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Idaho Water Resource Board details \$843 million list of major water infrastructure projects needed statewide

TWIN FALLS – (July 27, 2021) – The Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) voted unanimously to adopt a list of about 20 major water projects needed statewide to improve water supply resiliency and sustainability, including replacing aging water infrastructure, expanding aquifer recharge infrastructure expanding snowpack cloud-seeding operations to enhance water supply, and more. All told, the projects would cost an estimated \$843 million.

The Board compiled the list in response to a request from Gov. Brad Little. Under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed by President Biden on March 11, 2021, the governor requested latitude from the Biden administration as to how ARPA funds could be spent on “necessary investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure,” according to Section 602(c)(1)(D) of the Act.

“The plain language appears to grant the states broad discretion to spend ARPA money on necessary water, sewer, or broadband investments,” Gov. Little wrote to the Undersecretary for Domestic Finance in the Biden administration in June.

Briefing the Board on the topic, Brian Patton, the Board’s Executive officer, explained that the Biden administration’s definition of eligible water projects appears to be limited to drinking water and wastewater improvements and infrastructure projects, according to draft rules guiding the process.

In his letter, Gov. Little said, “Water infrastructure projects eligible for ARPA’s State Fiscal Recovery Funds should include regional storage, aquifer recharge, cloud seeding, and other projects that create resiliency in the face of drought and changing climate conditions.”

He requested more latitude to address water quality, water efficiency and sustainability projects.

Board staff worked with multiple local, state and federal agencies, water users, canal companies, irrigation districts, and Gov. Little’s office to develop the list of priority projects, which are broken down into Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 projects.

Any funds available for these projects would be contingent on federal ARPA funds or other funding sources, officials said.

“This is a great comprehensive list of projects that we need statewide,” Board Chairman Jeff Raybould said. “I compliment the staff on their hard work in putting this list of projects together.”

Board members agreed that the list is preliminary and should be viewed as a dynamic list that could change over time as new ideas, projects or opportunities arise.

The Tier 1-Tier 3 priority projects are detailed in the attached pdf.

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