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## Idaho

# Water Board approves ESPA recharge studies

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — The Idaho Water Resource Board has allocated \$322,000 to study six potential sites within the Eastern Snake Plain for conducting managed aquifer recharge, including five in the upper valley that would use flood-control releases.

In support of a water call settlement junior groundwater users reached with Surface Water Coalition irrigators in July 2015, the state has vowed to build its infrastructure to eventually average up to 250,000 acre-feet of annual recharge. Recharge involves injecting surface water into the groundwater table through unlined canals, sink holes or injection wells to bolster declining aquifer levels.

Idaho Department of Water Resources recharge coordinator Wes Hipke said the studies assessing the viability of proposed recharge sites could be completed by next spring.

The lone lower valley study approved at the Sept. 16 meeting is the Richfield site — a basin covering 62 state-owned acres on a lava field. The state can recharge for about 120 days in the lower valley during the winter.

Hipke explained the state is required to maintain a minimum flow of 500 cubic feet per second in the reach below Minidoka dam to benefit a protected snail, but Idaho law allows flows to be reduced to zero farther downstream, past Milner Dam.

In addition to studying expanded capacity in the Egin Bench near St. Anthony, the board approved four other upper valley studies near Idaho Falls — including the Woodville, New Sweden, Butte-Market Lake and South Fork sites. Hipke said the Butte-Market Lake study included three sites, and the

South Fork study will evaluate up to nine potential sites.

"The lower valley, that's our workhorse," Hipke said. "For our longterm goal, we also need to develop (upper valley) sites for when water is available — when there is a big year and (spring) flood-control releases."

The state is in its third year of conducting winter-long recharge, having recharged 75,000 acre-feet in the pilot year and 67,000 acre-feet last season. Hipke's goal for this winter is to recharge between 100,000 and 112,000 acre-feet, though he acknowledges the effort will be complicated by scheduled work on several canals. By next winter, Hipke said the state's infrastructure should support up to 600 cfs of recharge, roughly double the volume recharged last winter. By 2020, Hipke hopes the state will have the capacity to conduct 250,000 acre-feet of annual recharge, ahead of the state Legislature's timeline.

Also during the Pocatello meeting, the board approved a loan to Northside Canal Co. and extended repayment of a loan to Idaho Ground Water Appropriators. Northside manager Alan Hansten said the 20-year, \$5.2 million loan will finance rebuilding and re-lining of a nearly 1-mile stretch of the main canal over porous rock. Work is scheduled to start this fall and be finished by the spring of 2019. It will be done in three phases.

"What we're concerned about is if it continues to degrade and has a catastrophic failure, we could lose the full canal," Hansten said.

The \$6.9 million loan to IGWA, which the board extended by a year, covered the purchase of a fish hatchery and construction of a pipeline to deliver water to the Rangen Inc. hatchery, satisfying a water call. IGWA still owes \$5.1 million in principal.

# Bull trout lawsuit targets Payette National Forest roads

By KEITH RIDLER  
Associated Press

BOISE — An environmental group has filed a lawsuit contending two federal agencies are violating the Endangered Species Act by failing to analyze how roads and motorized trails could be harming threatened bull trout in the Payette National Forest in west-central Idaho.

The federal lawsuit filed by WildEarth Guardians in Idaho on Sept. 21 seeks to force the

U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete an analysis that could result in restrictions on roads and motorized trails.

Specifically, the group contends the 2007 travel management plan for the Payette National Forest needs updating following Fish and Wildlife's 2010 designation of critical bull trout habitat within the forest.

The group is asking a federal judge to order the two agencies to do necessary work to update the travel plan.

# Pocatello school plans potato semester

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — For a full semester, every subject taught to first- and second-graders at the Pocatello Community Charter School will feature potatoes, with strong industry support for the unique curriculum.

Teacher Kelly Bolander explained that during math class students will weigh or measure spuds. Spelling words may include "tuber" or "photosynthesis." Students will diagram the potato life cycle in art class and raise potato plants to observe for science class.

Even the classes' annual community service project is centered on spuds — students will donate thousands of pounds of produce gleaned from recently harvested fields to the local food bank.

The charter school launched the unit on Sept. 23 with a baked potato feast and a visit by the Idaho Potato Commission's Great Big Idaho Potato Truck.

The school's educational model, called expeditionary learning, gives students an in-depth look — spanning every course — at a designated subject for each semester.

