



## **Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan**

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### **Conversions Working Group Meeting #1**

#### **Draft Meeting Summary July 1, 2009 Idaho Dept. of Water Resources 900 N. Skyline Idaho Falls, Id. 83402**

#### **Overview**

The Conversions Working Group (WG) discussed the following at the July 1, 2009 meeting:

- WG Charge, Parameters and Final Product Design
- ESPA Plan Elements and Technical Information Related to Conversions
- Incentives for Conversions Projects
- Requested Map Refinements
- Criteria for Conversions Projects
- Next Steps
- Next Meeting

#### **WG Charge, Parameters, and Final Product Design**

The Conversions WG has until December to compile a package of recommendations on conversions projects in the ESPA. After December, the WG will likely continue to meet to refine and make any final recommendations to the Implementation Committee.

Parameters outlined in the ESPA CAMP as actions were confirmed, and WG members identified elements that are in the Plan regarding conversions. For example, it was noted that the full conversion of A & B Irrigation District is off-the-table although a partial conversion (particularly on the west end) is still considered. Other project locations included Hazleton Butte, Milner Gooding, Burley Irrigation District and Southwest Irrigation District. Additionally, WG members agreed that conversion and mitigation efforts need to be completely separated nor viewed as providing subsidies for groundwater users.

The final product of this WG will be a prioritized spreadsheet of conversions projects that includes detailed information such as: benefit to aquifer, cost to implement, water supply, depth to ground water, lift requirements to supply surface water, and environmental factors. Additionally, the list will include information on implementation steps and a coordinated plan to identify, rank and construct projects when funding becomes available.

#### **ESPA Plan Elements and Technical Information Related to Conversions**

The Conversions WG reviewed ESPA CAMP elements related to conversions. As outlined in the Plan, conversions projects are broken into two categories: soft and hard. Cynthia Bridge Clark, Board staff, provided definitions of soft (small) and hard (large) conversions projects. She described soft (small) conversions as projects in which the infrastructure to divert and deliver surface water is constructed for an individual or farm level system. Canal delivery infrastructure is located nearby (e.g. less than one mile). Hard (large) conversions projects are ones in which the infrastructure to divert and deliver

surface water is constructed for multiple farms through the same system, and is delivered to acres that are not currently being served by surface water.

Conversions WG members determined that both large and small projects should be considered conversions, which includes *all* the conversions projects under Phase I of the Plan (referring to both hard and soft conversions). In this first year, small projects will be implemented as immediate action items that produce timely results and can be expanded upon in future Phases.

### **Incentives for Conversions Projects**

The WG discussed incentives that could serve as talking points when engaging landowners/operators. Incentives include water reliability, reduction in power generation costs, specific benefits to the aquifer, and overall aquifer benefit resulting in lower pumping depths as a result of conversion projects. The most important incentive according to WG members is the savings related to a reduction in power costs.

WG members emphasized the need to treat the aquifer as a reservoir, and want to create an incentive program that promotes this perception. The WG briefly discussed an incentive program for landowners/operators to construct conversions projects on their land. While this needs to be further discussed, one WG member suggested the idea of the CAMP covering more costs (e.g. 70% of infrastructure) on the frontend, and the owners/operators covering the water supply. This approach would allow for risk to be shared by CAMP and the landowners/operators. It also was suggested that the incentive program should create competition amongst those who have convertible acres.

### **Requested Map Refinements**

Cynthia also provided highlights from IWRRI's soft conversions study. Of the lands that are supplied by groundwater, and are near or adjacent to a canal system, approximately 53,000 acres could reasonably be converted to receive surface water. WG members are confident that there are more potential acres than the 53,000 identified by IWRRI. In order to know more about the 53,000 acres and other potential acres, WG members identified refinements to existing IDWR maps of the ESPA and other information needed to make recommendations. They include:

