



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board recharges about 447,950 acre-feet of water into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer in winter 2019-20

BOISE - (May 20, 2020) – The Idaho Water Resource Board recharged approximately 447,950 acre-feet of water into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer in the winter of 2019-20, according to a staff report presented on Tuesday.

It was the fourth year in a row that the Board has been able to exceed its goal to recharge an average of 250,000 acre-feet into the ESPA on annual basis. Gary Spackman, Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources, praised the Board for meeting and exceeding recharge targets.

“I want to congratulate the Board for the great work you’ve done,” Spackman said. “It’s just a remarkable accomplishment.”

Two new recharge sites in the Magic Valley region, Milepost 29 on the Milner-Gooding Canal and Wilson Canyon on the North Side Canal, added to the Board’s overall recharge capacity in the 2019-20 winter season, said Wesley Hipkey, Recharge Program Manager for the Board. The Board recharged 364,000 acre-feet of water in the Magic Valley region over 202 days. In the Upper Snake Valley, the Board recharged 83,984 acre-feet of water over 74 days, Hipke said.

With substantial funding and direction from the Idaho Legislature, the Board has been working to restore the ESPA to sustainable levels since 2014 by diverting Snake River surface water to multiple aquifer-recharge sites in the ESPA region. Up to that point, the ESPA was being over-drafted by about 200,000 acre-feet of water per year. Aquifer levels have been declining since the 1950s.

A 2015 historic settlement between the Surface Water Coalition and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators (IGWA) in the ESPA region has led to a reduction in ground water pumping by 240,000 acre-feet by ground water users on an annual basis. The Board’s recharge program, combined with the IGWA-SWC settlement, has played a major part in causing ESPA water levels to increase in recent years.

The key is to continue to work toward those gains over the long term, Hipke said.

“We know that drought years will be coming in the future, so we have to exceed our recharge goal in wet years to stay on track with our long-term goals,” Hipke said.

The Board paid canal companies and irrigation districts \$3.46 million in the winter of 2019-20 for the canals to use their water-conveyance systems to move water to ESPA recharge sites, he said.

Looking ahead to next year, Hipke indicated that staff has been making investments in the Upper Snake Valley for the development of off-canal recharge sites in the Egin Lakes area and Butte-Market Lake area, among others. All of those sites are intended to increase recharge capacity and provide flexibility in operations, he said.

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