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December 10, 2019

Scott Bedke, Speaker of the House  
Idaho House of Representatives  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID, 83720

RE: ESPA CAMP Water Management Actions

Dear Speaker Bedke,

On May 8, 2019, the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) received your letter requesting a 10-year progress report on a wide array of water management actions focused on stabilizing and recovering the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) in Southern Idaho. The initiatives were detailed in the 2009 ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan, adopted the following year by the Idaho Legislature and incorporated into the State Water Plan.

The IWRB is pleased to report that substantial progress has been made in meeting ESPA CAMP hydrologic targets outlined in the ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP). Most importantly, ESPA water levels have been increasing and responding to the multi-pronged stabilization and recovery strategies. From the spring of 2015 to the spring of 2019, state hydrologists reported that ESPA water levels rose by 1.8 million acre-feet, the largest increase documented in the last 60 years.

The objective of the ESPA CAMP was to incrementally increase the water budget by 600,000 acre-feet of water annually into the ESPA by the year 2030. This objective was to be achieved by a mix of management actions described in the ESPA CAMP. As of 2019, the ESPA annual water budget has been increased by an average of 554,000 acre-feet on an annual basis. The most significant initiatives include: the IWRB's Managed Recharge Program, a 240,000 acre-feet annual reduction in consumptive water use by groundwater users across the ESPA via the 2015 water settlement, groundwater-to-surface water conversions, Cloud Seeding, and other measures.

Restoring the ESPA to sustainable levels has broad public support from water users across the ESPA and stakeholders in the Snake River Basin. The 2015

historic water settlement required a significant commitment by groundwater users to reduce their groundwater use by 240,000 acre-feet per year. The 2015 settlement ended years of litigation that could have curtailed water use on countless acres of farmland in the ESPA region and caused economic havoc.

**Legislative investment brings results.** The IWRB's Managed Recharge Program began making an impact when the Idaho Legislature made a significant investment in ESPA restoration activities in 2014, with the passage of HB 547, providing \$5 million annually to the IWRB for statewide aquifer stabilization. SCR 136 in 2016 directed the IWRB to develop a recharge program of 250,000 acre-feet per year on an average annual basis.

Since that time, the IWRB has been partnering with canal companies and irrigation districts across the ESPA region to use their canals to send water flows into recharge basins during the winter months, utilizing the IWRB's recharge water rights. Today, the IWRB works with more than 15 entities to send recharge flows into the ESPA at more than 25 recharge basins/sites. Because southern Idaho is subject to drought, the IWRB works to exceed 250,000 acre-feet in wet years, understanding there will not be enough water to reach 250,000 acre-feet of recharge in dry years.

As of June 2019, the IWRB has received a total of over \$54 million in the Secondary Aquifer Fund. Approximately \$35 million has been either committed/expended on the ESPA, with over \$29 million of that allocated towards the IWRB's Managed Recharge Program, \$3.5 million towards the Cloud Seeding program, and over \$2 million towards aquifer monitoring and modeling. In addition, \$9.1 million has been used from these funds for non-ESPA efforts, including the Treasure Valley Aquifer Groundwater Flow Model.

**Active public involvement and input continues** on the IWRB's ESPA sustainability initiatives. At the conclusion of the ESPA CAMP in 2009, it was expected that an Implementation Committee would provide public feedback and guide the plan moving forward. The ESPA CAMP anticipated that water users would be assessed to fund plan implementation. Those assessments were never authorized, and the committee was phased out. Instead, the IWRB and its aquifer stabilization committee have directly managed and implemented the ESPA CAMP goals.

The IWRB invites public feedback from stakeholders on the ESPA in its regular meetings and committee meetings. Over the last six months, as the IWRB has worked to compile this 10-year progress report the IWRB has received formal public comment from all stakeholder groups in the ESPA region. The overarching message is that the ESPA CAMP goals and objectives should continue to be the guiding light for the IWRB.

**Looking ahead**, the IWRB is pleased to report on the substantial progress achieved thus far on ESPA sustainability. There is still more work to be done. For example, some springs are showing increased flows, but others have not. The IWRB is carefully monitoring aquifer-retention rates related to managed recharge sites to ensure the State is getting the most "bang for the buck." The IWRB also is seeking input from the stakeholders affected by the ESPA-restoration activities on how the IWRB's action affect Southern Idaho's economy, fisheries, agriculture, municipal supplies, power generation, and water quality.

Idaho's leadership on restoring the ESPA to sustainable levels is an example that other States can only aspire to. Idaho's future depends on a sustainable supply of water. While southern Idaho is a desert, visionary leadership and investment have created a robust, diversified economy that depends on thoughtful planning and smart water management.

The IWRB appreciates the trust and support of the Idaho Legislature, Governor Little, and former Governor Otter. We are committed to restoring the ESPA to sustainable levels while striving to optimize outcomes for the State, all water users, and the environment.

Sincerely,



Roger Chase  
Chairman  
Idaho Water Resource Board

Cc: Governor Brad Little  
Lt. Governor Janice McGeachin  
Senate Pro Tem Brent Hill  
Sen. Lee Heider, Chairman, Senate Resources & Environment Committee  
Rep. Marc Gibbs, Chairman, House Resources & Conservation Committee  
Senate Resources & Environment Committee  
House Resources & Conservation Committee members  
Sen. Steve Bair, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee  
Rep. Rick Youngblood, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee  
Idaho Water Resource Board members  
Director Gary Spackman  
Deputy Director Mat Weaver  
Brian Patton, Idaho Water Resource Board Executive Officer  
Paul Arrington, Idaho Water Users Association

*ESPA CAMP Progress Report documents can be found at:*  
<https://idwr.idaho.gov/IWRB/>