



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Denise Gill, Clerk

The Health of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Must Come First

Our community of Gooding County lies in the heart of the Magic Valley, a haven in south-central Idaho that is known both for its picturesque landscapes and its active agriculture industry. This beating heart has about 15,000 residents and more than 500 farms, all of which rely on water to fuel our region, specifically water from the Snake River and the Eastern Snake Plan Aquifer. These natural water resources are vital because without them Gooding County's largest employment sector and most prosperous industry cannot survive.

Unfortunately, the continued health of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, or ESPA, is not a guarantee. This underground reserve is facing unprecedented pressures that are resulting in more water being pumped out than what is being put in, jeopardizing the future of both today and tomorrow's farms and threatening our entire region's livelihood.

Action must be taken now to ensure a reliable water supply. And we need the help of every water user, surface to ground and senior to junior, to achieve this.

So, where do we start? Let's look at the research.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) has been studying the ESPA for decades. And with our continuing advancements in technology, our understanding of the ESPA, from its spring runoff collection locations to its overall reach gains, has greatly improved. Just as we now have an app on our phones that can give us real-time directions to anywhere in the world, IDWR uses technology that can analyze the overall stability of the aquifer based on its past and its predicted future.

Since the 1950s, IDWR has determined that the ESPA has been hit with more demand, primarily due to farmers also embracing new tech that led to a switch

from flooding fields to pumping irrigation. While sprinklers are more precise for growing crops, less excess water is being left to seep through the soil to help fill the underground ESPA. And the introduction of wells for groundwater pumping has resulted in the ESPA levels seeing a loss of roughly 250,000-acre feet annually. That's equivalent to nearly 100,000 acres of irrigated land worth of water lost *every single year*.

This dire situation is not a lost cause – there are a few ways we can start to reverse this trend and recharge the ESPA for the betterment of us all.

The first is by investing in and leaning on proven research.

Over the summer, Bingham Groundwater District created a comprehensive groundwater conservation project. This initiative will implement a groundwater telemetry monitoring system that gives real-time groundwater pumping data. This helps farmers know their exact pumping totals, and the data can be used to better manage each water user's allotment and continue to follow the state's prior appropriation doctrine for water rights.

The North Snake Ground Water District has also embraced this trend. The district has continuously complied with state laws and the 2015/2016 water mitigation agreements to protect water property rights. It has also made significant investments in ground to surface water conversions, helping reduce pumping and up groundwater users' recharge to the ESPA. This has contributed to a combined net gain of 500,000 acre-feet being added to the ESPA's dwindling levels since the water agreements were signed nearly 10 years ago.

The leads to the second way we can help the ESPA: by putting more time, energy, and funding into water conservation.

Since 2014, the Idaho Water Resource Board has led the ESPA Recharge Program that works with both canal companies and irrigation districts to build recharge sites, or networks of waterways that collect excess water from the Snake River, ESPA, and mountain runoff. This water is then redirected back into the ESPA, better preserving the resource.

We also commend Governor Brad Little for the recent commitment of \$10 million to fund more projects that help recharge the ESPA. This investment in our water source will serve both groundwater and surface water users, as well as Idaho residents across the state. We encourage more stakeholders to take action and back more projects that help secure our water future.

As representatives for Gooding County, we care about our hardworking constituents and our thriving agriculture industry. But our broader concern is for the longevity of everyone in our great state. The recharge and sustainable management of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer must be our focus, and we need to continue to support those who are taking steps forward on this path to water recovery.

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GOODING COUNTY, IDAHO

/s/Mark E. Bolduc

Mark E. Bolduc, Commissioner

/s/Susan M. Bolton

Susan Bolton, Commissioner

/s/Ronald Buhler

Ronald Buhler, Commissioner