

# Proposal to eliminate ESPA boundary won't return in 2016

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — A proposed rule that could have resulted in more farmland being subject to curtailment during future water delivery calls was rejected by Idaho lawmakers this year and won't be proposed again next year.

The proposal by the Idaho Department of Water Resources would have repealed "rule 50" of the section of state code dealing with the conjunctive management of surface and groundwater. The rule identifies the area of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer that has a

common ground water supply.

A total of 1.8 million acres of farmland within that boundary is subject to curtailment during water delivery calls. Land outside the boundary is not.

If the rule had been repealed, up to an additional 500,000 acres of land could have potentially been subject to curtailment, opponents of the proposal claimed.

IDWR Director Gary Spackman said the proposal would not reappear in 2016.

"I don't intend to go back next year with the same proposal," he said. "The legislature said they want to leave the

rule in place."

Lawmakers were split on the proposal, which was crafted after Clear Springs Foods petitioned the IDWR to revise the boundary.

Spackman and IDWR senior adviser Richard Rigby told lawmakers the existing ESPA boundary is based on a 1992 U.S. Geological Survey study but the department's current technical information and data shows a significant area outside the current boundary is part of the ESPA's area of common groundwater supply and contributes to the aquifer.

Since those acres impact

the aquifer, it's a matter of fairness to those inside the boundary that the department should consider their impact when responding to water delivery calls, Rigby said.

He said the department received 200 comments on the proposed rule and those within the current boundary generally liked it while those outside of it who could be impacted by future delivery calls didn't.

Though the House and Senate resource committees rejected the proposed rule, several legislators supported it.

Rep. Fred Wood, R-Bur-

ley, said having an arbitrary boundary that doesn't conform to what the IDWR's current data shows "just simply isn't fair. I think those (additional 500,000 acres) probably should be incorporated."

But other lawmakers said there was too much uncertainty involved with the proposal, including exactly how much those additional 500,000 acres contribute to the aquifer.

"I'm certainly not comfortable with moving this forward," said Sen. Jeff Sidway, a Republican rancher from Terreton, who made the motion to kill the rule on the Senate side.

Rigby said the matter is complex and challenging, and although the legislature rejected the rule, the underlying issues are still alive.

Spackman said it's conceivable that during a future water call, a court could determine that the ESPA boundary doesn't reflect the IDWR's current data and order the department to consider those additional acres.

He said the proposed rule would not have established a new boundary. It would have "eliminated an artificial boundary that is not defensible technically or, perhaps, legally."

# Processing continues to grow in Southern Idaho

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

Growth in agribusiness in south-central Idaho's Magic Valley over the past few years continues to gain momentum with two new projects announced on last.

PerforMix Nutrition Systems is building an animal nutrition facility at Rupert and Glanbia Foods is expanding its cheese processing operation at Gooding, according to Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization.

PerforMix, a liquid and dry feed supplement and nutrition company for the beef and dairy industries and a subsidiary of Boise-based Agri Beef Co., will expand its production with a new facility on 10 acres in Rupert.

The business has facilities in Nampa and Fruitland, Idaho, and Moses Lake, Wash.

Groundbreaking on the

"most advanced liquid feed operation in the Pacific Northwest" is expected before July 1, according to company officials.

The company is nearing capacity at its Nampa plant and the Rupert facility will allow it to move its existing Eastern Idaho business to Rupert, opening up capacity for growth in the Treasure Valley, said Jim Keppen, PerforMix president.

On the western side of the valley, Glanbia Foods is expanding its presence in Gooding with the purchase of the former WEL Co. building. The 120,000-square-foot building and about 25 adjacent acres sits about 5 miles from Glanbia's cheese plant where storage is at capacity.

The building has 38,000 square feet of refrigerated space and will serve as extended warehouse capacity for barrel cheese, allowing for future growth in Good-

ing, said Ryan Heywood, Glanbia distribution and project manager.

The new building, surrounding property and rail access capabilities offer numerous expansion opportunities, he said.

The two latest announcements are in addition to several new agribusiness facilities and expanded operations in the Magic Valley, including new investments from Chobani, Monsanto, Clif Bar, and Frulact Group and expansions by Glanbia, McCain Foods, Calva/Brewster, and WillTran.

New agribusiness and expansion in 2014 generated nearly \$800 million in capital investment and created nearly 5,000 jobs, according to SIEDO.

Idaho ranks in the top third of U.S. states for food processing, and southern Idaho leads the state's agribusiness industry, contributing well over half of Idaho's nearly \$8 billion ag



John O'Conner/Capital Press

A center pivot system irrigates an Idaho potato field in this file photo. University of Idaho Extension irrigation specialist Howard Neibling expects most Eastern Snake Plain well users will find relatively painless ways to meet a mandate to cut water consumption by 13 percent.

# Expert offers well irrigators tips to meet water cutback

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — University of Idaho Extension irrigation specialist Howard Neibling expects most Eastern Snake Plain well users will find relatively painless ways to meet a mandate to cut water consumption by 13 percent.

