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DEPARTMENT OF
WATER RESOURCES

3/23/2022

To the Director of Water Resources,

This presentation is to get on record items that have either been ignored or left out in making the present ruling. Namely, the lack of recharge resulting from the change in irrigation practices from surface to sprinklers.

As anyone in the sales of sprinkler systems will state going from surface irrigation to wheel lines saves at least 50% in water being applied. If a pivot is used the water savings is even more, 60-70% reduction is not uncommon. Furthermore, with a pivot it is possible to only apply water to a depth of 8 inches resulting in even more water savings or less usage. The result is less water being recharged to the aquifer.

My family has owned and operated land on the headwaters of Silver Creek since 1949. During that time I have seen wet years, dry years, and everything in between.

The biggest factor in the decline of stream flow to Silver Creek occurred in the 1970s when sprinklers replaced surface irrigation on much of the land in the Bellevue Triangle. Wheel lines at first and many later replaced with pivots.

There are approximately eight (8) drains across the valley that were dug in the middle of the 1950s to drain water off. They declined in the 1970s to the place where the Deputy Water Master is only measuring one (1) of the eight (8) drains. The drain that is measured is the Buhler drain. The last year of measurement for the other seven (7) drains I believe was in 1979.

I have copies of the records or you can get them from Kevin Lakey, from whom I got them. These records were created as part of the Deputy Water Master's job and not compiled and kept to prove a point. As such they are not biased in any way which is why I cite them.

I will give some examples of why I believe this should matter in making the Director's decision.

1. The Hillside Ranch, owned by John Stevenson, has 400 inches of water right that flows through my land into Buhler drain that is no longer filled. The reason is that the land was placed under wheel lines in 1984. Since then there has not been a drop of water in the ditch, even in wet years. The ditch I refer to exists as a result of a legal action initiated by Earl W. Hutchison, in Blaine County and is a matter of court record. I have enclosed a copy of the Judgment.
2. In 2017, a very wet year, water was dumped into old gravel pits in the Bellevue Triangle to attempt to recharge the aquifer. The result for me was that I could not plant 155 acres into oats or barley for hay for feed for my cattle. There were 50 inches of water flowing across my field. It was so wet, I got stuck trying to spray for quack grass on Labor Day. I had a second field planted in Alfalfa that was so wet I could not cut the hay on approximately 25-30 acres. In fact, I had water running across part of the above mentioned 25-30 acres. It remained wet to the point that next year, 2018, we got stuck with the bale wagon six (6) times; two (2) of which required a Caterpillar D6 to pull it out backwards, leaving ruts 6-8 inches deep. As you should know, the Alfalfa stand was badly damaged by being wet for two (2) years. If needed, I can produce witnesses for this point.

As you can see by the above examples the change from surface irrigation has had a profound impact on Silver Creek flows.

There are other examples of the impact of sprinklers to stream flows. I cite the impact of sprinklers in Butte County above Mackay Reservoir. The irrigators in Butte County found that in order to keep some springs running with water, they had to direct recharge the aquifer.

I can also cite several other examples of the impact of a change in irrigation practices that have adversely impacted water rights to the point of being 100% loss. These examples are in Gooding County. Regardless of location, the impact of irrigation practices is still the same.

Now I ask the question...if the change in irrigation practices can and do impact water rights in other counties, why does it not impact water rights in this county? Remember, there are other counties (Gooding and Lincoln) that are impacted by what happens in Blaine County.

Will the Idaho State Department of Water Resources require farmers and/or ranchers in the county to go back to surface irrigation in order to insure water users in Lincoln and Gooding counties get their water? Or to say it differently, will Blaine County be denied the usage of more efficient water practices insuring the delivery of water to users down stream?

Next, why are only some of the farmers and/or ranchers in the Bellevue Triangle denied the usage of water, but not other waters users north of the Bellevue Triangle, such as the cities of Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum, and Sun Valley; or the users in the developments of say the Lane Ranch, Golden Eagle, and Hulen Meadows? The impact should be on all users, not a select few. Furthermore, since there is a water shortage, why isn't the Department of Water Resources requesting a curtailment of future water impacts such as housing developments. If we don't have enough water for the current users, why are we allowing for more demand such as domestic, palatial landscaping, and other types of nonessential leisure usages. What is the Department of Water Resources doing to monitor those water usages?

As you can see, there needs to be much more thought and consideration given to the change in irrigation practices and how it impacts the stream flows.

Respectfully,



Dean R. Rogers III
Dean R. Rogers Inc.
28 Hillside Ranch Road
Bellevue, Idaho, 83313
208-788-3644