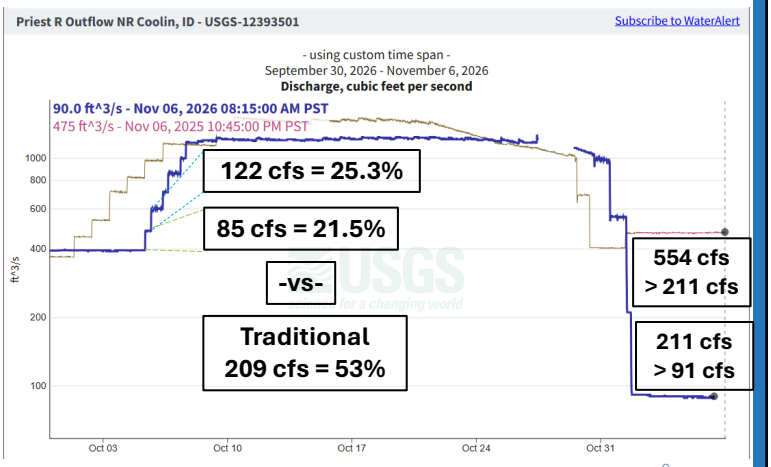
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Priest River – Fall Drawdown- 2026

- 400 cfs outflows 3 weeks prior to drawdown
- Lake level above 2.5' until October 9th
- 3 weeks of high 1,200 cfs river recreation flows
- Flow increases: 20% steps (per public comments)



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Stakeholder Engagement

- Operations Updates
  - IDWR website
  - Facebook
  - E-mail List
  - Lakes Commission
  - Priest River Watershed Group



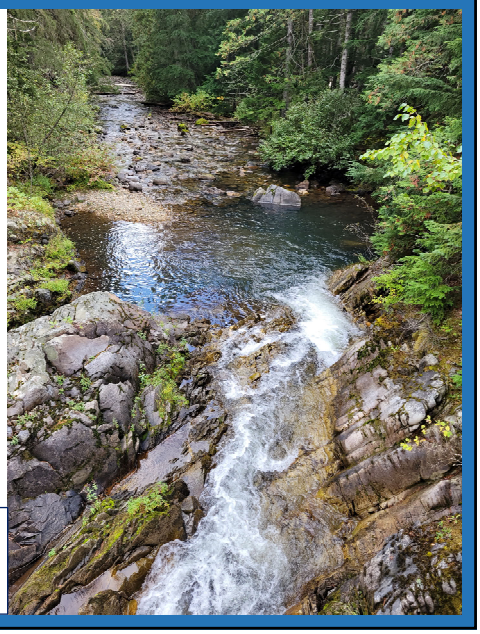
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Best Practices

- Tributary inflow measurement
- Need to know tributary inflows (cfs) and inflow timing
- September 29, 2025
- **Granite Creek: 44.1 CFS** (42% of inflow)
- **Lamb Creek: 2.7 CFS** (dam proximity)
- **UPR: 30.7 CFS** (early warning radar)



Hughes Fork just South of Gold Creek Road (NF-1013)

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Dam Safety

- Emergency Action Plan Seminar (Tabletop Exercise)
- New buoys upstream of dam
- EAP, SOP, Best Practices/Policy
- Signage



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Questions?

Michelle Richman, Bill Cresse
northerninfo@idwr.Idaho.gov
208-762-2800



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MEMO

To: Idaho Water Resource Board Special Committee on Priest Lake

From: Amy Cassel, IDWR Project Manager

Date: November 6, 2026

Subject: Public Comments Review and Discussion

INFORMATIONAL ITEM

Staff will provide a presentation summarizing the public comments received regarding Priest Lake Operations, with comments organized by category to highlight recurring themes, key concerns, and common areas of interest for the Board's review and consideration.

Attachment(s):

- *Public Comment Summary*

Priest Lake Outlet Dam – Public Comment Summary

Summary of public concerns and suggestions

PRIMARY TOPIC	SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONCERNS	PUBLIC COMMENT SUGGESTIONS
Lake levels and seasonal operations **Resource: Lake**	• Maintenance of summer lake levels • Excessive lake elevations • Timing and extent of fall drawdown • Winter lake levels • Static 3-3.5 ft. lake levels in summer creates a severe, one-way erosion dynamic • Higher winter lake levels leaves floating docks vulnerable to ice grounding and loading	• Operate a controlled seasonal lake-level cycling • Restore full winter drawdowns
River flows and flow fluctuations **Resource: River**	• Rapid changes in Priest River flows • Impacts of dam operations on natural flow patterns • Spring flooding • Low fall flows	• Operate a gradual fall drawdown; limit rapid fall drawdown • Limit the rate of flow changes • Allow springtime high flow that mimics natural flow regimes
River water temperatures **Resource: River**	• Elevated Priest River temperatures • Effects of water released from the outlet dam on downstream temperatures	• Evaluate lake water release temperatures • Consider measures to reduce river temperatures
Fish and aquatic species habitat **Resource: River and tributaries**	• Declining native trout populations • Habitat loss • Water temperatures • Changes to natural hydrology.	• Restore fish habitat • Work with other state agencies to create a streamflow protection plan • Evaluate potential impacts of dam operations on aquatic resources

Lake operations River flows / temperatures Fish / aquatic resources

Priest Lake Outlet Dam – Public Comment Summary

Summary of public concerns and suggestions

PRIMARY TOPIC	SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONCERNS	PUBLIC COMMENT SUGGESTIONS
Fish and wildlife - riparian and lakeshore **Resource: Lake and River**	• Fluctuating lake levels affect migratory birds, nesting areas, mammals, ponds, swimming areas, and algae blooms • Dewatering of kokanee redds	• Operate a gradual fall drawdown • Limit the rate of flow changes • Drawdown of lake completed prior to kokanee spawning
Tributary monitoring **Resource: River and tributaries**	• Need for additional streamflow and temperature data	• Seek additional streamflow and temperature monitoring in Priest Lake tributaries • Engage in greater coordination among agencies, including the Kalispel Tribe
Water management policy and legislation **Resource: Lake and River**	• Need for additional legislation and policy guidance	• Legislation addressing lake levels • Revisions to the State Water Plan • Additional water rights • A streamflow management plan • Establishment of a stakeholder steering committee

Wildlife / lakeshore Tributary monitoring Water policy / legislation

MEMO

To: Idaho Water Resource Board Special Committee on Priest Lake

From: Planning & Projects Bureau Staff

Date: November 6, 2026

Subject: Non-Action Items for Discussion

INFORMATIONAL ITEM

This item is presented to provide an opportunity for discussion of non-action items and general Committee updates.

Attachments:

- *None*