



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Idaho Water Resource Board approves funds for 23 Aging Infrastructure Grants statewide, two new ESPA recharge projects in the Upper Snake River Valley**

POCATELLO - (Sept. 17, 2024) – The Idaho Water Resource Board approved 23 new Aging Infrastructure Grants statewide, and funded two new aquifer-recharge sites and four test well locations to benefit the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) in the Upper Snake River Valley during its regular bimonthly meeting in Pocatello last week.

Jo Ann Cole-Hansen, chair of the IWRB Finance Committee, said she was pleased to see a wide variety of project proposals submitted for the 5<sup>th</sup> round of Aging Infrastructure Grants. A total of \$12.4 million was approved for the 23 projects statewide.

“It’s an excellent slate of projects,” Cole-Hansen said. “The projects are well-distributed across the state.”

The approved ESPA recharge projects will be located north of Idaho Falls – one adjacent to the existing 55<sup>th</sup> Road recharge site near Ririe in partnership with Enterprize Canal Co., and another in the West Egin area in partnership with the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District.

“This is exciting to see two more aquifer-recharge sites approved to help recover the ESPA,” said IWRB member Brian Olmstead of Twin Falls. “We need to create 100,000 acre-feet of additional capacity in the Upper Snake River Valley to complement our recharge capacity in the Magic Valley area. This will help restore balance to the aquifer and work toward a sustainable future.”

In response to direction from Governor Brad Little, the Board also voted to allocate \$10 million from its Water Management Account to support projects aimed at improving the condition of the ESPA. Those funds will be applied to ESPA projects in addition to funding dedicated to managed aquifer recharge.

On Thursday, the Board toured the American Falls Dam Spillway Rehabilitation Project, a \$23 million Regional Water Sustainability Project, for which the Board contributed \$12.5 million. The project includes spillway repair, replacement of trunnion pins required for spillway gage operation, and dam intake replacement. Board members were able to observe crews working on the spillway gate trunnion pins and learn about the ongoing operation and maintenance activities. The project is being funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds through the Board in addition to contributions from the Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Power Co. and local water users.

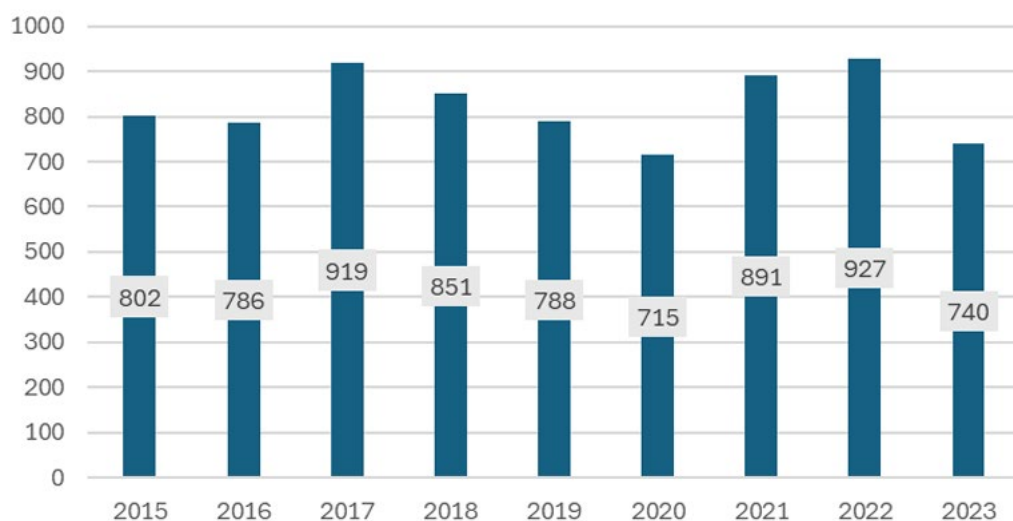
American Falls Dam and Reservoir are considered the “workhorse” of the Upper Snake reservoir system, providing 1.7 million acre-feet of water storage, said Ryan Bills, operations and maintenance manager for the Bureau of Reclamation. It’s also the largest reservoir on the Snake River and in the state of Idaho.

The IWRB also toured the site of a previously approved Aging Infrastructure Grant awarded for improvements to Falls Irrigation District’s pump station and a 5-foot-diameter diversion pipe located on the south side of American Falls Dam. The Board is contributing approximately \$3 million to the \$9 million project, which includes replacing a 1960s-era pump station with new high-efficiency pumps, variable frequency drives and associated infrastructure. Construction will begin this fall and finish before irrigation season starts next April 2025, officials said.

The Board also heard a status report from IDWR Eastern Regional Manager James Cefalo. Eastern Idaho continues to see a large number of water rights transfers and ownership changes because of steady population growth, he said. There also has been an increase in applications for water right permits in the Lemhi Basin for streamflow maintenance and in the Bear River Basin, where an adjudication is currently under way.

Overall, the region has been experiencing substantial growth, Cefalo said. Counties in Eastern Idaho continue to approve new subdivisions even though there is a moratorium on new water rights in the Upper Snake River Basin, he noted. Counties and developers are able to avoid the moratorium by having homeowners develop individual ground water wells via the state’s domestic exemption, he said. In some cases, the domestic exemption is being stretched beyond its historical limits. Cefalo also highlighted some of the challenges that come with enforcing the ½-acre irrigation limit of the domestic exemption.

### Ownership Change Notices



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