



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Idaho Water Resource Board contact: Brian Patton, Deputy Director, 208-287-4800

## **IWRB officials pleased to see construction work wrapping up on Priest Lake outlet dam, providing more flexibility in lake management**

SANDPOINT – (May 28, 2024) – Idaho Water Resource Board officials toured the Priest Lake outlet dam to view completed improvements during its meeting in Sandpoint last week, after hearing from staff that adding 6” of height to the 11 outlet dam gates will enhance lake management.

“The gate height extensions are allowing for a new approach to provide flexibility in lake management while also providing more flow in the river below the dam,” said Michelle Richman, Northern Idaho regional manager for IDWR. “This is a positive outcome of the Board’s investment in the Priest Lake outlet dam.”

State law requires that IDWR maintain the Priest Lake level at 3.0 feet by Memorial Day to maintain water levels for docks, beach frontage and recreational use in the summer season in normal or wet years, Richman noted. IDWR also has the option of maintaining lake levels at 3.0-3.5 feet in dry years for additional flexibility.

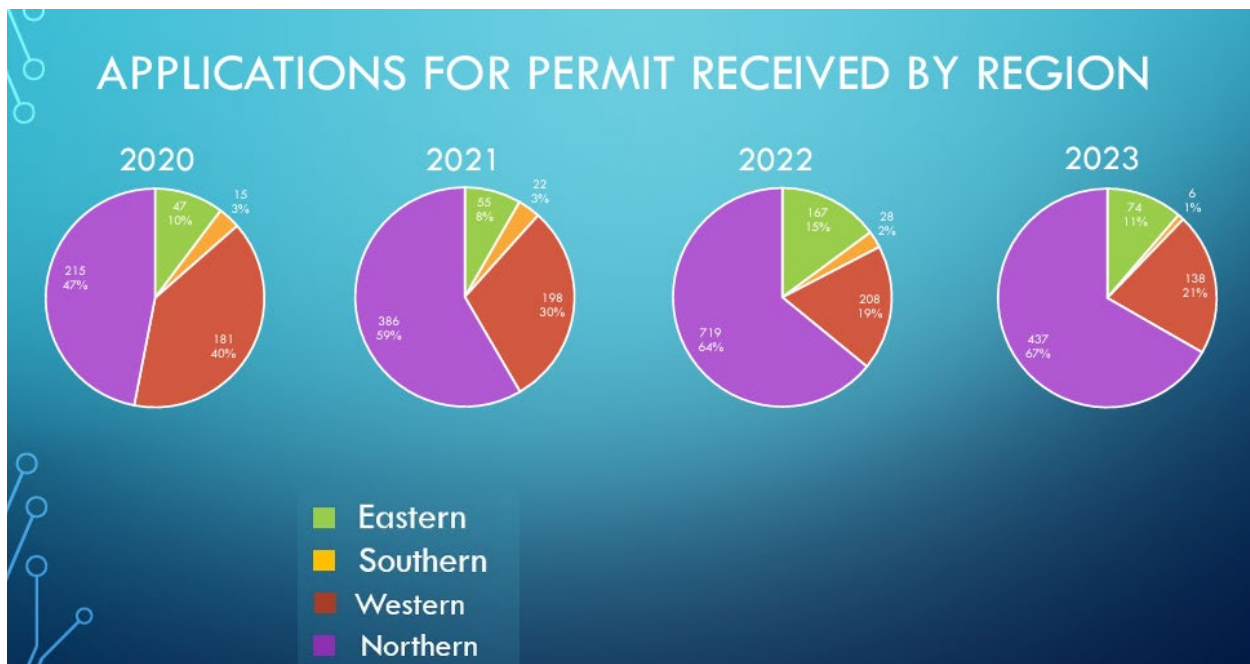
“The lake and the river are one cohesive system,” Richman said. “It’s not simple. It’s a dynamic system. The lake level can change quickly with weather, rain on snow events, and evaporation.”

Storing additional water in Priest Lake in the spring can provide more water flows later in the year to maintain the 3.0-foot lake levels and provide more water for resident fish populations below the dam, she said.

After a very dry year in 2015, the Idaho Water Resource Board launched a study to determine how best to maintain statutorily mandated lake levels while maintaining adequate flow in the Priest River downstream, particularly in dry years. . The study recommended adding 6” extensions on the outlet dam gates to allow additional storage and provide more flexibility in lake management.

The Board approved a construction plan to increase the height of the dam’s outlet gates and necessary structural modifications, and reconstruction of a breakwater structure at the mouth of the Thorofare at the north end of Priest Lake – something that Priest Lake homeowners and boaters had sought to achieve for years. Construction of the new breakwater structure was completed in 2021. The final phase of the outlet dam modifications and improvements were constructed in the winter of 2023-24. Closeout of the project is underway.

During the Board meeting, Richman also gave an update on IDWR’s Northern Idaho activities. She noted that the Northern Idaho region continues to outpace other parts of the state when it comes to applications for water rights permits, with 437 in 2023.



The ongoing Northern Idaho water rights adjudications and rapid population growth in the area have contributed to the increase in water right application filings, she said.

The Northern Idaho regional office is fully staffed for the first time since 2019, she told the Board, with six hires in the last 12 months. “That’s a huge thing for us to handle our increasing workload and provide the quality customer service.”

The Northern Idaho staff has been working to respond in a timely manner to applications for water rights permits, new well-drilling permits, and stream-channel alteration permit requests, while also tracking dam safety and the water levels of key aquifers in the region, she said.

In other action, the Board:

- Reviewed a request by Payette River Basin water users to work toward acquiring 16,000 acre-feet of uncontracted water storage space from the Bureau of Reclamation at Cascade Reservoir and potentially 22,000 acre-feet of uncontracted water storage space in Deadwood Reservoir. The project will be added to the Board’s Regional Water Sustainability Priority List, which allows the IWRB to work with water users to evaluate project feasibility and options for development.
- Approved a new loan for \$185,333 to the Farmer’s Land and Irrigation Company, located in SE Idaho, to replace an existing check structure. The loan interest rate will be 8.5 percent and carry a 15-year repayment term.
- Approved a one-year extension of an existing loan to the Boise City Canal Co.

#####