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Idaho

Water director orders ESPA groundwater management area

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Gary Spackman has established a groundwater management area for the Eastern Snake Plain, expanding the territory where irrigators will be asked to help stabilize the declining aquifer.

IDWR Deputy Director Mat Weaver said the department will soon create an advisory committee that will work during the next couple of years to help draft a groundwater management plan, governing the management area described in Spackman's Nov. 2 order.

The management area will have no bearing on senior users' water delivery calls, but IDWR will retain the authority to curtail any irrigators who fail to live up to the terms es-

tablished under the groundwater management plan.

"It looks more broadly than just whether or not existing rights are being met," said John Simpson, an attorney representing the Surface Water Coalition. "It looks at whether the water supply is sustainable and whether it's sufficient to meet all of the uses."

Water calls within the ESPA are confined to an area of common groundwater supply established under Idaho's Conjunctive Rule 50, which was based on the best science available during the mid-1990s. The groundwater management area is broader than the Rule 50 boundary — roping in a small area north of Howe and a strip of the eastern edge of the aquifer from American Falls to St. Anthony, thereby enabling the department to force irrigators to balance their water use with supply, regardless of their im-

munity from calls.

"If you stabilize and reverse the declining trends, delivery calls will no longer be necessary and will fall by the wayside," Weaver said.

Spackman has vowed the management area's rules will not interfere with a recent water call settlement between the Surface Water Coalition and groundwater irrigators. Groundwater users agreed to both reduce their water use and provide mitigation to the coalition, hoping to restore depleted spring flows into the Snake River below Blackfoot.

The management area excludes tributary basins, surprising some water managers who predicted Spackman would seek to force all users who contribute to the ESPA decline to help reverse it. In addition to having better models for the main basin, Weaver explained most of the

tributaries already have water-conservation plans in place under their own groundwater management areas or critical groundwater areas.

Weaver explained the Big Lost Basin, for example, was excluded because of a pending petition for a critical groundwater designation — acknowledging the water supply is already insufficient to meet existing rights. The basin will be added to the management area if the critical designation fails.

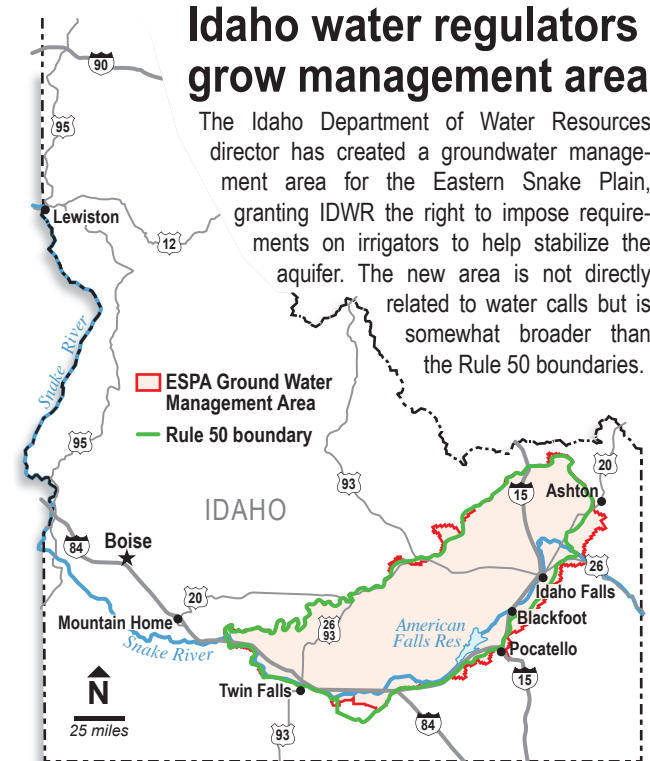
Lynn Tominaga, executive director of Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc., said his members are divided on the management area.

He said some members approve of the concept because it "includes folks who have not contributed to the aquifer."

