

## 8. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability focuses on the overall stewardship of the state's water resources for the good of the people of the State of Idaho.

### 8A - SUSTAINABILITY OF IDAHO'S WATER RESOURCES

**Sustainability is the active stewardship of Idaho's water resources to satisfy current uses and assure future uses of this renewable resource in accordance with state law and policy.**

#### **Discussion:**

This Sustainability Policy depends on the state's sovereignty over its water resources. Water is the foundation of Idaho's economy and culture; the lives and livelihoods of Idahoans depend on a reliable supply of water. Stewardship of Idaho's water resources begins with the realization that the water resources of the state are not inexhaustible. Therefore, it is necessary to manage and administer Idaho's water resources and protect Idaho's water quality. Stewardship, by necessity, also includes taking affirmative steps to address declining trends in the resource, where those trends exist, and to establish policies that will prevent future unsustainable declines. The goal must be overall stewardship of the state's water resources for the good of the people of the State of Idaho.

The State of Idaho encompasses some of the most diverse and awe-inspiring physical and geological features in the country. From the depths of Hells Canyon to the peak of Mount Borah, from sagebrush deserts to the extensive agricultural farm and ranch land, from alpine forests and meadows to the cities and towns, the ecosystems of each of these varied areas all rely on the water resources of the state. The people of the state interact with and depend upon the water resources in these different landscapes in many different ways. Therefore, the water sustainability policy of the State of Idaho must embrace the diversity of the state, while recognizing the potential for a use or activity in one place to affect the water resources in another part of the state.

Sustainable water management strategies to meet current and future needs must be based on adequate knowledge regarding available supplies, existing use, trends, competing economic and social demands, and future needs. Planning and management actions to promote water sustainability must be designed and implemented to ensure that existing water rights are protected and the economic vitality of Idaho is optimized.

The goal of sustainable use of water resources of the state must recognize that the goals of sustainable economic growth and protection of existing rights must coexist with and are enhanced by measures that protect and maintain surface and ground water resources and the

aquatic, riparian, fish and wildlife, recreational, and human resources that depend on these water resources. Recognizing these needs will promote economic and environmental security and enhance the quality of life for the people of the State of Idaho.

### **Implementation Strategies:**

- Ensure that all actions taken toward a sustainable water future protect and respect private property rights both in the land and water rights.
- Inventory Idaho's water supply, current uses, and future water supply needs.
- Evaluate long-term and short-term trends in water availability for present and future uses.
- Identify areas where present water supplies are either inadequate for present uses or not sustainable, and develop management plans to address supply in an appropriate time frame, while respecting private property rights.
- Identify management alternatives and projects that optimize existing and future water supplies without compromising water quality.
- Prioritize and implement management alternatives and projects where competing demands and future needs are most critical.
- Enhance water transfer mechanisms in Idaho law, policy, and regulations to allow future economic opportunities to utilize existing water supplies, while protecting existing uses.
- Utilize the Idaho Water Resource Board's Funding Program and prioritize allocation of funds for projects that ensure water sustainability across the state.
- Utilize the state protected river system and the Idaho Water Resource Board minimum stream flow water rights to sustain water supplies for fisheries and recreational opportunities.
- Educate the public about water uses and the need for water conservation measures.
- Identify water conservation measures that water users, municipalities, governmental agencies, and other entities can undertake to help protect the water resources of the state and provide guidance to those entities on best practices to implement those conservation measures.
- Recognize that conservation measures may reduce water supplies utilized by others in other parts of the resource.
- Identify measures and provide funding for aquifer stabilization strategies, including managed recharge, throughout the state with due regard to the priorities of basin-specific Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plans.
- Pursue enhancement of surface water storage supply as a mechanism for meeting Idaho's future water needs.
- Recognize weather modification may help to achieve water sustainability goals.
- Cooperate with flood control entities to ensure flood control actions are consistent with water sustainability.

- Use a grassroots approach to identify problems and develop optimal solutions. The needs of individual basins must be taken into consideration in how the resource should be managed, while recognizing the potential for decisions in one basin to affect the resources of another basin. An integrated and collaborative approach to water resource management is critical for the sound and efficient use of Idaho's water resources. The State of Idaho, when appropriate, should work together with water users, tribes, local communities, neighboring states, and the federal government to resolve water issues.
- Protection of the quality of existing water supplies, particularly those ground water resources that are used for drinking water supplies, to ensure the vitality of local communities. This goal requires other state and local agencies to exercise their appropriate authorities to protect the water resource and to assist in meeting the goal of sustainable economic growth.

### **Milestones:**

- Protect and respect private property rights in accordance with state law and policy.
- Identify number of basins where water supply and demand have been inventoried.
- Identify number of basins where management alternatives have been identified and implemented to optimize existing and future water supplies, including surface water storage, ground water recharge, conservation measures, and weather modification.
- Obtain more accurate water supply, water measurement, and forecasting information.
- Disseminate water supply forecasts and trends to water users in cooperation with other federal and state agencies.
- Measure utilization of the Water Supply Bank and transfer procedures to allow sustainable use of the resource.
- Determination and implementation of measures and policies to enhance the utility of the Water Supply Bank and transfer procedures.
- Financial programs and funding strategies that meet the future water resource needs of the State of Idaho. Secure funding and resources in cooperation with the Governor and legislature. Reliable on-going, long-term funding will be needed to enable and support active stewardship of Idaho's water resources.
- Basin aquifer stabilization—stabilization of ground water levels in basins where declines are occurring to restore and maintain sustainable aquifer levels.
- Initiate and facilitate construction of additional surface water storage to meet current and future needs.
- Use of adaptive management to identify and address uncertainties for success, including those related to data, modeling, and impacts of climate variability.
- Balance water supply and demand—supply and demand must be in balance to support current and future use within a particular basin.
- Consider impact of water use changes and water supply trends on future water availability.

- Improve data management—accurate and abundant data is necessary to assist with ensuring stewardship of Idaho’s water resources to satisfy current and future uses.
- Coordination with state and local entities on measures to protect and enhance ground water and surface water resources so that these resources are available for use by the people of the State of Idaho.