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IWRB tours Bonneville-Jefferson Groundwater to Surface Water conversion project; funds surface water efficiency proposal from Twin Falls Canal Co.

IDAHO FALLS – (July 28, 2025) – The Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) toured a $15.9 million groundwater-to-surface water conversion project with Bonneville-Jefferson Groundwater District officials, and approved a surface water efficiency project proposed by the Twin Falls Canal Co. as part of its bimonthly meeting here last week.

Both projects are directly related to assisting Groundwater Districts and the Surface Water Coalition in fulfilling the terms of the 2024 Water Settlement Agreement in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region. The IWRB received $30 million in new funding from the 2025 Idaho Legislature to assist water users across the ESPA region with implementing aquifer-recharge, water conservation, real-time water measurement automation projects, and groundwater-to-surface water conversion projects.

The Bonneville-Jefferson Groundwater District Osgood conversion project would help its water users reduce consumption from the ESPA and meet targets stipulated in the 2024 water agreement, officials said.

“We’ve been doing outreach with our water users, increasing our assessments to cover the cost of new infrastructure, and working to meet the terms of the 2024 agreement,” said Brad Butters, Manager of the Bonneville-Jefferson Groundwater District.

During the field tour, Butters showed the IWRB members a new aquifer-recharge well that will help mitigate the impact of groundwater irrigation. The deep well is being monitored for water quality impacts to any adjacent properties in a remote farming area northwest of Idaho Falls before it goes into full production, he said.

The Twin Falls Canal (TFCC) operational efficiency project would line 9.25 miles of leaky canal sections to save an estimated 19,000-68,000 acre-feet of water. The $26.3M project is estimated to take 5-8 years to complete with IWRB funding provided over a span of eight years and will not reduce incidental recharge to the ESPA. The project also would address concerns voiced by ESPA groundwater users that TFCC wastes valuable Snake River surface water, officials said.

Both Butters and Alan Jackson with the Bingham Groundwater District said they supported the TFCC efficiency project. “The Twin Falls Canal project – that’s something to be applauded,” Jackson said. “We support it.”

TFCC General Manager Jay Barlogi explained the need for multiple canal-lining projects where they know significant seepage losses – and in some locations, sink holes - occur. He noted that TFCC has been doing lining projects since the 1920s. “We’ve been doing liners for 100 years, but they do wear out over time,” he said.

The TFCC surface water efficiencies project also would increase water-measurement capacity with telemetry in strategic locations – including at multiple return flow locations – to quantify the amount of return flows pouring back into the Snake River. “We have 28 locations for return flow monitoring,” Barlogi said. “That will give us a much better idea how much water is coming back into the river.”

In other action, the Board:

- Approved a $991,600 surface water efficiency design-engineering study proposed by the American Falls Reservoir District No. 2 to look for potential water efficiency measures in its canal system.
- Approved a $950,000 one-year pilot cloud-seeding project with the State of Utah in the Bear River Basin, using ground generators.
- Approved two new ESPA recharge projects – the Hilton Well project proposed by the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., and a recharge basin and well proposed by the Burgess Canal Co. Both projects would enhance return flows to the Blackfoot-Minidoka Reach Gains section of the Snake River and boost ESPA water levels, officials said.
- Received a presentation from the Bingham Groundwater District in which officials highlighted mitigation measures including the development of an aquifer-recharge site at Bond Road that could potentially send 150-300 cubic feet per second water flow into the ESPA, and the installation of approximately 650 additional flow meters with telemetry on groundwater wells in the district. Bingham GWD already has more than 300 flow meters with telemetry installed in the district, Jackson said.

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