Others fear it provides Spackman with too much power to impose conditions on groundwater use.

Idaho water regulators grow management area

The Idaho Department of Water Resources director has created a groundwater management area for the Eastern Snake Plain, granting IDWR the right to impose requirements on irrigators to help stabilize the aquifer. The new area is not directly related to water calls but is somewhat broader than the Rule 50 boundaries.



Source: Idaho Dept. of Water Resources

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Wheat commission seeks grower contact information

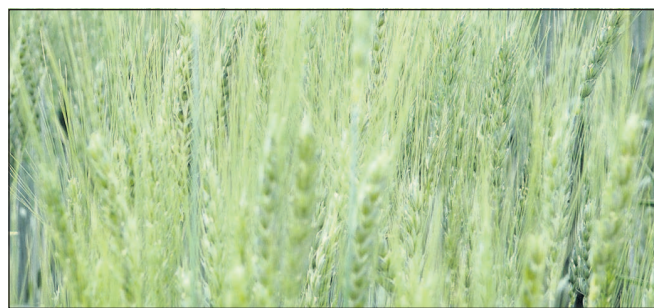
By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Wheat Commission is negotiating with wheat purchasers over a proposed rule that would allow the commission to have access to the names and contact information of all wheat producers in the state.

Idaho statute gives the IWC the authority to have the information but the commission lacks the mechanism to collect it.

All states with a wheat commission have that ability except for Idaho, said IWC Executive Director Blaine Jacobson.

"It puts us at a disadvantage in relation to other wheat-growing states,"



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Winter wheat grows in a southwestern Idaho field June 2. The Idaho Wheat Commission has proposed a rule that would allow it to collect the names and contact information of all wheat producers in the state. Some wheat elevators have asked the commission to hold off a year so they can ask their customers if it's OK to provide that information to the IWC.

Jacobson said.

The rule would require the first purchaser of Idaho wheat to submit the information to the commission.

Having the information would enable the commission to inform wheat producers of timely and important information, such as disease

outbreaks or price premiums, Jacobson said.

It would also allow the commission to show growers how their wheat checkoff dollars are being spent, he said.

Estimates on the number of wheat producers in Idaho vary wildly, from 2,500 to well over 3,000.

Jacobson said the commission's statutory duty to educate growers and improve the marketing of wheat in Idaho is hindered by the lack of grower information.

"Our intent is to keep the wheat industry as healthy as we can," he said. "For the long-term health of the wheat industry in Idaho, it's an important piece we need."

About half of the wheat elevators in Idaho provide the IWC with grower names and addresses, which are exempt from disclosure under the state's public records law.

IWC Commissioner Bill Flory, a North Idaho farmer, said any grower information the commission has is guarded carefully and shared with no one.

The IWC tried to pass the rule during the 2016 legislative session but after it faced opposition from some elevators, entered into a negotiated rule-making process that allows stakeholders to try to reach an agreement on the proposal.

The commission plans to reintroduce the rule during the 2017 Idaho Legislature but some elevators have asked the commission to give them time to contact the producers they purchase wheat from to see if they're OK with their names and addresses being released to the commission.

Expert: Few zebra chip problems despite record Idaho psyllid population

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — A University of Idaho-led insect monitoring program captured a record number of potato psyllids in 2016, but growers have reported few problems with zebra chip, the crop disease spread by the pests.

Caused by the *Liberibacter* bacterium, zebra chip reduces potato yields and quality, forming patterns in tuber flesh that darken when fried. The disease first surfaced in the Northwest in 2011.

UI Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger said researchers and industry partners captured 6,585 potato psyllids during the summer on sticky traps set up around potato fields — far more than during the monitoring program's previous four years combined.

In spite of the increased number of traps, Wenninger hasn't heard many reports of zebra chip infection in his conversations with growers, and when he dug tuber samples from 36 fields involved in the monitoring program, he said he found "almost no zebra chip symptoms."

