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Idaho Water Board receives updates on ESPA recharge, cloud seeding programs to increase water supplies in S. Idaho in 2025

BOISE - (Jan. 22, 2025) – Staff provided updates on the Idaho Water Resource Board's managed aquifer recharge program for the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) and seasonal cloud seeding operations during its bimonthly meeting on Friday.

The Board's ESPA managed recharge program has sent an estimated 63,054 acre-feet of water into the ESPA so far this winter, partnering with three Magic Valley-area irrigation entities to convey water into the aquifer. Over the past 10 years, the Board's program has recharged on average 251,000 acre-feet per year. Staff are optimistic that the 10-year average will remain above the current goal of 250,000 acre-feet per year.

The Board received an update on the development of new ESPA recharge sites in the Upper Snake region. In response to questions from the public about the use of injection wells for aquifer recharge, the Board voted to "pause" any further approval of injection wells. That will allow time to provide information about IDWR's permitting process and current testing and monitoring protocol, officials said. A follow up discussion will occur in a forthcoming Aquifer Stabilization Committee meeting.

In other action, the Board heard an update on cloud seeding operations from staff member Kala Golden. She noted that the Board's Cloud Seeding web page provides data about aircraft and ground-based cloud seeding efforts for the collaborative cloud seeding program in the Upper Snake, Boise, and Wood River basins, Idaho Power's Payette River Basin Program, the High Country RC&D program in the Upper Snake, and the state of Utah.

Overall, early snow storms in November and December allowed for cloud seeding activities by all of those entities, but the overall number of flight hours or ground-generator hours is generally running below 75 percent of normal, Golden said. More information about cloud seeding so far this winter will be presented this week at the Idaho Water Supply Committee meeting on Jan. 22 at IDWR in Boise.

For more details about cloud seeding activities in each basin, as well as ongoing research and design work, go to: https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/programs/cloud-seeding-program/current-projects-and-programs/

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