



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**WATER RESOURCES**

NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Water users take note: IDWR new orders expand the impact of the Surface Water Coalition delivery call into the Little Lost, Big Lost and Raft River tributary basins**

BOISE - (Feb. 4, 2026) – Officials with the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) are giving water users a head’s up in the Big Lost, Little Lost and Raft River basins – all tributary to the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Area of Common Groundwater Supply – that they will be subject to water delivery calls by the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) in the future.

For certain portions of the Big Lost and Little Lost Basins, they won’t subject to the SWC water delivery call until April 1, 2027. For the portions of the Big Lost up to Mackay and Little Lost Basin at Howe that were brought into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Area of Common Groundwater Supply (ESPA ACGWS) by Senate Bill 134, they will be subject to the SWC delivery call in the 2026 irrigation season.

The Raft River Basin won’t be subject to the SWC water delivery call until April 1, 2027.

Mathew Weaver, Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources, recently issued an order on Jan. 13, 2026, bringing all of the Big Lost River Basin into the ESPA ACGWS. The Director also issued an order on Nov. 26, 2025, to bring all of the Little Lost River Basin into the ESPA ACGWS, and on Dec. 15, 2025, to bring the Raft River Basin into the ESPA ACGWS.

In an order dated Feb. 2, 2026, Weaver found that 1,005 ground water rights within the expanded area of administration were brought into the SWC delivery call proceeding and could have become subject to administration. However, “The Director finds that the material injury caused by the diversion and use of water under these newly included ground water rights is delayed or long range. The Director also finds that the economic impact of immediate and complete curtailment would be severe,” Weaver said in the Feb. 2 order.

In addition, Weaver concluded that “the priority administration of these newly included groundwater rights should be phased-in to provide the affected water users a reasonable time to implement a mitigation plan “to lessen the economic impact of immediate and complete curtailment.” Accordingly, the newly included water rights listed in Attachment A of the Feb. 2 order will not be subject to administration in the SWC delivery call until April 1, 2027.

In 2024, the Idaho Legislature passed Senate Bill 1341, which expanded the ESPA ACGWS to include portions of the Big Lost and Little Lost basins, portions of the Upper Snake River in the Rexburg Bench and Ririe areas, as well as portions in the Pocatello and Oakley areas. The legislation also directed IDWR to expand the ACGWS into other ESPA tributary basins upon finding that groundwater pumping in those basins affected ESPA water levels and spring flows in the “Reach Gains” area of the Snake River between Blackfoot and Minidoka.

Under Idaho’s Conjunctive Management Rules, the ESPA ACGWS defines the sources of groundwater that must be jointly administered to prevent material injury to senior surface water users. The ongoing water delivery call by the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) will affect the tributary basins in the future.

“Senate Bill 1341 instructs IDWR to investigate the impact of tributary basins on the ESPA and Snake River Reach Gains on which the SWC depends to fulfill their senior water rights,” said Brian Patton, IDWR Deputy Director. “Our analysis shows that it is appropriate to add the Big Lost, Little Lost and Raft River basins into the ESPA ACGWS. The legislation also directs IDWR to give water users advance notice about these findings.”

“Groundwater users within these tributary basins will be subject to the SWC delivery call, so groundwater users are encouraged to establish a mitigation plan or join an existing mitigation plan to shield themselves from possible curtailment in the future from the SWC delivery call,” Patton said.

In related news, since Director Weaver’s Dec. 8, 2025, final curtailment order was issued regarding Step 9 in the ongoing SWC delivery call, IDWR staff have been working to resolve any issues with affected water users. Under that Dec. 8 order, 1,587 individual groundwater rights were affected – 1,124 irrigation rights and 463 non-irrigation or mixed use rights. Since irrigation diversions have ceased for the winter, watermasters have been working with the owners of the 463 non-irrigation and mixed use water rights to curtail their water use or join a mitigation plan. As of Jan. 29, 2026, 54 percent of those water rights have been addressed, and investigations are ongoing for the remaining 46 percent.

Please see maps below regarding the changes in water rights administration in the Big Lost and Little Lost basins as well as the Raft River Basin.

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