The monitoring program, started in 2012, has included 13 intensely scouted fields, each surrounded by 10 sticky traps and subjected to routine leaf collections and vacuuming for psyllids. Seventy-five to 94 other fields are lightly monitored. Each is surrounded by four sticky traps that are collected weekly.

UI Extension virologist Alexander Karasev reported his lab is about halfway through testing 2016 psyllid samples for the presence of



John O'Connell/Capital Press

University of Idaho Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger discusses a 2016 surge in potato psyllid populations in Idaho Nov. 3 during the Idaho Association of Plant Protection annual meeting in Jerome.

Liberibacter. Thus far, 2.7 percent have been infected. The researchers expect the final infection number will drop below 2 percent, as testing of late-season psyllids continues. Wenninger explained infection runs highest early in the season — possibly because *Liberibacter* inhibits a psyllid's ability to reproduce.

Karasev theorized the decline in crop infection could be due to the monitoring program's effectiveness.

"This year, when suddenly we had a spike of psyllids in June, (Wenninger) alerted everyone, and people probably started spraying," Karasev said.

Wenninger has found few psyllid eggs and nymphs on leaf samples since 2012, which was the last year in which zebra chip caused widespread grower losses. That year, 23.3 percent of the 1,603 psyllids collected were infected.

"(Growers) are probably doing a good job of controlling the psyllids because we don't find much on the leaves," Wenninger said.

Much of Idaho's dry bean crop still in the field

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

NAMPA, Idaho — A significant portion of Idaho's dry bean crop is still in the field and some growers are scrambling to get their remaining beans harvested.

Persistent rains and a cool fall that delayed bean maturity are the main reasons for the late harvest, according to growers.

Farmers in southwestern and southcentral Idaho who produce the state's \$70 million dry bean crop say they can't remember the last time this many beans were still in the field this late in the year.

"I don't think I've ever been into November before," said Paul, Idaho, farmer Dana Rasmussen, who still has about 90 acres of beans left in the field, about a third of his total crop. The rains "have just made it hard to get back in the field."

About 30 percent of bean fields in southcentral Idaho and 10 percent in southwestern Idaho have yet to be harvested, said Don Tolmie, production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co. in Homedale.

Farmers who still have beans left out "are obviously concerned about it and are on top of it," he said. "As soon as we get a window where we can get a combine out in the field, we'll be picking up beans at a rather rapid rate."

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Idaho bean acres totaled 48,000 this year, down from 50,000 in 2015.

Twin Falls has received 6.16 inches of rain since Sept. 1, which is 4.75 inches more than normal.

"We have just had a ton of rain here. It's been incredibly wet," said Twin Falls farmer Bill Bitzenburg.

Bitzenburg got the last of his beans harvested the first part of October but that's because he didn't have any late-season varieties. Parma farmer Mike Goodson has had his beans in since September but like Bitzenburg, he also didn't plant any late-season varieties.

Farmers with late-season varieties, however, are feeling the pressure.

A cool fall meant late season varieties didn't get the necessary heat units and

matured slower than normal, said Lorell Skogsberg, large seed production manager for HM Clause's garden seed bean processing facility in Nampa.

HM Clause has only one 17-acre field in southcentral Idaho yet to harvest and is in pretty good shape, Skogsberg said. But some of its competitors are under the gun and have asked for the company's help in drying their remaining beans.

The quality of the beans that have been harvested looks good but yields weren't exceptional, farmers told Capital Press.

"I've not heard anybody bragging about their yields," Bitzenburg said.

Bean farmers said from a price standpoint, the crop is one of the few bright spots this year when compared with other crops grown in the area.

Tolmie said his company is paying \$28-32 per hundredweight for pintos right now, compared with \$18-24 last year at this time.

"Beans are somewhat of a glimmer of hope in this commodity market," Goodson said.

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