Because the learning model also emphasizes first-hand experiences, the first- and second-grade "expedition," titled the Magical Potato, includes field trips to the Wada Farms fresh packing facility in Pingree, the Idaho Potato Museum in Blackfoot, the Lamb



John O'Connell/Capital Press  
Larry Bathe, driver of the Great Big Idaho Potato Truck, eats a baked potato with students Miles Marshall, left, and Brianna Sander from the Pocatello Community Charter School on Sept. 23. The truck visited the school to help first- and second-graders start a semester-long unit on potatoes.

Weston potato processing plant in American Falls and to area farm fields to witness the spud harvest.

"When we started this years ago, it was because we were looking for a compelling issue around the area," Bolander said. "And we can have access to farmers and their fields and have a service component that makes it a more worthy expedition."

Teacher Whitney Griggs said a favorite activity for students visiting potato cellars is to "climb to the top and slide down the potato mountain."

Lance Funk Farms in American Falls and Miles Brothers Farms in Grace are regular participants in the unit, welcoming students for gleaning and harvest visits.

Seed grower Everett Miles admits to dumping extra potatoes in the chosen field before the students come to glean, ensuring they have a sufficient volume for the food bank. He also sends each child home with a bag of spuds.

"It's a fun day for the kids," Miles said. "They love coming."

Teaching assistant Lisa Barthlome said the Miles Brothers are her husband's uncles. Her daughter, Sydnee, a seventh-grader at the school, is well-versed in the farming operations and leads the tours.

"It's really educational for kids in Idaho to learn what goes on in their own backyard," Barthlome said.

At the semester's end, the school will host an expedition night, during which first- and second-graders will display their potato-related work and the plants they raised.

# IPC adds international bloggers to industry tour

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BLACKFOOT, Idaho — Having visited Eastern Idaho potato processing facilities and personally dug spuds at an Idaho farm, food writer and blogger Mara Coraeo vows she'll share a newfound appreciation of the vegetable with her audience in Guatemala.

For the first time, the Idaho Potato Commission included international food bloggers on its annual publicity tour, hosted Sept. 19-21 to introduce bloggers to the state's potato industry.

In addition to a dozen U.S. bloggers, IPC hosted six bloggers from Central America, including Coraeo.

Coraeo founded Nu Chef magazine in 2005. In addition to the publication's 25,000 subscribers, she reaches followers on social media and about 1,000 people per month who attend her regular cooking classes.

"The amount of work that goes into a single french fry, that's pretty amazing," Coraeo said. "When you think about fries — the ones that are



John O'Connell/Capital Press  
Food bloggers pose by the entrance of the Idaho Potato Museum in Blackfoot on Sept. 20. They were part of an annual tour showing the Idaho potato industry to food bloggers, including the tour's first international participants.

left over in a McDonald's bag — I will feel guilty to leave them there because it takes so much work."

The tour, in its fifth year, included stops at IPC Commissioner James Hoff's farm in Shelley, a field of colored potatoes, the Wada Farms fresh packing facility in Pingree, the Lamb Weston frozen processing factory in American Falls and Idahoan Foods in Lewisville. The group also went to the recently renovated Idaho Potato Museum in Blackfoot, located in an old train depot, where upgrades include a new potato cinema and a small restaurant that

opened Memorial Day in the former baggage claim area, featuring a basic menu of staple potato foods.

Traci Lofthus, IPC's international marketing director, called a chef her organization works with in Guatemala and Central American buyers to find good blogging candidates to invite.

"The last three or four years we've wanted to do some type of media tour, and we just have not done that," Lofthus said. "We've been busy on distribution and buyers."

This year, IPC also added a new requirement establishing minimum expectations of each participant to promote Idaho potatoes — the bloggers must post about Idaho spuds at least four times, using at least two different social media channels.

Following past tours, IPC marketing manager Jamie Bowen explained some bloggers have been more active than others in posting about the experience and IPC "decided to make the requirement this year so we got as much out of it as they did."

Bowen said tour participants were surprised to learn how much real potato is used in processed products, and by the sheer volume of potatoes produced in Idaho.

Bowen said IPC invited bloggers from diverse backgrounds. For example, Kita Roberts, who blogs as Girl Carnivore, made friends with Susan Pridmore, known by her followers as the Wimpy Vegetarian.

Pridmore, of San Francisco, admits she didn't realize farmers propagate spuds by planting small, cut tuber pieces. She also learned refrigerating potatoes can elevate sugars, causing darker fries.

"I'm going to be adding a lot more information about potatoes, because I think if it's a surprise to me, it's going to be a surprise to other people," Pridmore said.

Roberts, of Newark, Del., is eager to share her personal connections with the farmers who raise Idaho spuds with her readers, believing it will lend her followers a greater trust and value for the product.



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