



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Idaho Water Resource Board selects three major water infrastructure projects to finance initially with ARPA funds**

BOISE - (Jan. 24, 2022) – The Idaho Water Resource Board voted unanimously on Friday to define criteria for funding major water infrastructure projects in the state, and to select three projects to finance initially as recommended by the board’s Finance Committee and Gov. Brad Little in his fiscal 2023 state budget.

The allocation of proposed funds is still contingent on final budget approval by the 2022 Idaho Legislature, officials noted.

The initial three projects are: \$90 million for the Anderson Ranch reservoir enlargement; \$30 million for the Mountain Home Air Force Base water sustainability project; and \$75 million for a large aquifer-recharge infrastructure project, yet to be determined, in the Upper Snake River Valley, for a total of \$195 million in ARPA funds.

In Gov. Little’s proposed FY 2023 “Leading Idaho” budget, he recommended allocating \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the Idaho Water Resource Board in FY 2023, and \$50 million each over the next three fiscal years for a total of \$250M over five years. In addition, the governor’s budget recommends allocating \$75 million in state general fund surplus funds to the Idaho Water Resource Board in the current fiscal year.

Earlier this month, the Water Board’s Finance Committee recommended a definition for “threshold criteria” to be used in determining whether a proposal water project should be added to a state’s list of water sustainability projects.

That definition says: “A project that helps achieve water supply sustainability on a regional, basin-wide or statewide basis.” The Board adopted that language on Friday.

The Board’s executive officer, Brian Patton, pointed out that the Idaho Legislature had previously allocated \$70M to the Board, and the Board had planned to allocate those funds to the three projects mentioned above, plus \$2 million for future water projects in the Bear River Basin.

The recently-passed federal infrastructure bill will allow ARPA funds to be used for the non-federal match for the Anderson Ranch enlargement, Patton noted. “That could free up those funds for other priority projects.”

The Board's Finance Committee will, at a future date, schedule one or more public meetings to hear from water users across the state about other potential major water project needs. But the Board will wait to see how the 2022 Idaho Legislature acts on the Governor's budget recommendation prior to holding the meetings, officials said.

Earlier in the week, Water Board members heard Jennifer Carrington, acting Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation, speak about a long list of federal funds that have been approved through the recently passed \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure bill at the annual Idaho Water Users Association meeting in Boise. The Infrastructure bill includes \$8.3 billion over the next five years for Reclamation, she said, a large increase in funding for the agency. Carrington shared information about hundreds of millions of dollars that may be available for water infrastructure or water quality projects from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service and more.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime or once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernize our infrastructure, and we're committed to getting these dollars on the ground," Carrington said.

Added Water Board Chairman Jeff Raybould, "That's a huge amount of money for water projects. We have to figure out how to spend that money in a fair and equitable way to meet our highest priorities statewide."

Water users should take a hard look at their future needs and see what funding sources might make the most sense, including funding from other state or federal agencies, Raybould said. "We will come up with a fair process for evaluating projects, but we still have a lot of details to work through," he said.

In other action, the Board:

- Approved \$700,000 for a study on the Mountain Home Plateau aquifer and hydrologic system, from King Hill to the edge of the Treasure Valley. Significant declines in the aquifer have been a concern for Elmore County and the state for some time. The study will help inform a future groundwater model for the Mountain Home aquifer which could become an extension of the Treasure Valley flow model, officials said.
- Approved a new \$56,615, 15-year loan to the Cloverdale Ridge Water Corporation to finance a new pipeline and associated pump. The interest rate for the loan is 2.6 percent, reflecting the Board's new loan interest rate policy for aging infrastructure projects.
- Heard from Gary Spackman, the Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources, that the department may have to adjudicate all domestic and stockwater claims in the Snake River Basin Adjudication, depending on how a judge rules on that request. The number of domestic and stockwater claims may range from 50,000 to 130,000, Spackman said. The Snake River Basin Adjudication has been completed except for stockwater and domestic claims. It is considered to be the largest and most successful adjudication of water rights in the western United States.

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