



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The IWRB Aquifer Stabilization Committee receives updates on ESPA Recharge, approval process required for ESPA recharge injection wells

BOISE – (Feb. 19, 2025) – The Idaho Water Resource Board’s Aquifer Stabilization Committee received several presentations from staff on Tuesday related to the Board’s Managed Aquifer Recharge program for the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA).

The Board’s Managed Aquifer Recharge program in the winter of 2024-25 has sent approximately 81,045 acre-feet of water into ESPA so far through partnerships with three Magic Valley-area canal companies and irrigation districts participating in the recharge program. A continuous flow of 533 cubic feet per second is going into the aquifer currently, officials said. See more detail about ESPA recharge activities [here](#).

Erik Boe, IDWR Water Compliance Bureau Chief, gave a presentation to the committee about how IDWR evaluates and processes applications for injection wells proposed as part of the Board’s Managed Aquifer Recharge Program. The same process would be followed for any private ESPA injection well recharge applications as well.

Boe explained that IDWR has had regulatory primacy of Class V injection wells since 1985. New applications for injection wells proposing aquifer recharge must adhere to both state and federal rules and law, Boe said.

Class V injection wells are defined as wells used to inject “non-hazardous fluids into or above underground sources of drinking water.” Recharge injection wells are constructed to a depth of greater than 18 feet and are typically designed to tap into the deeper portion of the ESPA.

Applicants for ESPA recharge injection wells must demonstrate that injection fluids (Snake River surface water) will not endanger any drinking water wells nearby, Boe said. Groundwater monitoring plans are required, he noted. Applications for injection wells proposing recharge within the ESPA are assigned a subcategory called “5R21” which corresponds to the source of the injectate, in this case, water from the Snake River that is conveyed via irrigation canals to the point of injection.

The 5R21 subcategory is defined as “Aquifer Recharge wells used to recharge depleted aquifers and may inject fluids from a variety of sources including lakes, streams, domestic wastewater plants, other aquifers, etc.,” Boe said.

Ag irrigation return flows are not allowed to be used for 5R21 injection wells, he noted.

The application process includes:

- An application.
- IDWR requests additional information from applicants, as needed.
- Application Review.
- Draft Monitoring Plan.
- Create draft permit.
- Public notice in newspapers.
- Draft final permit or denial.

IDWR requests for additional information often require the applicant to provide a detailed description of the water proposed for aquifer recharge, the geologic and hydrogeologic conditions present at and near the proposed injection well site, information to demonstrate that no impact would occur to drinking water wells in the vicinity, and a proposed detailed monitoring plan. Typically groundwater monitoring would occur two times per month, he said.

The Idaho Water Resource Board has currently placed on “pause” any additional applications for injection wells because of concerns expressed by the public, officials noted. Several groundwater districts in Eastern Idaho are considering the use of injection wells for aquifer recharge in order to help meet their obligations under the 2024 Settlement Agreement between the groundwater users and the Surface Water Coalition.

Technical working groups involving both the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency are reviewing the current application review process to ensure compliance with federal code along with rules administered by other state agencies, Boe said. This collaborative effort was initiated following recent public concern. A key question is whether any potential biological contaminants in Snake River surface water may affect drinking water wells in the vicinity of a proposed recharge injection well, he said. The “area of influence” around a proposed injection well is determined based on the rate of injection and potentially other factors, he said.

The technical working groups will need to take some time to study the issue more closely, and that will likely take several months, Boe said. The outcome will likely improve how IDWR processes applications for ESPA recharge injection wells currently and in the future, he said.

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