



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Idaho Water Resource Board approves priorities for allocating \$70M in major water infrastructure projects statewide**

BOISE - (March 22, 2021) – The Idaho Water Resource Board voted on Friday to recommend priorities for allocating as much as \$70 million in funding appropriated by the Idaho Legislature and approved by Gov. Brad Little for major water infrastructure projects statewide.

It also discussed approval by the Legislature’s Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee of \$1 million in funding for ongoing implementation of a Flood Management Grant Program, \$200,000 of which will be used for Snake water quality analyses in 2021.

Through House Bill 285 approved by the 2019 Idaho Legislature and Senate Bill 1121 recently approved by the 2021 Legislature and signed by Gov. Little, \$70 million in funding for critical water projects was provided. In accordance with legislative direction, the IWRB recommended allocation of the funds as follows:

- \$28 million for a sustainable water system for Mountain Home Air Force Base. The Board’s contribution would cover the construction of a pipeline from CJ Strike Reservoir to the base.
- \$22.4 million for large aquifer-recharge projects in Eastern Idaho. The Board is currently researching the capability of several large off-river recharge sites in the Upper Snake River Basin.
- \$17.6 million in interim funding for raising Anderson Ranch Reservoir by 6 feet to create an additional 29,000 acre-feet of storage water. The Board will coordinate with water users to fund the non-federal portion of the estimated \$83 million project. Reclamation is completing the final Environmental Impact Statement on the project; final design is expected to begin by December 2021.
- \$2 million to investigate developing more water storage in Bear Lake for water users in the Bear River Basin.

In other news, the Board learned that the recharge program for the Winter 2020-21 is finishing up early this year, as irrigation canals need to begin diverting water to fill canals and serve water users in April. The total amount of recharge will be about 130,000 acre-feet of water to the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). All of the recharge was done at Magic Valley recharge sites this year.

Wesley Hipke, Recharge Program Manager for the Board, said the increased recharge site capacity developed over the past several years allowed the Board to recharge a significant amount of water into the ESPA despite the limited snowpack. Looking at a comparable snowpack/runoff year in 2015-2016,

the Board recharged about 75,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA with only the Milepost 31 site., he said.

With similar water supply conditions this year, the Board was able to recharge more water by using MP 31, as well as the new Wilson Canyon and MP 29 recharge sites, and Southwest Irrigation District injection wells. The Board also allowed 27,287 acre-feet of water to flow past Milner Dam at the request of the Idaho Power Company for hydropower production and water quality.

Hipke said ESPA recharge activities could start up again this spring if there are any surplus flows released in the Upper Snake region.

In other action, the Board approved three water transactions with local irrigators to improve streamflows for endangered salmon and steelhead in the Upper Salmon River Basin. The transactions involve Panther Creek, Morgan Creek and more water for the L-6 diversion on the Lemhi River. The Board coordinates with the local irrigators and land owners to help maintain a 35 cfs minimum flow at L-6 for spring juvenile fish passage and 25 cfs for upriver adult migration in the fall.

In other action, the Board:

- Heard a presentation from Congressman Mike Simpson on his concept proposal to save endangered salmon in Idaho. Simpson’s plan calls for removing the four Lower Snake River dams in Washington to keep salmon and steelhead from going extinct in Idaho while providing mitigation funds to wheat farmers, barging companies, lower Snake River irrigators. It also calls for developing alternative sources of energy to replace the energy lost from the Lower Snake dams.

“Salmon are a big part of our heritage,” Simpson said. “That’s important to me. I’m doing this for our grandchildren. Let’s put down the pitchforks and have a conversation. We need to have this debate.”

Jeff Raybould, Chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board, said, “The Board needs to be engaged in this conversation. I would like to continue the dialogue. There has to be a solution to provide control over our water resources and save the salmon.”

- Heard a presentation from Paul Kimmel with the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee. Kimmel said water-conservation measures continue to lead to a reduction in overall water consumption by Moscow and Pullman residents, plus at Washington State University and the University of Idaho. Water use has decreased by 20 percent since 1992, he said, slowing the rate of the aquifer decline to .7 feet per year. Still, a major long-term solution will be needed, and the PBAC group will have a final recommendation by December 2021, he said.
- Approved a \$95,000 loan with 3.5 percent interest to Picabo Livestock Company, which operates the Picabo community water system, for a backup drinking water well.

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