



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Idaho producers see strong benefits in signing up for CREP to reduce impacts on ESPA; enrollees get paid annual rental rates for idled farmland**

BOISE – (April 2, 2026) – Producers in Southern Idaho showed strong interest in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) during the latest enrollment period, with 34 new contracts pending, covering 91 farm fields and 3,152 acres in five counties, according to State CREP Manager Rob Sharpnack.

At the Idaho Water Resource Board’s regular bimonthly meeting, Sharpnack presented the results of the enrollment period that opened on Feb. 12 and closed on March 20<sup>th</sup>. Farmers who enrolled in CREP must make a 10-year commitment in the contracts, idle the farmland, voluntarily pause their water right for the contract term (*some irrigation may be used for vegetation establishment*), and convert acreage into permanent vegetative cover.

In return, the producers receive federal annual rental payments and state cost-share assistance. The Idaho Water Resource Board has added funding to increase the budget for state cost-share assistance for producers who sign up for the CREP program. The Board’s interest mainly is tied to the reduction in groundwater withdrawals from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA), officials said.

Future groundwater savings as a result of the recent CREP enrollments will amount to about 6,305 acre-feet per year over the 10-year life on the contracts, Sharpnack said. The new contracts must be approved at the federal level and will become official on April 6, he said.

CREP is a partnership program between the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the State of Idaho that provides incentive payments to farmers to idle marginal irrigated cropland and conserve groundwater. Producers enroll in CREP through the FSA. Sharpnack provides technical assistance as the State CREP Manager for the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

With many commodity prices below the break-even point for producers, and some farmers facing the possibility that they may be exceeding their water allotments under the 2024 Water Settlement Agreement, enrolling some acres in CREP looked to be an attractive option, officials said.

“We had one of the largest new enrollments in CREP since the program began 20 years ago,” Sharpnack said.

In other action, the Board voted to add the Mountain Home Plateau Water Sustainability Program to its Regional Water Sustainability Project list with additional funding of \$8 million to help the Elmore County community reduce its impact on the local groundwater aquifer and establish a long-term regional water supply.

Currently, groundwater pumping exceeds the annual rate of recharge by 30,000 to 40,000 acre feet annually on the Mountain Home Plateau, according to HDR engineering. The goals are to stop the water-level decline in the Mountain Home Plateau Aquifer, avoid the curtailment of existing groundwater rights and associated beneficial uses, develop new water supplies to support municipal, industrial, commercial, and domestic growth, and reduce groundwater extraction via aquifer recharge activities and converting groundwater uses to surface water sources.

To accomplish those goals, Elmore County has acquired deliverable surface water rights to accomplish recharge and conversions. The county is working to obtain funding assistance for construction and operation of facilities to import and deliver surface water for various water uses, officials said. It is pursuing surface water sources on the Snake River and the South Fork Boise River, and developing engineering designs for pump stations and a pipeline to deliver water to the Mountain Home Plateau Aquifer, officials said.

In other action, the Board:

- Approved new terms and conditions for the newly created Raft River Irrigation District to move forward with a \$58M project to reduce groundwater impacts in the basin by building a pipeline from the Snake River and delivering surface water flows to the basin. The IWRB already has committed \$7M to the project. The Board also approved a \$14.1 million loan for the Raft River Regional Water Sustainability Project. The loan will have a 4.75% interest rate and a 20-year repayment term. The Raft River Basin is tributary to the ESPA; it was recently brought into the ESPA Area of Common Ground Water Supply by order of IDWR Director Mathew Weaver.
- Approved a \$40,000 loan to the Farmers Land & Irrigation Company in the Soda Springs area so it can install an automated water-measurement system at its Soda Creek Diversion. The loan will have a 4.88% interest rate and a 15-year repayment term.

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