



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board on pace to meet 600,000 acre-foot target for Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer; final report sent to Speaker Bedke

BOISE - (Dec. 18, 2019) – Today, the Idaho Water Resource Board delivered a report to House Speaker Scott Bedke, summarizing the significant progress that’s been made toward meeting or exceeding milestones necessary to rebuild the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) to long-term sustainable levels.

The 2009 ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (ESPA CAMP) set a target of adding 600,000 acre-feet of water to the aquifer by 2030 on an annual basis to bring the Lake Erie-sized ground water source to sustainable levels. In the report to Speaker Bedke, the Board reports that it has reached an annual average water budget of approximately 555,000 acre-feet of water for the ESPA, or 92 percent of the goal so far.

The water budget change includes the Board’s ESPA managed recharge program, a 13 percent reduction in consumptive water use by ground water users across the ESPA via the 2015 historic water settlement, ground water-to-surface water conversions, Cloud Seeding, and other measures.

Restoring the ESPA to sustainable levels is a goal that has broad public support from water users across the ESPA, cities and communities, business and industry, Idaho Power Co., the Idaho Legislature, and Governors Butch Otter and Brad Little.

“This is a great step forward for the people of Idaho, making sure that we have a sustainable water supply for future generations and our future needs,” said Roger Chase, Chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board. “In putting together this report over the last six months, it’s been very reassuring that the people of Idaho wholeheartedly support protecting and rebuilding this precious resource. The ESPA CAMP is the foundation for creating a sustainable water supply in Southern Idaho. Our report demonstrates that the plan is working.”

Bedke requested the 10-year review report last summer, asking that it be delivered by the beginning of the 2020 legislative session.

The Board also thanked the Idaho Legislature for providing substantial funding for the Board’s ESPA managed recharge program. Since the funding kicked in, the Board has been able to make substantial progress toward meeting an annual goal of 250,000 acre-feet of recharge flows into the aquifer. It’s expected that the Board will need to exceed that amount in wet years to make up for drought years, when 150,000 acre-feet of recharge flows may be possible at the most. The Board works with more than 15 entities to send recharge flows into the ESPA at more than 25 recharge basins/sites.

To date, the Board has received \$54 million from the Idaho Legislature to cover the costs of aquifer-sustainability initiatives. Those funds include \$29M for the ESPA recharge program, \$3.5M for cloud seeding (in partnership with Idaho Power), and \$2M for aquifer monitoring and modeling.

The Board also applauded Speaker Bedke, the Surface Water Coalition and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators for hammering out the 2015 historic water settlement, which provides for a 13 percent reduction in ground water use across the Eastern Snake Plain region, or a net reduction in 240,000 acre-feet of water.

The contribution of 7,650 acre-feet of water by the coalition of cities in the ESPA region also is important, officials said.

“We couldn’t have reached the current level of sustainability water targets without the 2015 water settlement, the ESPA CAMP plan, the cities’ contribution, Idaho Power’s Cloud Seeding program, and all of the follow up actions and cooperation by our partners in the recharge program, canal companies and irrigation districts,” added Water Board Vice Chairman Jeff Raybould of Rexburg.

The Board will need to “stay the course” with ESPA sustainability initiatives for many years to come to restore the aquifer, officials said.

“We compliment the board for all of their work, and we need to keep pushing ahead toward ESPA sustainability,” said Lynn Tominaga, executive director of IGWA.

“The CAMP is working; the science says it’s working,” added Brian Olmstead, general manager of the Twin Falls Canal Company and a spokesman for the Surface Water Coalition. “We are all working together. We applaud and support the board’s recharge program and other initiatives. We need everybody who’s involved in stabilizing the aquifer to continue their work.”

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

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