Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer
Camp Aquifer Management Plan (ESPA CAMP)
&
Implementation Committee

At the request of the legislature the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) has been asked to undertake a review of the CAMP implementation process with respect to the identified targets and goals achieved during the first ten (10) years. Following its review the IWRB will submit planning recommendations to the legislature and the governor's office. There has also been a request to reinstate the CAMP Implementation Committee at this time.

Idaho Ground Water Appropriators (IGWA) represents ten (10) ground water districts and irrigation districts, eight (8) cities, and three (3) industrial users. In total, IGWA represents an estimated one (1) million acres irrigated by ground water on the ESPA. IGWA questions whether it is premature and unnecessary to reinstate the Committee. The legislature and governor's office should first respond to IWRB's review and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The ESPA CAMP was adopted by the IWRB on January 29, 2009 and then approved by the Idaho Legislature (House Bill 264) on April 23, 2009. The overarching goal of the Plan was to "sustain the economic viability and social and environmental health of the Eastern Snake Plain by adaptively managing a balance between water use and supplies."

The Plan established five objectives to achieve its goals:

1. Increase predictability for water users by managing for a reliable supply.
2. Create alternatives to administrative curtailment.
3. Manage overall demand for water within the Eastern Snake Plain for increased recharge to the aquifer.
4. Increase recharge to the aquifer.
5. Reduce withdrawals from the aquifer.

The Plan aimed to achieve an annual net ESPA water budget change of 600,000 acre-feet by 2030. This would be achieved in three phases through the implementation of a mix of management actions

- aquifer recharge;
- ground water to surface water conversions;
- demand reduction; and
- weather modification.

Phase 1 identified specific goals to achieve during the first ten (10) years of implementation.

Initially, the IWRB created an Implementation Committee for guidance and recommendations in establishing the actions, priorities, projects, and funding necessary to achieve the goals identified. The Committee has been largely inactive for the last ten (10) years.

ESPA STABILIZATION & RECOVERY

While the aquifer had been declining steadily over the last 50 years, drought exacerbated the impact of increased ground water diversions coupled with surface water irrigation efficiencies and conservation efforts that reduced incidental recharge. Public policy has also contributed to the issues on the ESPA. Examples of these issues include changes to the Palisade's Winter Water Savings Program, the Snake River Basin Adjudication, and the Nez Perce Agreement's flow augmentation requirements.

The combination of drought, increased ground water diversions, surface water conservation and efficiencies, and public policy may have contributed to the conflict on the ESPA. But it was a series of water delivery calls from surface and spring water users against junior ground water users that led to the actions that are reversing aquifer decline. (Surface Water Coalition, Clear Springs Foods, Rangen Inc., Hagerman Area, and Big Wood & Little Wood Surface Water Delivery Calls) Some of these water deliver calls remain active today.

Many of the goals and objectives of the CAMP process are already being implemented through private and public efforts. Together IGWA, the IWRB and state of Idaho, cities on the ESPA, and industrial users are working to recover and stabilize the ESPA aquifer.

In 2015 IGWA and the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) entered into a historic, long term settlement agreement (Agreement) to reverse aquifer decline, effect long term aquifer recovery, and fully resolve the issues on the ESPA. The objectives of that Agreement are as follows:

- Mitigate for material injury to senior water users in the Surface Water Coalition Delivery Call
- Provide safe harbor to participating ground water users in participating Ground Water Districts (GWD)
- Minimize economic impact to water users and the state economy
- Increase reliability and enforcement of use, measurement, and reporting across the Eastern Snake Plain (ESP)
- Develop an adaptive management plan to stabilize and enhance the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) ground water levels

These objectives mirror those of the CAMP process. Similar agreements have also been reached between cities on the ESPA and Southwest Irrigation District. Having these agreements in place combined with IWRB activities and the states commitment to fund and implement recharge further begs the question as to the necessity of reinstating the ESPA CAMP Implementation Committee.

Idaho Department of Water Resources provides oversight for these agreements. The state, largely represented through the IWRB, is also active in a number of other programs to support aquifer recovery and stabilization. These programs range from recharge to flow measurement and monitoring; cloud seeding; and federal programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the IWRB Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and a second IWRB RCPP for Soft Conversions and End Gun Removal.

Going forward, additional issues will likely impact the efforts to recover and stabilize the ESPA. These include the Swan Falls Agreement, the Columbia River Treaty, and the Biological Opinion for Salmon Recovery. IWRB is already actively engaged in these issues.

The IWRB has the decision making authority to fund and implement projects and programs to address these and other issues as they arise. The Implementation Committee does not. The IWRB should continue to be responsible for providing leadership for all facets of water management, including aquifer recovery and stabilization. Again, IGWA questions whether it is premature and unnecessary to reinstate the Committee at this time.

ACTIVE CONJUNCTIVE ADMINISTRATION DELIVERY CALLS (DC) & MITIGATION PLANS: The goal of these programs and plans is to protect and preserved ground and surface supplies on the Snake River Plain. This includes recovering and stabilizing the ESPA and maintaining minimum stream flows through the Snake River basin. There are additional economic and environmental benefits for agriculture, fish and wildlife, community growth and development, and recreation.

