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Idaho Water Board approves \$14.1 million loan for Raft River Recharge project, two other loans to improve irrigation systems

BOISE - (Nov 22, 2022) – The Idaho Water Resource Board approved a \$14.1 million loan to the Raft River Recharge Group on Friday to help finance the construction of a pump station on the Snake River, a 13-mile pipeline and recharge basins to add water to a declining aquifer in an existing Critical Ground Water Management Area.

Project representatives said the total cost of the Raft River Recharge project is \$48.6 million. Approximately \$28.2 million has been allocated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the project, and the recharge group is providing a \$6.2 million cash match.

Project representatives also noted that the Raft River surface flows are intermittent because of dropping aquifer levels, and the aquifer itself is declining. Most farmers in the area now are pumping ground water for irrigation. “Without this project, agriculture won’t be sustainable in the Raft River Basin,” said Hattie Zobott, project engineer.

The Board also approved a \$1.2 million loan to the Northside Pumping Company near Twin Falls to upgrade several irrigation pump stations and increase irrigation efficiency. And the Board approved adding \$650,000 to an existing loan with the Blaine County Canal Company to cover higher pipeline costs and other infrastructure expenses, bringing the total approved loan amount to \$1.8 million.

In other action, the Water Board approved several new construction projects that will add capacity to the Board’s recharge program for the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. Two new injection wells were approved in the Southwest Idaho Irrigation District project area at a cost of \$245,000, and two new recharge sites were approved in partnership with Enterprise Canal Company at a cost of \$3.4 million. Both of those projects were funded with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that had been allocated to the Board by the Idaho Legislature and Gov. Brad Little.

Wesley Hipke, ESPA Recharge Project Manager for the Board, said ESPA winter recharge operations are under way and approximately 30,000 acre-feet of water has been recharged into the aquifer so far in the Magic Valley area.

In a related matter, at the request of Idaho Power Company officials, the Board agreed to bypass 200 cubic feet per second of water below Milner Dam from Dec. 1, 2022 to Feb. 15, 2023 to provide flows in the Middle Snake River for hydropower.

Idaho Power officials requested the change to provide more “balance” in Snake River winter flows between aquifer recharge and hydropower production.

In other action, Bureau of Reclamation officials briefed the Board on design activities related to the proposed 6-foot raise of Anderson Ranch Dam and the associated projects around the reservoir rim intended to address any impacts from the increased reservoir water-surface elevation. The project will result in approximately 29,000 acre-feet of additional water storage capacity. Reclamation completed a Feasibility Study and issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement in 2020. As a result of the recent additional design work, Reclamation has determined that a Supplemental Draft EIS is needed to incorporate the new information. Reclamation plans to publish the Supplemental Draft EIS for public comment in Fall 2023 and anticipates issuing a Final EIS and Record of Decision in Summer 2024, officials said.

Changes to the environmental review process will be posted on Reclamation’s [Anderson Ranch project web site](#).

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