Irrigators with Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc., recently agreed to curb their water usage to help stabilize a declining aquifer. Many specific details of the agreement, reached to avert the Surface Water Coalition's call based on declining spring flows into the Snake River due to groundwater pumping, are still being negotiated.

Neibling has been working to help irrigators in Nevada, Northern California and Montana facing more acute shortages reduce water use by more than a quarter.

"Relative to (cuts) I see some other groups are having to make, it looks like in most cases people will still be able to do it and still maintain the same acreage, and hopefully grow the cropping mix they want to grow," Neibling said.

He believes growers will implement new irrigation technology and pay greater

attention to maintenance.

He said fixing leaky irrigation systems is a good place to start. In a commercial study he conducted a few years ago, Neibling evaluated 30 wheel lines, finding losses due to leaks averaged 16 percent. Growers lost another 13 percent due to worn or incorrectly sized nozzles.

The 30 pivots he tested had few leaks, but about 60 percent of them didn't meet industry standards for uniformity of water distribution. Neibling said pivot pressure regulators and nozzles should be replaced every five to seven years to avoid uneven distribution.

Growers with hand and wheel lines who irrigate on 12-hour sets should test soil moisture to determine if it's penetrating below crop root zones, Neibling said.

"The normal set in Kimberly, we were applying two hours too much and had to cut back a couple of hours," Neibling said.

In fields heavy in rock outcroppings, Neibling said, growers can avoid unnecessary watering by using variable-rate pivot irrigation.

On flat, sandy soils, Neibling's research of pivots in Arco, Idaho, shows growers can improve soil moisture

penetration by 20 to 30 percent by using hoses that lower nozzles from 6 feet off the ground to closer to the crop canopy. The method avoids evaporation and wind-blown water droplets, he said.

American Falls grower Jim Tiede has chosen to remove the end guns from pivots on 720 acres of sugar beet fields to comply with the agreement.

"It's not a real efficient way to water," Tiede said.

Neibling estimates growers can save 13 percent of their water by turning off end guns and leaving the corners of fields fallow. Yields on corners tend to be 17 percent lower, anyway, due to inefficient watering, he said.

IGWA Executive Director Lynn Tominaga anticipates growers will also conserve water by cutting out late-season irrigation of grains, when crops are still green but kernels have mostly filled in.

"It'll mean we have to manage the water better but yet make sure our crops get finished and we have good quality," Tominaga said.

Tominaga said agreement negotiations must prioritize protecting growers who have already implemented conservation measures and have less room for improvement.

# DEQ specialist aids SE Idaho producers with water projects

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — As a fourth-generation farmer, Steve Smith believes agricultural producers are quicker to trust him than a typical government bureaucrat.

Since October, Smith has served in the new position of source water and watershed protection specialist with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's Pocatello office.

In the past, the office assigned 10 percent of one staff member's time to help land owners access some of the \$2.4 million allocated annually to Idaho for water quality projects benefiting diffuse sources, other than industrial or municipal operations. Seeking to prioritize the grant source, offered under section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act and administered by DEQ, Smith has been assigned to devote 40 percent of his time to those projects.

One of Smith's recent projects, for example, entailed restoring Whiskey Creek to its original channel at a Grace dairy. The creek had been rerouted through an old barn that housed bulls, exposing the water to excrement.

The grant also helped to upgrade the dairy's irrigation system. Another project involved upgrading an old irrigation diversion with a modern structure that was both easier to operate and better for fish passage, as well as stabilizing stream bank and restoring flooding to naturally irrigate land along the channel.

On July 21, federal EPA officials are scheduled to tour southeast Idaho's section 319 projects, before heading to see grant proj-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Steve Smith is the new source water and watershed protection specialist with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's Pocatello office. Smith helps agricultural producers access Clean Water Act funding to improve their operations while maintaining clean water.

ects in Magic Valley and Treasure Valley.

Recipients of section 319 grants are expected to share 40 percent of the costs of their projects, with payments capped at \$250,000.

"Most of the (projects) have an agricultural component," Smith said.

The remainder of his time will involve work in a program that protects sources of drinking water, and can also benefit agricultural producers.

"Historically, having 10 percent of a person was always tough to do, because it's an ancillary duty," said DEQ Regional Administrator Bruce Olenick. "I think the hope is he'll have a better awareness of where those trouble spots are and maybe advocate for those trouble spots, whereas before we were beating the bushes trying to find projects."

Smith, who farms 90 acres in Preston, previously worked for the Idaho Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

Paris rancher Max Bunderson believes Smith's background in agriculture gives him a more realistic perspective about producers' needs and the challenges they face.

Smith helped Bunderson secure section 319 funds and plan how to relocate old corrals and build a barn to move cattle away from Paris Creek, where they were adversely affecting water quality.

"Steve is nothing short of a genius when it comes to these projects," Bunderson said. "He really went off the deep edge to help me. Not only do you trust him, but he has foresight, and he really understands the procedures."

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