



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IDWR issues Mid-Summer Methodology Order for Snake River water users, finding a continued shortfall; Junior groundwater users are encouraged to join mitigation plans, if they haven't done so already, to avoid curtailment

BOISE - (July 22, 2026) – In the ongoing Surface Water Coalition's conjunctive administration delivery call, Director Mathew Weaver of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) continues to determine that the Surface Water Coalition (SWC) is experiencing injury to their water supplies this irrigation season due to junior groundwater pumping, as predicted this spring.

In an order sent out by IDWR Director Weaver to junior Snake River groundwater users on Tuesday, July 21, the curtailment date for groundwater rights within the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) Area of Common Groundwater Supply remains unchanged at October 11, 1900, for those not covered by an approved mitigation plan.

The Methodology Order is the court-approved process IDWR uses to evaluate water supply conditions, aquifer conditions, and irrigation demand. From that calculation, IDWR determines the impacts or injury to surface water users with senior water rights caused by junior water users pumping from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA).

Under Idaho water law, surface water users with senior water rights have priority over water users with junior rights on the Snake River and the ESPA. The rule of law is "first in time, first in right." On the Snake River, IDWR manages both surface and groundwater resources together as one whole, or "conjunctively," in calculating impacts each year.

The Director's July order means that certain groundwater users who draw water from the ESPA with a priority date junior to the date of Oct. 11, 1900, must curtail their use unless they are covered by an IDWR-approved mitigation plan.

Those groundwater rights junior to October 11, 1900, that are covered by an approved mitigation plan, including the groundwater districts' mitigation plan, can continue operating pursuant to the terms of their mitigation plans. Other approved mitigation plans within the ESPA Area of Common Groundwater Supply include the A&B Irrigation District mitigation plan, the Coalition of Cities mitigation plan, the Southwest Irrigation mitigation plan, and the Water Mitigation Coalition mitigation plan.

Although the majority of ground water rights on the Eastern Snake Plain are protected by an approved mitigation plan, there are still more than 900 water rights that are not protected and subject to curtailment. As a result, IDWR field agents have been working to bring those junior groundwater users into compliance. Out of 930 water rights identified in the Director's previous curtailment order in April, IDWR has addressed 87% of them and investigation is under way for an additional 11%, officials said. Department and water district staff will make periodic site visits during the remainder of the irrigation season to confirm water users don't illegally resume use.

The July shortfall estimate is based on observed supply and demand conditions from April through June, along with updated projections for the remainder of the irrigation season. An exceptionally warm and drier-than-normal spring, coupled with rapid snowmelt and reduced runoff, resulted in higher demand and lower natural-flow volumes than were anticipated in the April Methodology Order.

According to the June Joint Forecast issued by the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, unregulated flow on the Snake River at the Heise gage for the June–July period is projected to be 900,000 acre-feet, approximately 50 percent of normal. This represents a notable decline from the April forecast, which had forecasted runoff flows at approximately 70 percent of normal.

IDWR applied the ESPAM 2.2 groundwater model to evaluate impacts to senior surface-water users and identify which junior groundwater users may be affected by the Director’s order.

Much water litigation has resulted from conflicts between Snake River surface water users with senior water rights and groundwater users with junior water rights in the ESPA. The litigation led to a water delivery call in 2005 by the SWC, the coalition of seven surface water irrigation entities that collectively irrigate more than 500,000 acres of farmland in Southern Idaho.

Under the SWC's water delivery call in 2005, the Director of IDWR is required by law to issue an order at the beginning of the irrigation season and again in early July, determining the shortfall to senior surface water users due to the pumping impacts of junior groundwater users and determining their obligations to curtail water use or mitigate for depletions to the holders of senior priority water rights.

Please see the Director’s July Methodology Order for more details.

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