2009 Clear Springs Water DC Director's Final Order & Mitigation Plan *March 2012*
IGWA purchased Idaho Trout (Hardy Facilities for $33 million) which settled the Clear Springs Water Delivery Call and applied to any facilities owned or rented by Clear Springs Foods in the future.

2011 Billingsley Creek (Rangen) DC Director's Final Order *January 2015*
Curtailment of 159,000 acres which included Municipal, Commercial, and Industrial water rights junior to October 1962. In 2014 IGWA built a $5 million pipeline to deliver 7.5 cubic feet per second (cfs) of spring water to mitigate this DC. In 2017 IGWA purchased the Rangen Hatchery for $1.9 million.

Six Hagerman Area DCs Director's Final Order *June 2015*
IGWA negotiated subordination agreements with surface and spring owners to avoid the curtailment of junior groundwater rights.

IGWA SWC SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT *2015 – present*
Per the terms of this Agreement, IGWA provides 240,000 acre-feet (ac-ft) annually of demand reduction and recharge on the ESPA. IGWA also provides the SWC an additional 50,000 ac-ft of storage water annually.

Southwest Irrigation District (SWID) Settlement Agreement *2015 to present*
As part of its Settlement Agreement with the SWC, SWID has converted over 35,000 acres of groundwater supplies to surface water supplies. An estimated 90,000 ac-ft of water is no longer being withdrawn from their aquifer. SWID has also developed a number of recharge projects within their service territory. The amount of water being recharged is not currently available.

Coalition of Idaho Cities Mitigation Plan: *2019-2054*
Per the terms of this Agreement, the cities will recharge 7,650 ac-ft per year based on a five (5) year rolling average to mitigate present usage and future growth for the next 35 years.

State of Idaho Commitments *2016 – present*

- Idaho's goal is to recharge on average 250,000 ac-ft annually
- Management of Trust Water Rights
- IDWR oversight of settlement agreements and flow measurement monitoring

FEDERAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) *2007-present*
Under CREP, an estimated 19,500 acres of irrigated groundwater have been idled since the program's inception in 2007. This federal program provides a financial incentive to irrigators who reduce their demand on the water supply. On average over 30,000 ac-ft per year has remained in the aquifer since the program started in 2009.

IWRB Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) *2009-2013*
Projects funded through RCPP include:

- Ground to Surface Water Conversions and Surface Water Delivery Improvements (soft conversions)
- End Gun Removal and Pivot Enhancements
- Flood Irrigation Enhancements
- Pump Back and Storage Systems
- Fallowing/Conversion to Dryland for Groundwater Irrigated Lands
- Thousand Springs Conservation Program

Over 12,842 acres of irrigated land has been converted from groundwater to surface water supplies since the program began in 2009. This translates to an estimated 19,700 ac-ft that remains in the aquifer every year.

IWRB RCPP for Soft Conversions and End Gun Removal *2017-2020*
The program will provide $5 million to implement additional soft conversions and end gun removal program. A soft conversion is one where an irrigator has a dual irrigation system that allows him to irrigate using either ground or surface water. When the program ends, it is projected that an additional 16,000 ac-ft of water will be converted from groundwater to surface water supplies above and below American Falls Reservoir.

OTHER ISSUES AFFECTING THE ESPA

Swan Falls Agreement

The Swan Falls Agreement between Idaho Power and the state of Idaho establishes minimum flows at Murphy Gage of 5600 cfs during the winter and 3900 cfs during the summer. The Agreement was negotiated between the state of Idaho and Idaho Power to protect Idaho Power's minimum flows at Swan Falls. This followed a lawsuit and an Idaho Supreme Court ruling that put junior groundwater users above Swan Falls Dam at risk of curtailment. The controversy began in the 1970's and continues today as we attempt to balance water uses for agriculture and hydropower generation in the Snake River Basin.

As part of the Agreement, Idaho Power's water rights above Swan Falls are held in trust by the state of Idaho to protect the minimum flows and regulate any future development in an area that extends from Mountain Home across the ESPA to the Wyoming border. The following website provides a map of the trust water area. *https://data-idwr.opendata.arcgis.com*

Columbia River Treaty

The Columbia River Treaty is an international agreement between the United States and Canada to cooperatively manage water in the Columbia River Basin for flood control and hydropower generation. It was ratified in 1961 and implemented in 1964. Negotiations are currently underway to update the Treaty by re-allocating the hydropower benefits, flood control responsibilities, and possibly addressing environmental impacts. The outcome of these negotiations could affect the Upper Snake River System of the Columbia and Snake River. This could impact Idaho Power's dams and Idaho's reservoir storage system.

Biological Opinion for Salmon Recovery

The final Bi-Op could affect the operation and management of Idaho's reservoir system. Additional information is available at
https://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fish_passage/fcrps_opinion/federal_columbia_river_power_system.html