Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer Comprehensive Management Plan
Framework Process

October 2006 Public Meetings (October 11, 18 and 19, 2006)
Executive Summary
Prepared by CDR Associates, October 31, 2006

Below is a summary of public input received at the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA) Framework public meetings held on October 11, 18 and 19, 2006. Approximately 225 members of the public attended the public meetings held in Pocatello, Twin Falls, and Idaho Falls. The goals of the meetings were to provide information and solicit public comment regarding the development of a Framework for a Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan for the ESPA. For a complete list of comments, both written and verbally expressed during discussion at each meeting, and a copy of the PowerPoint presentation used by the facilitators, please visit www.espaplan.idaho.gov.

Summary of Public Comments

The facilitation team delivered a PowerPoint presentation at each of the three public meetings. The goals of the presentation were to 1) provide an overview of the ESPA, 2) introduce the ESPA Framework Process, 3) discuss roles, and 4) receive public input. Following the presentation, questions were posed to participants. The questions were:

- What issues/concerns do you have related to the process of developing a Framework?
- What are your thoughts on possible goals for aquifer management?
- What comments do you have on the management alternatives
- How should the ESPA management alternatives be funded? Principles?
- Other Comments?

A summary of public input, written and verbal, received at the combined meetings follows.

1. **What issues/concerns do you have related to the process of developing a Framework?**

Numerous members of the public expressed support for the development of a management plan for the ESPA. Some members expressed interest in increased outreach before the next round of public meetings. Ensuring that all water users' perspectives are incorporated into the Framework was an expressed interest. The facilitation team received suggestions for additional individuals and groups to involve in the process.

2. What are your thoughts on possible goals for aquifer management?

The facilitation team solicited input regarding aquifer management goals. Numerous perspectives regarding aquifer goals were expressed including the need for:

- Developing a system where all water users are treated equally, especially in times of shortage;
- Reducing withdrawals from the aquifer to achieve aquifer stabilization (participants noted that an appropriate aquifer level must be identified);
- Keeping senior water rights holders 'whole' through implementation of the prior appropriation system;
- Protecting the aquifer to ensure the economic viability of the region, especially in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors;
- Providing a long-term sustainable supply of water for all water users.

Other members suggested that management of the aquifer should be fair, simple, realistic and consistent with existing state statues. Aquifer management should not create unnecessary administrative or legal procedures; rather it should provide clarity and predictability in terms of water use.

3. What comments do you have on the management alternatives?

Numerous management alternatives were discussed at the public meetings. Attendees frequently mentioned intentional recharge of the aquifer. Recharge, especially when implemented by running 'excess water' through existing canals, was supported by many participants. The obstacles to recharge including legal, political and geographic, were raised at the meetings. A number of attendees mentioned House Bill 800 to illustrate the political obstacles to implementing recharge. Some offered the idea that a credit and trading system could be developed around recharge, with those involved receiving credit for participating in or funding recharge projects, with those credits made available to offset mitigation requirements. Participants suggested that the facilitation team work to identify and overcome the obstacles and identify ways to implement intentional recharge for the 2007 water year.

Some members of the public strongly advocated for involuntary curtailment using the prior-appropriation system, i.e. curtailing junior-rights holders during times of shortages. Many who advocated for involuntary curtailment discussed current and personal impacts to their water supply. Other participants noted that the strict use of curtailment would not result in water immediately returning to impacted water users and advocated for other options to meet water needs. Voluntary reduction of groundwater pumping, including through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), water buy-outs and groundwater/surface water conversions, was discussed and supported by many participants, especially when coupled with a 'willing buyer willing seller' approach to acquisition.

Increasing storage, through dam construction outside the ESPA, was an alternative suggested to address water supply needs. Numerous members of the public advocated managing the aquifer like a reservoir, which includes using groundwater to offset shortages in overall water supply.

4. How should the ESPA management alternatives be funded? Principles?

A variety of perspectives were presented regarding how to fund the ESPA aquifer management alternatives. Numerous participants felt that the state is primarily responsible for the ESPA aquifer management, since the state issued water rights that are viewed as contributing to current water shortage issues. Others advocated for a state-wide water sales tax increase of a quarter cent to address ESPA and other water needs across the state. Some participants objected to the concept of a water use fee or per acre levy by noting that the problem was create by the state, while others were in favor of water users helping to offset costs by paying a fee based on the volume of water used.

Funding principles suggested included:

- Financial contributions to ESPA aquifer management should be based on the priority of water right;
- Those who have been damaged should contribute less than those who have not been impacted;
- Those who benefit most from the alternatives should pay a proportional share for the management;
- An equal share of the costs should be apportioned to users based on the volume of water used;
- New users, including domestic wells and new groundwater pumpers, should contribute more for the management of the aquifer.

It was noted by participants that the funding mechanism should ensure implementation of goals and that adaptive management concepts be established to monitor performance. The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) was identified by some as the most appropriate entity to ensure implementation, and participants suggested that an increase in Department resources may be required to accomplish this task.

Members of the public expressed an interest in the facilitation team outlining the costs and benefits of each set of alternatives (minimum, modest, aggressive) to understand the financial implications. Others cautioned the facilitation team on identifying funding mechanisms before the goals and alternatives have been established.

5. Other Comments?

Numerous members of the public expressed the view that the current ESPA groundwater model in use by IDWR is inadequate for the task of water-rights administration and aquifer management, and suggested refinements to the existing model. Others suggested a focus on

mitigation strategies that can be implemented during times of shortage. Increased monitoring of domestic wells was recommended to keep track of who is using water.