- Identification of groundwater systems with potential for conversion
  - within 5 KM of Snake Plain River
  - with less than 100' lift to deliver surface water from the source/canal to the site
  - with greatest depth to ground water
  - with water supply/canal capacity
- Additional information for future consideration in ranking sites
  - Cost and cost-benefit ratio of converting the system
  - Year to year conditions of system
  - Power costs of groundwater system
  - Conversion shall not injure existing water rights

### **Criteria for Project Selection**

WG members discussed criteria for project selection. These criteria do not have a point or rating or system (at this point) as not enough information is known about proposed projects. Criteria include:

- Long-term benefit to the aquifer
- Cost of implementation
- Cost-Benefit Ratio

- Adequate water supply
- No injury to existing water rights
- Environmental factors

**Final Evaluation Criteria for Recommendations to Implementation Committee**

The WG also established some preliminary criteria for the final package of recommendations for the Implementation Committee. WG members would like the final package of conversions to be judged with a comprehensive lens. Criteria include:

- Geographic diversity within ESPA, as outlined in the Plan
- Environmental considerations
- Early action items
- Long-term benefit to the aquifer

**Next Steps**

Conversions WG members agreed to develop a prioritized list of projects that meet the criteria developed above. In order to begin the process of developing such a list, the following steps must be taken:

Action	Responsible
Members of the Conversions WG will gain a sense of willingness and of specific acres that are convertible from landowners/operators and canal company managers	All WG Members
Identify ESPA acres that are potentially convertible to receive surface water from the Snake River	All WG Members
IDWR maps will be refined to include new information requests and talk to Bryce Contor about mapping	Cynthia Bridge Clark/Brian Patton
Continue coordination with BOR on Milner Gooding costs and working through rental pool	Rich Rigby
Conversions WG will apply identified criteria to potential acres	All WG meetings
Potential projects that meet criteria will be identified/listed.	All WG meetings
Discuss potential for funding mechanism addition to groundwater statute	AGs Office
Coordinate with Recharge WG on impacts that conversions projects may have on recharge and vice versa	WG Members and Bill Quinn
Coordinate with Bryan Higgs	Cynthia Bridge Clark

**Next Meeting:**

At the Conversions WG meeting, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 11:00am – 5:00pm, these topics have been identified:

- Tour of projects in the Burley Irrigation District
- Power Point presentation on surface water for conversions
- Updates from Informal Conversation with canal managers
- Data Analysis and Maps Overview
- Environmental Factors

**MEETING ATTENDEES** \*telephone participation

**Conversions Working Group Members**

- |     |        |           |                                |
|-----|--------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| 1.  | Randy  | Bingham   | Surface Water Users            |
| 2.  | Jared  | Fuhriman  | Municipalities/Counties        |
| 3.  | Steve  | Howser    | Surface Water Users            |
| 4.  | Linda  | Lemmon*   | Spring Water Users             |
| 5.  | Albert | Lockwood  | Surface Water Users            |
| 6.  | Brian  | Olmstead  | Surface Water Users            |
| 7.  | Dean   | Stevenson | Groundwater Users              |
| 8.  | Dan    | Temple*   | Mixed-Use                      |
| 9.  | James  | Tucker    | Hydropower                     |
| 10. | Will   | Whelan*   | Environmental and Conservation |

**Ex Officio Members and Other Attendees**

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|-----|----------|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 11. | Jonathan | Bartsch      | CDR Associates                        |
| 12. | Jon      | Bowling      | Idaho Power                           |
| 13. | Cynthia  | Bridge Clark | IDWR                                  |
| 14. | Lance    | Clow*        | Municipalities/Counties               |
| 15. | Don      | Dixon        | U.S. Senator Mike Crapo's Office      |
| 16. | Jennifer | Graham       | CDR Associates                        |
| 17. | Joan     | Kathol       | CDR Associates                        |
| 18. | Brian    | Patton       | IDWR                                  |
| 19. | Rich     | Rigby        | BOR                                   |
| 20. | Steven   | Serr         | Bonneville County                     |
| 21. | Lynn     | Tominaga     | Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc |