



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board hears about major uptick in new water permit applications in N. Idaho, status of ground water aquifers

LEWISTON - (May 23, 2022) – Rapid population growth in the Northern Idaho region has led to a major increase in domestic well applications and people seeking customer service on water issues, doubling the water right application workload for the Idaho Department of Water Resources staff in the region, officials said Friday.

“We’re getting over 100 phone calls a day on our busiest days, over 140 walk-ins a month, and we’ve had over 1,200 well-drilling applications since June of last year,” said Michelle Richman, Northern Idaho regional manager for IDWR in Coeur d’Alene. “The population growth in our region is really affecting our workload.”

The N. Idaho region is currently receiving the most water right applications statewide (see graphic below). The major uptick in water inquiries and permit applications is one indicator of how population growth is affecting the demand for water statewide.

“In North Idaho, we’re seeing that coping with drought, growth and high demand for water supplies are a big priority for the people who live here,” said Idaho Water Board member JoAnn Cole-Hansen who is based in Lewiston.

Water Board Chairman Jeff Raybould agreed. “Trying to meet the increasing demand for water in our state is going to get more complex over time.”

In that vein, the Board received updates about the status of three key ground water aquifers in the N. Idaho region that provide water supplies for the growing area – the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer in the Coeur d’Alene/Spokane area, Palouse Basin Aquifer in the Moscow-Pullman area, and multiple aquifers underlying the Lewiston area.

The Lewiston Plateau and Palouse Basin aquifers are experiencing declines, while the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer is holding steady, officials said.

The Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer is a key source of drinking water for more than 500,000 people. Thirty-eight monitoring wells show the aquifer water levels have gone up since the 1990s, and otherwise, go up and down, following the trends of each water year, said Daniel Sturgis, a hydrogeologist for IDWR.

The aquifer peaks every 5-8 years, he said, adding with new population growth, “there is a lot of demand on this aquifer right now.”

In the Palouse Basin, major water conservation efforts have reduced the rate of the decline, but the aquifer is still declining about 7/10ths of a foot each year, officials said. A number of solutions are being explored to recharge the aquifer to sustainable levels. A workshop will be held in July to share the alternatives and costs with the public, officials with the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee said.

In the Lewiston area, demand for water is exceeding the ability of some of the aquifers to keep pace, Sturgis said. The Lewiston Plateau Ground Water Management Area has been in place since 2013; a management plan was completed in 2015.

Recent measurements show a decline in a Lewiston aquifer near the junction of the Snake River, he said. The construction of Lower Granite Dam raised the water level of the Snake River near Lewiston by 30 feet, and that increased the ground water level by a similar amount. Since then, however, that aquifer has declined to almost pre-dam levels, he said. Another area of concern is the Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District (LOID) wells. One of the LOID wells has dropped more than 15 feet since 2001, with summer water levels dropping 30 feet in 2021, Sturgis said.

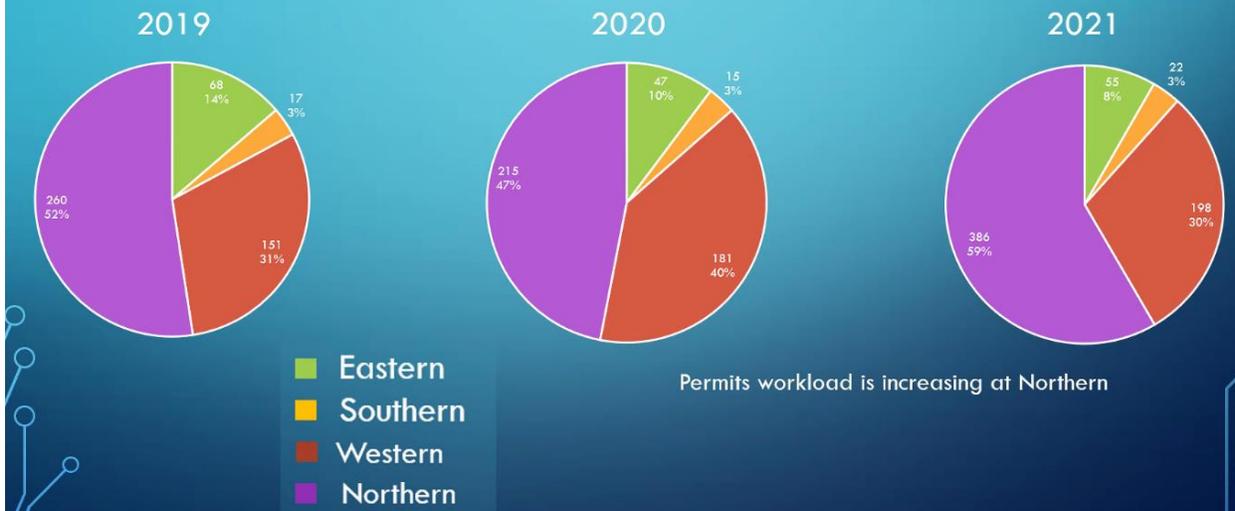
IDWR staff is adding more ground water monitoring wells throughout the Lewiston area to better understand how water use is affecting the aquifers, track recharge rates, and what management steps might need to be taken in the future.

In other action, the Board:

- Toured the Board’s Dworshak Small Hydropower Plant, located on pipelines from Dworshak to the USFWS’s Clearwater Fish Hatchery downstream. The hydro plant produces about 21 million kilowatt-hours per year, officials said. The Bonneville Power Administration purchases the power from the facility. The hydro plant generates about \$738,000 in net annual revenue for the Board, which is used to support and finance statewide water projects, officials said.
- Approved a 5-year, \$225,000 loan to Reynolds Creek Irrigation District at 2.8 percent interest. The bridge loan will allow the district to complete repairs to a 940-foot syphon system that feeds water to a canal from the Snake River. Located in Owyhee County, the project also has a hydroelectric component that produces revenue for the district.
- Approved a 30-year, \$1.5 million loan to the Delmore Canal Company at 3.5 percent interest for the purchase of water rights. The project is located in Oneida County.
- Approved an increase of \$900,000 to an existing \$250,000 loan to the Blaine County Canal Company, bringing the cost of the total loan to \$1,150,000 at 2.6 percent over a 15-year term. The loan will provide bridge funding to cover the costs of replacing a diversion structure and converting a section of canals to an enclosed pipe system. Trout Unlimited and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are partners in the project.

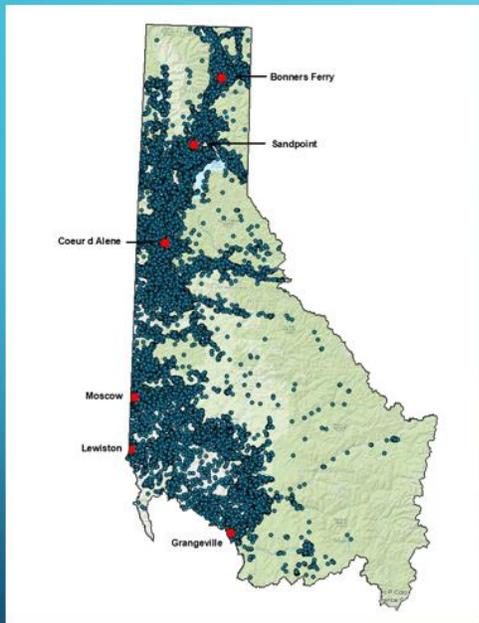
(See illustrations on N. Idaho water wells applications below)

APPLICATIONS FOR PERMIT RECEIVED BY REGION

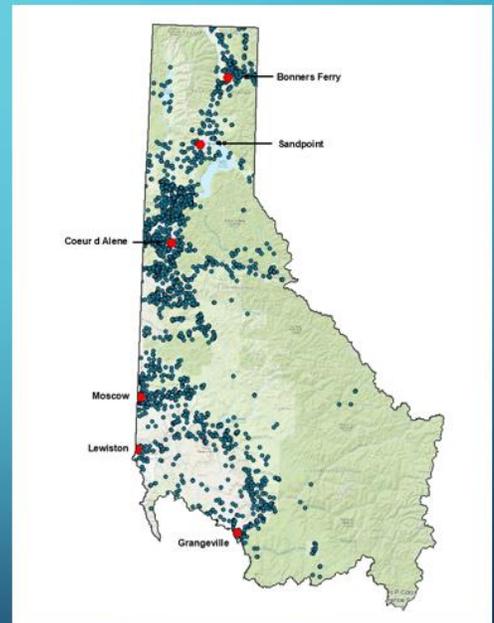


Water permit applications in the Northern Region are outpacing the other regions of Idaho.

POPULATION GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT



Location of all recorded wells in Northern Region



Location of wells drilled since 2020

Source: IDWR

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