ATTACHMENT A

LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF IDAHO
Sixty-fifth Legislature Second Regular Session - 2020

IN THE SENATE

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 137
BY STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

STATING FINDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE AND DIRECTING THE IDAHO WATER RESOURCE BOARD TO WORK EXPEDITIOUSLY WITH LOCAL WATER USERS TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT THAT RESOLVES CURRENT TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS THAT ARE THE RESULT OF COMPETING WATER SUPPLY DEMANDS IN THE LEMHI RIVER BASIN AND THAT THE COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT, TO THE BEST OF THE ABILITIES OF THE PARTICIPATING PARTIES AND IN THE SPIRIT OF COMPROMISE AND RESOLUTION, IS CONSISTENT WITH PAST PRACTICES, FUTURE NEEDS, AND IDAHO LAW.

Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Idaho:

WHEREAS, Lemhi irrigators have diverted natural flow in the Lemhi River Basin in excess of their decreed rights for their shared benefit during the spring runoff in late May or June when flows exceed the amount of water required to satisfy all existing water rights for almost as long as there has been irrigation in the Lemhi River Basin; and

WHEREAS, the 1982 Lemhi Basin Decree memorialized the high-flow practice in a general provision that allowed irrigators whose rights were decreed in the Lemhi Adjudication to continue to divert "so called 'high waters' or 'flood waters' in addition to the quantified rights as described in the recommended decree of water rights"; and

WHEREAS, the 1982 Lemhi Basin Decree defined high water or flood water as the diversion of "natural flow of water over and above the amount required to fulfill (1) existing quantified rights as shown in the decree of water rights and (2) any future rights that may be established pursuant to statutory procedures of the State of Idaho"; and

WHEREAS, Lemhi irrigators sought to decree the high-flow practice through the filing of claims in the Snake River Basin Adjudication (SRBA); and

WHEREAS, the Lemhi water users' claims were denied by the SRBA District Court as a result of objections to the claims by the United States, the Nez Perce Tribe, and conservation groups; and

WHEREAS, the SRBA District Court reaffirmed the Lemhi Basin Decree high-flow general provision through the inclusion of the Basin 74 General Provision in the SRBA Final Unified Decree; and

WHEREAS, since the early 1990s, Lemhi irrigators have led an effort to protect and enhance salmon runs in the Lemhi River Basin, including but not limited to providing passage flows for salmon, screening diversion works, and implementing habitat improvement projects; and

