**ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan**

# Facilitation of a Framework for Presentation to the 2007 Idaho Legislature

Public Meeting Presentation by CDR Associates

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# Goals of Presentation

- Provide an overview of the ESPA
- Introduce ESPA Framework Process
- Discuss roles – facilitation team, Board, stakeholders
- Receive input from the public
- Identify next steps

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# Agenda

- Why this Process?
- Overview of the ESPA
- Overview of the Framework process
  - Discussion of Roles
  - Opportunities for Engagement
- Themes heard during interviews
- Emerging elements of a Framework
- Questions and Discussion

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# Why this Process?

- Senate Concurrent Resolution 136
  - "These (disputing) parties are negotiating a framework for settlement that makes it critical that the State of Idaho Water Resource Board establish public policy with regard to the future management of the aquifer system"
- First phase – develop a Framework and present to 2007 Legislature
- Second phase – Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan

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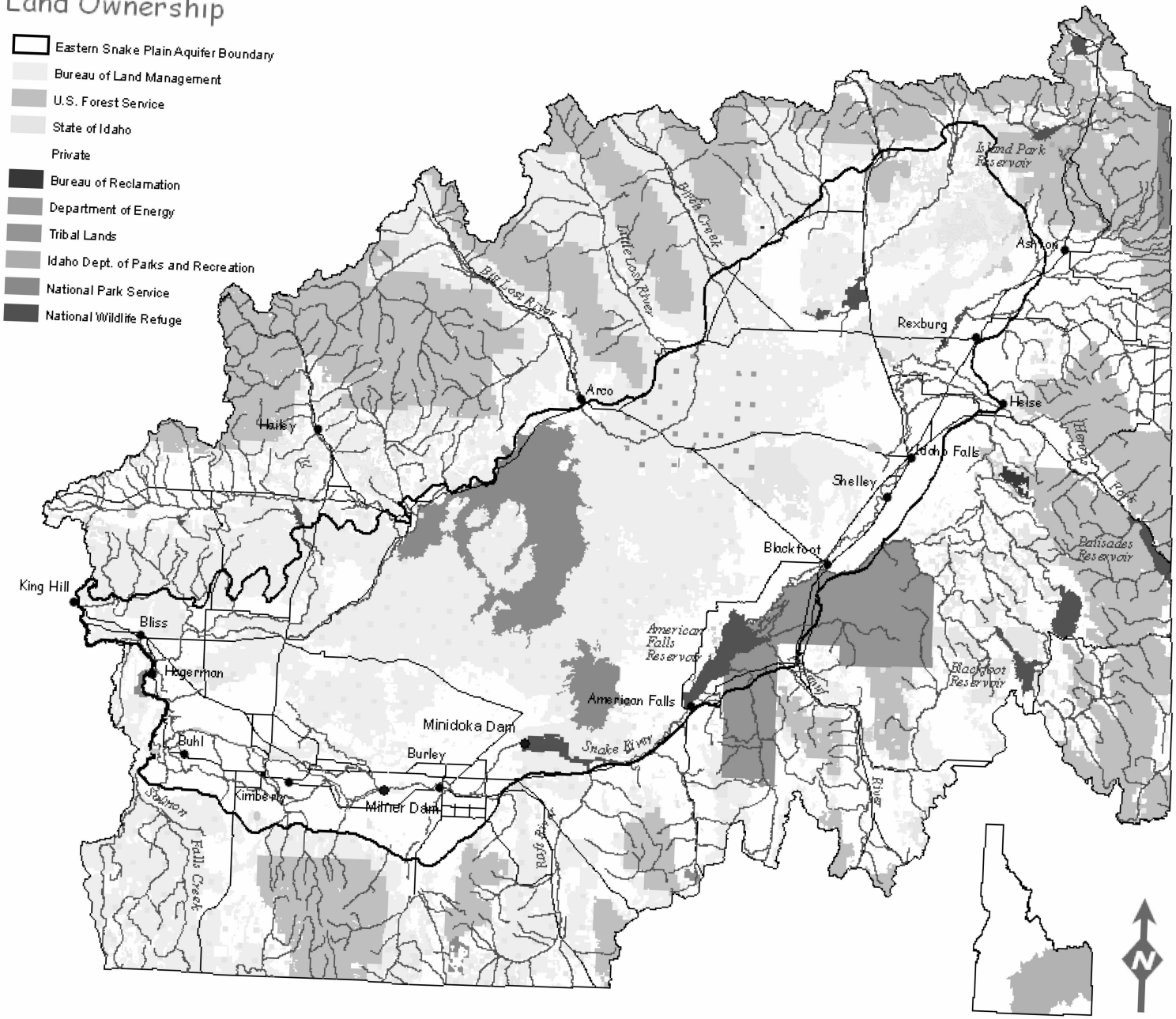
# Overview of the ESPA

- Located within the Upper Snake River Basin
  - The Upper Snake River Basin encompasses all or part of 20 counties, and approximately 35% of Idaho's land area (29,000 square miles)
- The Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA) underlies approximately 10,000 square miles, or 13% of the State of Idaho

# Upper Snake River Basin

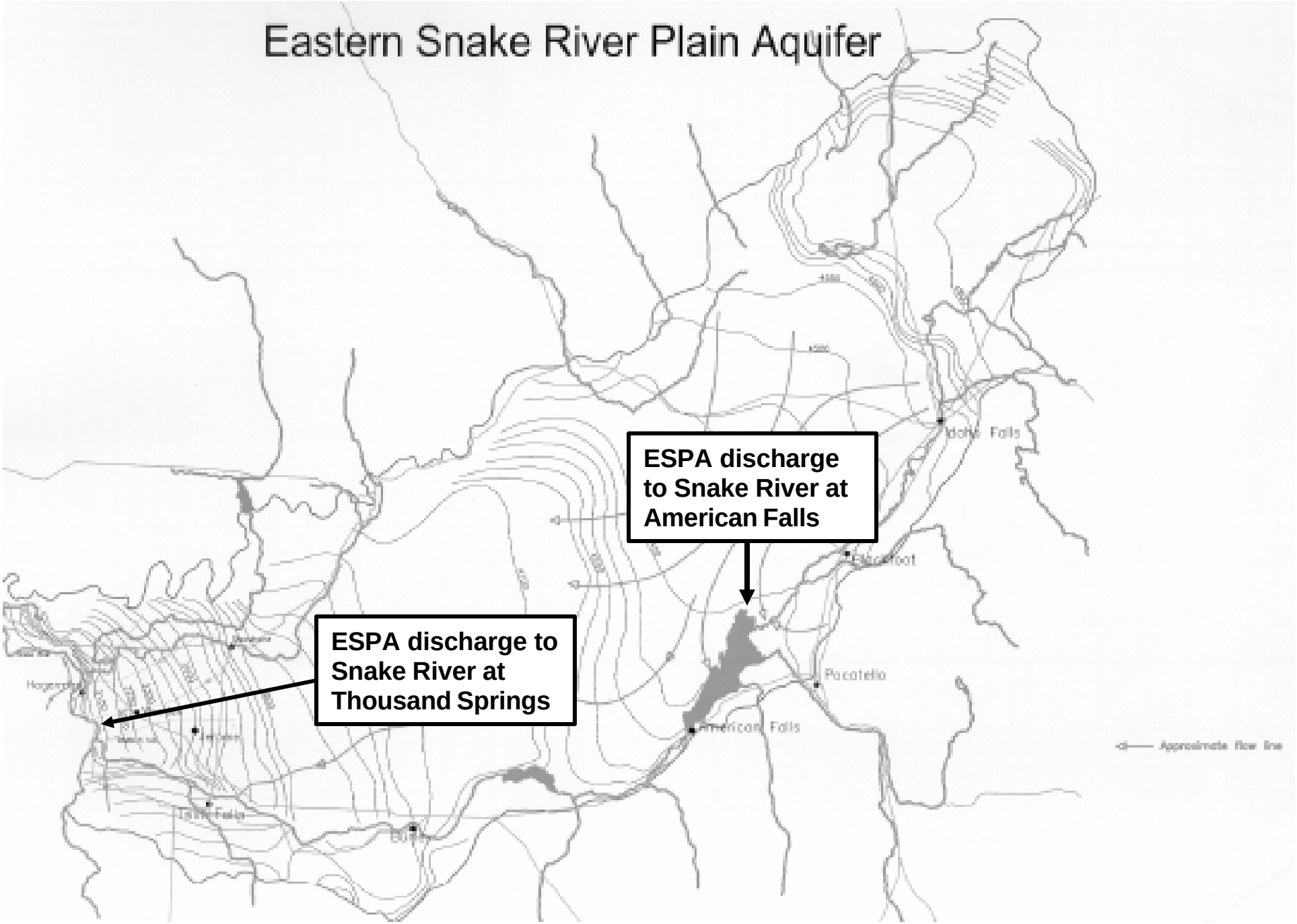
## Land Ownership



# Aquifer Characteristics

- Layered basalt, thousands of feet thick in some places
- General direction of ground water flow: northeast to southwest
- Hydraulically connected to the river
- Two major aquifer discharge areas:
  - American Falls (about 2 MAF/yr)
  - Thousand Springs (about 4 MAF/yr)

# Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer



# What Recharges the Aquifer?

- Direct precipitation
- Underflow from tributary basins
- Seepage from streams overlying the aquifer
- Leakage from canals
- Deep percolation of excess irrigation water

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# Who Uses the Aquifer?

- Municipal and domestic water wells
- Agriculture – irrigation with groundwater
- Agriculture – irrigation with surface water that is fed by spring discharge into river
- Springs – aquaculture and other uses
- Commercial/Industrial wells
- Tourism – “Thousand Springs” and other attractions
- Wildlife/environmental benefits

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# Why Manage the Aquifer?

- Water availability varies, but demand stays relatively constant
- Shortage in available water for some users
  - Example: Decline in spring flows in the Thousand Springs reach

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# Overview of the Framework Process

- Project Launch in August
- Initial interviews with stakeholders in September
- Public meetings in October
- October/November: Facilitation team drafts Framework with stakeholder input
- Public meetings in December to get reactions and comments
- Presentation to Legislature in January

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# Roles

- Idaho Water Resource Board
- Facilitation Team
- Department of Water Resources
- STAKEHOLDERS

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# Link to Decision Making

- Framework decisions
  - Identify goals and alternatives
  - Determine level of management – minimal, modest, and aggressive alternatives
  - Funding strategies and fee structure
  - Interim implementation measures
- Decision makers – the Board

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# Outreach to Stakeholders

- Contacted over 60 individuals and groups
  - Water users: spring, surface, groundwater
  - Groundwater districts, canal companies, irrigation districts
  - State and federal agencies
  - Local government/municipalities
  - Water-dependent industry & local business
  - Environment and wildlife
  - More that we missed?  Tribes?

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# Opportunities for Engagement

- Public Meetings
- Comment forms
- Direct contact with Facilitation team by email, phone, individual or small group meetings
- Website: www.espaplan.idaho.gov

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# Themes from Interviews

- General areas of agreement
  - Widely held but not unanimous opinions
- Divergent views
  - Issues with a range of opinions and outstanding questions
- Emerging Framework elements
  - A first glance at possible issues to be addressed in the Framework

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# General Areas of Agreement

- The times have changed
  - Farm practices and farm economics
  - Aquifer levels and discharges
- The aquifer needs management
  - What does management entail? What is the goal of management?
- Ensuring implementation of the Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan is critical

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# General Areas of Agreement

- The Model – significance tied to the way it is used
- Recharge is important and supported, but won't solve the problem
  - Political, physical, technical, legal and financial hurdles exist
- CREP is a good start but it won't solve the problem either

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# General Areas of Agreement

- Strained relationships
- Some issues cannot be resolved through a management plan
  - What are the options to address localized, individual impacts?
- Desire to keep water users as whole as possible
  - A “healthy” aquifer benefits everyone in the long term

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# General Areas of Agreement

- Funding should come from everyone, including the State
  - Must be put to good use, with results that can be measured (and agreed ways to measure them)
  - Must be fair – different levels for senior/junior, surface/ground/spring?
  - Water will eventually be an issue of concern for the entire state, not just ESPA

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# Divergent Views

- The reality and role of the aquifer
- The “health” of the aquifer
  - Definition of a “healthy” aquifer, and how to measure aquifer health or decline
- Role of environmental and aesthetic issues in Framework
  - Not a major issue for some stakeholders, but others concerned these issues are not being adequately addressed

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# Divergent Views

- Prior appropriation
  - Absolute mandate for curtailment in times of shortage? Implemented within the context of economic development for the state?
- Water: an economic good?
  - Should the free market be used to find the “most valuable” use of water? How does the prior appropriation system interact with market valuation?
- What is fair?
  - Perceptions of equity and equal impact

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# Emerging Framework Elements

- Goals and objectives for aquifer management
- Management alternatives
  - CREP, recharge, conversion, buyouts, others?
- Funding strategies
- Interim measures
  - What can we start doing now?

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# Emerging Framework Elements

- Goal: Sustainability
  - Water Budget: Balance supply and demand?
  - Economic sustainability for the region?
  - Keep aquifer level from declining further?
  - Keep spring discharges from declining further?
  - Funding for long term programs? Buying water rights?

# Emerging Framework Elements

- Goal: Some degree of predictability and equivalent treatment
  - Domestic wells: Monitoring? Ensure continuity/protection of water supply?
  - New residential and industrial development interdependent with existing agricultural and other uses
  - Ensure new development water sources make sense given surrounding uses

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# Emerging Framework Elements

- Funding: Something from everyone
  - Statewide sales tax?  Political hurdles?
  - State surplus funds?
  - Per acre/share levy for water users in the Eastern Snake Plain?
  - Appropriate State percentage and local percentage?

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# Emerging Framework Elements

- Potential interim measure: recharge
  - Important and supported, but won’t solve the problem
  - Interest in exploring opportunities for recharge within the coming year

# Next Steps

- Develop and refine goals and objectives based on public input
- Outline draft management alternatives
- Detail funding principles and level of funding required for management alternatives
- Identify and refine interim measures

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# Questions for Discussion

- 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?

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