



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Brian Patton, Deputy Director, Idaho Department of Water Resources, 208-287-4800

IDWR finds 75,300 acre-foot shortfall of water in July 2025 Methodology Order; Junior groundwater users encouraged to join an approved, compliant mitigation plan

BOISE - (July 10, 2025) – In the ongoing Surface Water Coalition’s conjunctive administration delivery call, Director Mathew Weaver of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) has found that the Twin Falls Canal Co. may face a shortfall of 75,300 acre-feet of water in the 2025 irrigation season in an order signed today and sent to water users.

The Methodology Order is the court-approved process IDWR uses to evaluate water supply conditions and irrigation demand in the delivery call proceedings. From that data, IDWR calculates an in-season demand shortfall, which quantifies the impacts or injury to Snake River surface water users with senior water rights caused by junior water users pumping from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA).

Under Idaho water law, surface water users with senior water rights have priority over water users with junior rights on the Snake River and the ESPA. The rule of law is “first in time, first in right.” On the Snake River, IDWR manages both surface and groundwater resources together as one whole, or “conjunctively,” in calculating impacts each year.

To quote the Director’s order: “On or before July 25, 2025, ground water users holding consumptive water rights bearing priority dates junior to October 11, 1900, within the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer area of common ground water supply shall establish, to the satisfaction of the Director, that they can mitigate for their proportionate share of the predicted IDS (water demand shortfall) of 75,300 acre-feet in accordance with an approved mitigation plan. If a junior ground water user cannot establish, to the satisfaction of the Director, that they can mitigate for their proportionate share of the predicted IDS (shortfall) of 75,300 acre-feet in accordance with an approved mitigation plan, the Director will issue an order curtailing the junior-priority ground water user.”

“Idaho law and the constitution remain clear about first in time, first in right. However, regardless of these facts, most water users will not face curtailment thanks to the hard work farmers put in last summer to create the 2024 Water Settlement,” said Brian Patton, IDWR Deputy Director. “Compromises like this, and investments in our water supply, will benefit Idaho water users into the future and I applaud their foresight.”

All groundwater users in good standing who are participating in an approved mitigation plan, including the 2024 Water Settlement, will avoid curtailment. Any junior water users who are not participating in an approved mitigation plan need to join one to avoid curtailment, officials said.

The Director’s April 2025 Methodology Order did not find any shortfall would occur to the other six members of the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) - A&B Irrigation District, Burley Irrigation District, Milner Irrigation District, Minidoka Irrigation District, North Side Canal Company, American Falls Reservoir District No. 2.

Why Has the Injury Volume Increased Since April?

The 75,300 acre-foot shortfall estimate is based on updated water flow forecasts for the Snake River and ESPA discharge conditions as well as the ESPAM 2.2 computer model. A dry and warm spring with rapid snowmelt and reduced runoff caused injury estimates to increase from 63,000 acre-feet in the April forecast and Methodology Order. The updated joint forecast issued by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates a natural flow of 2,198,456 acre-feet of water at the Heise gage, a 35 percent decrease compared to the April estimate of 3,380,000 acre-feet.

IDWR Announces Earliest Groundwater Curtailment Date on Record

IDWR has determined that certain groundwater users must stop pumping based on a priority date of October 11, 1900—the earliest cutoff date ever established under the Methodology Order. This means that unless protected by an approved mitigation plan, all junior groundwater rights with a priority date after October 11, 1900, are subject to curtailment to protect senior water users.

Why is the Curtailment Date so early?

The injury amount, 75,300 acre-feet of water, is in the range that IDWR would anticipate for a near-normal water year, Patton said. “It could be zero in a good water year or several hundred thousand acre-feet in a severe drought year.”

This season, the early priority date is a function of changes made to the Methodology in 2023 and the fact that the injury volume increased between April and July. “The reason the curtailment date is so early is that we are several months into the irrigation season, and only have a few months left to make up the increased shortfall. To add the required volume of water in the Snake River, more acres of groundwater-irrigated farmland would need to be curtailed to provide the water by the Sept. 30 deadline,” Patton said.

Important background: The way IDWR calculates the curtailment date for the methodology order changed in 2023 to better reflect the senior’s actual water needs during this year’s irrigation season.

Prior to 2023, IDWR estimated how much water curtailed acres would return to the Snake River over the long term—often looking decades into the future, when the effects of stopping groundwater pumping would fully stabilize. This long-term approach used what is known as “steady state” assumptions to determine which groundwater rights had to be curtailed.

In 2023, IDWR updated the Methodology to focus on near-term impacts. Now, the curtailment date is based on how much water can be returned to the Snake River by the end of the current irrigation season. This change ensures that the water needed by senior surface water users is actually delivered in the same year it’s needed.

This updated approach is consistent with court decisions that came after the issuance of the original Methodology Order in 2010, which affirmed mitigation must occur in the amount equal to the injury, at the location of injury, and *when* the injury occurs. This approach also strengthens protections for senior water rights while providing clearer expectations for groundwater users about their responsibilities in a given year.

Delivery Call Background

Much water litigation has resulted from conflicts between Snake River surface water users with senior water rights and groundwater users with junior water rights in the ESPA. The litigation led to a water delivery call in 2005 by the SWC, the coalition of seven surface water irrigation entities with senior water rights in Southern Idaho.

Under the SWC's water delivery call in 2005, the Director of IDWR is required by law to issue an order at the beginning of the irrigation season and again in early July determining the shortfall to senior surface water users

due to the pumping impacts of junior groundwater users and determining their obligations to curtail water use or mitigate for depletions to the holders of senior priority water rights.

Please see the Director's Methodology Order for more details.

#####