WHEREAS, the National Marine Fisheries Services (NOAA Fisheries), in the spring of 2000, threatened to bring an enforcement action under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) against Lemhi irrigators for dewatering of the Lemhi River at the L-6 diversion; and
WHEREAS, the 2001 Idaho Legislature enacted Section 42-1506, Idaho Code, at the request of the Lemhi River Basin irrigators, which authorized the Idaho Water Resource Board to appropriate a minimum stream flow in the lower reach of the Lemhi River to provide fish passage and protect Lemhi water users from ESA enforcement actions; and
WHEREAS, the Lemhi minimum stream flow is sustained, in part, through the Lemhi water bank and voluntary agreements not to divert when the minimum stream flow is not being met; and
WHEREAS, the biological and business goals of the Lemhi irrigators are to conserve, restore, and enhance sufficient habitat to sustain viable fish populations in the Lemhi River Basin while protecting private property rights and preserving and enhancing the farming and ranching lifestyle and economy of the Lemhi River Basin; and
WHEREAS, in the absence of storage reservoirs in the Lemhi River Basin, the high-flow practice helps to achieve the Lemhi irrigators' stated biological and business goals by extending the water supply for irrigators and enhancing the natural flow of the Lemhi River during the dry summer months; and
WHEREAS, consistent with the Lemhi irrigators' biological and business goals, 15 cubic feet per second (cfs) of the 35 cfs of the Lemhi minimum in-stream flow water right diversion rate is subordinated to high water or flood water authorized under the Lemhi Basin Decree; and
WHEREAS, a consequence of the SRBA District Court not decreeing the Lemhi irrigators' high-flow claims is that the high-flow practice does not have an established priority date and therefore is not protected from junior water rights diverting and diminishing the water supply available for future high-flow diversions; and
WHEREAS, without protection for the Lemhi high-flow practice, high-flow water supplies historically available to the irrigators could be reduced, maintenance of the Lemhi minimum stream flow could be compromised, and Lemhi water users could face an increased risk of ESA enforcement actions; and
WHEREAS, the SRBA decreed the U.S. Forest Service federal reserved water rights 75-13316 and 77-11941 on the main stem Salmon River in the SRBA; and
WHEREAS, the quantity of the U.S. Forest Service's Salmon River reserved water rights would have precluded most future development in the Salmon River Basin, the Forest Service agreed to subordinate its water rights to up to "150 cfs (including not more than 5,000 acres of irrigation...) when the mean daily discharge at the Shoup gage is [less than] 1,280 cfs" and "an additional diversion of 225 cfs (including up to an additional 10,000 acres of irrigation...) when the mean daily discharge at the Shoup gage is [greater than or equal to] 1,280 cfs"; and
WHEREAS, since the decree of the Lemhi minimum stream flow water right and the Salmon River federal reserved water rights, certain irrigators in the Lemhi River Basin have or are in the process of perfecting water rights in the Lemhi River Basin; and
WHEREAS, the SRBA Final Unified Decree establishes that 27 tributaries to the Lemhi River "shall be administered separately from all other water rights in [the Lemhi] Basin ... in accordance with the prior appropriation doctrine as established by Idaho law"; and
WHEREAS, the SRBA District Court held the separate streams general provision does not preclude the U.S. Forest Service from making a delivery call under its Salmon River federal reserved water rights; and

WHEREAS, new applications to appropriate water on tributary streams have led to numerous protests by downstream Lemhi water users, conservation groups, and state agencies; and

WHEREAS, the Idaho Department of Water Resources has recently conditioned certain protested water right permit applications in the Lemhi River Basin limiting the diversion of water authorized by the permits to times when stream flows at specified locations within the Lemhi River Basin exceed certain minimum flow rates, and these conditioned stream flow diversion limitations are separate and apart from the Lemhi minimum stream flow water right; and

WHEREAS, the State of Idaho must harmonize its competing duties to protect existing water rights, to safeguard the provisions of the Forest Service settlement, to allocate additional water rights, to conserve, restore, and enhance sufficient habitat to sustain viable fish populations, and to enhance the farming and ranching lifestyle and the economy of the Lemhi River Basin; and

WHEREAS, the above described legal developments have created legal uncertainty for all water users in the Lemhi River Basin; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature finds it is in the public interest for affected stakeholders to work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive solution that achieves the Lemhi irrigators' biological and business goals of conserving, restoring, and enhancing sufficient habitat to sustain viable fish populations in the Lemhi River Basin while protecting private property rights and preserving and enhancing the farming and ranching lifestyle and economy of the Lemhi River Basin; and

WHEREAS, Section 42-1734, Idaho Code, provides authority to the Idaho Water Resource Board to cooperate in water studies, planning, and research; and

WHEREAS, the Idaho Legislature established the Aquifer Planning and Management Fund to provide moneys for "monitoring, measurement and comprehensive plan development as well as for personnel costs, operating expenditures and capital outlay associated with the statewide comprehensive aquifer planning and management effort."

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the members of the Second Regular Session of the Sixty-fifth Idaho Legislature, the Senate and the House of Representatives concurring therein, that we direct the Idaho Water Resource Board, with technical support from the Idaho Department of Water Resources, to work expeditiously with local water users to develop a comprehensive settlement that resolves current tensions and conflict that are the result of competing water supply demands in the Lemhi River Basin and that the comprehensive settlement, to the best of the abilities of the participating parties and in the spirit of compromise and resolution, is consistent with past practices, future needs, and Idaho law.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Idaho Water Resource Board report to the First Regular Session of the Sixty-sixth Idaho Legislature on the implementation of this resolution.