



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Implementation Committee members appointed, protocols approved to move forward with Lemhi River Basin Settlement Agreement operations in 2023

BOISE – (April 3, 2023) – The Idaho Water Resource Board on Friday approved the appointment of six people to serve on the Lemhi River Basin Comprehensive Settlement Agreement Implementation Committee and the procedures to be followed in exercising a minimum stream flow at McFarland Campground every 2-5 years on the Lemhi River.

In February 2022, local water users reached agreement on the terms of the Lemhi River Basin Settlement Agreement, which looks to resolve long-standing water use conflicts in the basin. In March 2022, the Idaho Legislature unanimously passed House Bill 749, which codified key terms of the Settlement into Idaho law. The bill was signed by Gov. Brad Little on March 28, 2022.

Since that time, officials with the Idaho Water Resource Board and the Idaho Department of Water Resources have been working to move forward with implementation of the Settlement Agreement.

One of the key terms of the Settlement Agreement was to establish a committee to advise the Board during the implementation phase. The settlement called for a committee made up of two representatives of the Lemhi Irrigation District, two representatives of the Upper Lemhi Basin Water Users, one representative from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, one representative from the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, and one representative of the Water Board who would chair the committee.

The Board appointed the following individuals to the committee:

- Carl Ellsworth and Carl Lufkin from the Lemhi Irrigation District (Stephen Shiner and Ed Snook were appointed as alternates).
- Kurt Bird and Steven Johnson from the Upper Lemhi Basin Water Users (Merrill Beyeler and Merritt were appointed as alternates).
- Windy Schoby from IDFG (Stacey Meyer was appointed as an alternate).
- Daniel Bertram from OSC (Graham Freeman was appointed as an alternate).
- The Lemhi Basin 74 watermaster or an IDWR employee will serve as an ex-officio member of the committee.

The Implementation Committee will schedule its first meeting in mid-May, officials said.

In that meeting, the committee will discuss the protocols and procedures for exercising the Board's minimum streamflow water right at McFarland Campground every 2 out of 5 years for three days between March 15-July 6. The purpose of the 420 cubic feet per second (cfs) minimum flow is to flush out fine sediments in the Lemhi River to clean out spawning gravels and boost egg-to-fry survival.

In general, the committee will follow protocols for exercising the minimum stream flow water right based on whether adequate snowpack and streamflows are available, among other things.

So far this spring, the Lemhi Basin snowpack snow-water equivalent is currently 139 percent of the 30-year average.

Another component of the Lemhi Basin Settlement Agreement allows water users to file water right applications for streamflow maintenance water rights in the Lemhi River Basin. Streamflow maintenance water rights allow water users to convert their existing high flow use to a protectable water right. So far, IDWR has received 122 applications for streamflow maintenance water rights. The period for applications will remain open through July 1, 2024.

In other action, the Board approved:

- Pursuing short-term agreements 2023-2025 with Lemhi Basin water users to secure up to 24.40 cfs of additional water to maintain the Board's minimum flow of 25-35 cfs at the L-6 diversion on the Lemhi River. In drought years, the Board's long-term agreements with water users provide 19.55 cfs for the minimum flow. Short-term agreements can provide additional water to get flows closer to the 35 cfs minimum flow. The Board's action will ensure that the agreements are in place to provide crucial water flows at the L-6 diversion for out-migrating juvenile Chinook salmon and in-migrating adult Chinook salmon, both of which are protected by the Endangered Species Act. The flows also benefit ocean-going steelhead and resident fish.

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