



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Surface, ground water users work together to meet terms of Big Wood River Ground Water Management Plan**

HAILEY - (Sept. 19, 2022) – Big and Little Wood River water users said a wet spring helped them meet the terms of a new ground water management plan in the first year of operations during the 2022 growing season, but they likely will need more funding for conservation efficiencies and water infrastructure over time to keep the agreement intact.

Big Wood, Little Wood and Silver Creek water users, and area ground water users provided feedback on the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Plan during the Idaho Water Resource Board's meeting last Thursday at the Community Campus in Hailey and during a field tour in the afternoon.

The ground water management plan is designed to protect farmers and ranchers with senior water rights and to prevent the Wood River aquifer system from being over-drafted by ground water pumping, said Tim Luke, Water Compliance Bureau Chief for the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

"The goal is to manage the effects of ground water withdrawals on the aquifer," Luke said. Ground water withdrawals can affect surface water flows in the Big and Little Wood Rivers and in Silver Creek, a spring-fed stream, officials said.

The ground water plan was signed by 10 Big Wood Basin surface and ground water organizations in January 2022. It calls for [detailed mitigation measures](#) and a reduction in land irrigated by ground water users. The terms of those measures have been met so far during the 2022 growing season, Luke said.

Water Board member Dean Stevenson complimented the group for staying on course.

"The reason this deal has worked is because everyone is focused on solutions that work for the resource and everybody concerned," Stevenson said. "It's impressive to see this kind of cooperation and open communication between all the water user groups."

Kristy Molyneux, chair of the South Valley Ground Water District, said her members have idled farm land and reduced consumptive use of water by 11,000 acre-feet.

"Our members have been very cooperative," Molyneux said. "It's all new."

“Obtaining storage water from the Snake River was key to the whole agreement,” said Cooper Brossy, representing the Big and Little Wood Water Users Association. “The wet spring really made a difference, too. Things were looking pretty bleak in early April.”

Carl Pendleton, representing the Big Wood Canal Company and surface water users, agreed, saying the cool, wet spring extended the growing season for farmers by at least three weeks.

The Conservation, Infrastructure and Efficiency Fund (CIEF), created as part of the ground water management plan, is a unique component that provides about a steady stream of funding from water users and the Water Board. The Board agreed to contribute a two-to-one match in the first year, and it will contribute a one-to-one match in subsequent years, up to a maximum of \$200,000 each year.

Larry Schoen, a rancher and former Blaine County commissioner who chairs the CIEF Committee, underscored the importance of the CIEF to invest in future conservation measures, irrigation efficiencies and additional water infrastructure to keep the water agreement whole.

“I think this is a very unique component to the agreement, but we may need to raise more funds than we originally expected,” Shoen said.

Purchasing Snake River storage water for the groups this year cost \$80 per acre-foot, for example.

“I think we all know that the cost of water is going to continue to go up, and we’ll need more funding for conservation, efficiency and infrastructure projects,” he said.

At the conclusion of the Water Board meeting on Friday, IDWR Director Gary Spackman complimented Wood River water users for the “cooperative spirit” holding the management agreement together.

“I have the greatest respect for all of the people and parties involved,” Spackman said. “I think it’s been really successful so far. Hopefully it all works out in the long term.”

For more information about the Big Wood Ground Water Management Area plan, go [here](#).

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