

# Idaho tops 100,000 acre-feet in fall recharge

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — An Idaho Department of Water Resources official says it's been a record fall for the state's aquifer recharge program, which has already injected more than 100,000 acre-feet of surplus surface water into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

The state has a special water right for recharge, which remains in priority in the Lower Snake, downstream of Minidoka Dam, from at least the end of the irrigation season in fall until the start of the new irrigation season the next spring. Upper Snake recharge is typically in priority only during especially wet springs, when flood-control releases must be made from reservoirs.

The program pays participating irrigation entities to allow surface water to seep through their unlined canals and adjacent spill basins into the aquifer to help reverse a long-term trend of declining groundwater levels.

Wes Hipke, who manages the recharge program, estimates the state is on track to recharge at least 280,000 acre-feet this season, not counting recharge that is likely to occur in the Upper Valley next spring or in the Big



Idaho Department of Water Resources

Aquifer recharge is conducted in late September at the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co.'s Hilton Spillway, contributing toward a state fall recharge program that has already topped 100,000 acre-feet.

Wood and Little Wood river systems. The state has set a goal of averaging 250,000 acre-feet of recharge annually.

"I'm optimistic of being able to do as good as last year, and with the right conditions I can do better," Hipke said, adding he's already 76,000 acre-feet ahead of last season's recharging pace.

Hipke said the state recharged 317,000 acre-feet in 2016-2017, but didn't top 100,000 acre-feet in either of the previous two seasons.

During the past three seasons, Hipke said there's been 500 cubic feet per second of flows available for Lower

SNAKE fall recharge, but the state has had the capacity to recharge no more than 250 cubic feet per second. This season, following an abnormally wet winter, Hipke said reservoirs ended the season with 70 percent carryover, and water managers have already started making releases to free space for future runoff.

Hipke said the state, which normally starts with fall recharge in November, commenced with its program on Aug. 30 this season. In the Lower Snake, the state has been recharging 900 cubic feet per second, of 2,000 cubic feet per second now avail-

able, mostly using the recently developed Shoshone spill basin and expanded Milepost 31 site, operated by American Falls Reservoir District No. 2. Hipke said the state may lose 250 cubic feet per second of capacity if ice blocks access to the Shoshone site when freezing weather arrives.

In the Upper Snake, Hipke said the state had already recharged more than 61,000 acre-feet by the end of October, using storage water donated by the Surface Water Coalition, which received it as mitigation for a water call settlement. Immediately after the storage ran out, the state's recharge right in the Upper Valley come into priority. At the peak, Hipke said the state was recharging 1,300 cfs in the Upper Snake, but has since cut back to 700 cfs, as some canal companies have closed their systems to make repairs.

Aaron Dalling, assistant manager with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, said the Egin Bench Canal Co., which his district serves, has lowered its shareholder assessments by about 30 percent, thanks to fees it received for conducting Upper Snake recharge.

"We're hoping to help the aquifer, but wheeling fees are nice, too," Dalling said.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little addresses potato growers during a forum for Idaho gubernatorial candidates hosted Nov. 14 during the Idaho Potato Commission's Big Potato Harvest Meeting in Fort Hall.

## Candidates for Idaho governor address potato growers

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

working in a modern Idaho food processing plant.

Ahlquist, who grew up on a small farm in Hunter, Utah, has worked as an emergency room doctor, is chief operating officer of the real estate development company Garden Co., and is a founder of Stat PADS, a major manufacturer of medical defibrillators.

"Idaho feeds the world, and I want you to know that I understand that," said Ahlquist, who has chosen an Oakley farmer, Todd Cranney, as his "right-hand man" for his first campaign for public office.

Ahlquist said he empathizes with farmers, who run small businesses, because he's encountered "stifling" state and federal regulations as a business owner. He hopes to change the state's business culture.

"In Idaho, if you are a special interest group or a big company, you will be taken care of," Ahlquist said. "But if you are a family or small business in Idaho, you won't be."

Ahlquist believes the state is too focused on college education and ought to place greater emphasis on preparing students for "the jobs sitting all around us," including apprenticeships and work-study programs.

Ahlquist also supports "rolling back regulations that have destroyed medicine" and suggests the state needs a "crash course on ethics in politics," especially pertaining to campaign finance laws.

Labrador, who has been invited to address potato growers during the University of Idaho's late-January potato conference in Pocatello, submitted a statement to Capital Press highlighting his efforts on behalf of agriculture. Labrador said he introduced legislation that has streamlined grazing permit renewals, and he's proposed legislation to force environmentalists to pay legal fees for "frivolous lawsuits."

FORT HALL, Idaho — Two Republican candidates for Idaho governor shared their visions with potato farmers Nov. 14 on topics such as helping rural America, providing relief for small business owners and reversing the trend of Idaho youths leaving the state to start careers.

Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little, a third-generation rancher, and Tommy Ahlquist, a developer, business owner and emergency room doctor, spoke during the Idaho Potato Commission's Big Idaho Potato Harvest Meeting, hosted at the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel and Event Center.

Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, is also among the front-runners in the race for governor but couldn't attend the forum due to votes in Washington, D.C.

Little emphasized that Idaho leads the nation in both job and income growth, and he believes the state's large cities are benefiting from increasingly diversified economies.

"We're on a pretty good trajectory," Little said. "Idaho has one of the most solid fiscal positions of all 50 states, and vastly superior to the federal government."

But Little said he's concerned about rural Idaho, and described how his hometown, Emmett, lost its major employer when its sawmill closed.

Little said the potato industry has been "in the lead" of adding value to its commodity in Idaho, processing potatoes into frozen products at local plants, and he believes other Idaho commodities must follow suit. Little said he's participated in foreign trade missions to develop new foreign markets for Idaho agricultural products. He also emphasized the need to better prepare students as early as seventh grade for careers that may not require a college degree, such as

## Officials urge ranchers to report all cattle deaths

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — Coming across a dead cow in the herd with no outward signs of what killed her often leaves cattlemen guessing about the cause.

But they shouldn't assume it was poison, bloat, a broken neck or that she got stuck on her back. Her death could have been caused by a wolf, Todd Grimm, Idaho state director of USDA Wildlife Services, said during the Idaho Cattle Association annual convention.

A wolf's teeth are blunt and not meant to rip, puncture or tear; they're meant to crush muscle. Because of their thick hides, a majority of adult cattle killed by wolves show no outward signs of the attack. But they do show subcutaneous hemorrhaging and bite marks under the hide, he said.

Those clues can help investigators confirm a wolf depredation — but only if cattlemen report the death. The agency is urging cattlemen to report all deaths and to leave the carcass undisturbed to preserve the evidence.

In the past 22 years, the agency has confirmed 750 wolf depredations in cattle, affecting 400 producers in 32 counties in Idaho. But deaths from wolves are likely much higher, he said, adding that the science says that for every kill confirmed, there are probably six or seven more.

The agency needs additional data to take to the predator control board to show the



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Greg Jones, a trapper/gunner for USDA Wildlife Services, updates ranchers on wolf depredation during the Idaho Cattle Association annual convention in Sun Valley on Nov. 13, while Todd Grimm, Wildlife Services Idaho state director, stands by.

problem is bigger than estimated to ease the restrictions it faces on wolf removal.

And it's had success in doing that in the McCall zone, a chronic depredation area, where ranchers have responded to the agency's request to report all livestock deaths.

This year, the agency has confirmed 70 wolf depredations of cattle in the region, compared to 32 in 2016. The increase in confirmed deaths is not just from more wolf activity, but also from the agency paying more attention and ranchers calling the agency to look at every carcass, Grimm said.

"We realize there are a lot more kills that cattlemen aren't identifying," said Greg Jones, a trapper-gunner with USDA Wildlife Services.

The agency has found many of those mysterious

deaths show signs of exertional myopathy, which could be caused by the stress of being chased by a wolf.

It's found dead cows with grass or dirt pushed up in their nostrils, indicating a face plant. Other signs are animals with nose in legs out, buckled hoofs, legs straight out and no ground disturbances around the carcass, which would signify a struggle — such as being stuck in the mud or trying to get up.

"She's dead on her feet before she hits the ground," he said.

While there might be no external signs of a wolf attack, investigators can skin the carcass to look for subcutaneous hemorrhaging with associated bite marks that can confirm wolf depredation.

If ranchers find a dead animal, the agency wants to look

at it, he said.

"We need to look at it so we can confirm. If you see something, don't just run on by," he said.

The only way to reduce wolf depredation is to remove more wolves, and the agency needs the data to do that, he said.

Increased depredations in chronic areas have led the agency to look at more animals it can confirm, and myopathy is playing a part, Grimm said.

"The bottom line is it doesn't cost anybody any time or money to have us come out and look at it at the least," he said.

Even if it's in backcountry, cattlemen can report the death and GPS coordinates of a dead animal and the agency will investigate. It has also been able to confirm wolf depredation on scavenged carcasses, he said.

## Extension of farm bill expected

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

SPOKANE — An economist and a consultant say they expect the current farm bill to be extended for a year, and farmers ultimately won't see much change when new legislation passes.

Washington State University small grains economist Randy Fortenbery said he expects at least a year extension of the current farm bill.

Even with a new bill, Fortenbery said, the programs will likely be similar to the current farm bill.

Fortenbery expects some budget cuts, which will impact the redesign of the bill's Agriculture Risk Coverage program, or ARC.

Issues will include whether switching between ARC and the Price Loss Coverage program will be allowed, or if those programs will even survive, Fortenbery said. Farm groups so far disagree on which changes should be made, Fortenbery said, adding that agriculture should



present a unified voice to Congress.

ARC and PLC provide farmers with protection against market downturns, according to USDA. The individual or county ARC protects farmers against revenue drops either at the individual level or based on county prices and yields as published by USDA. PLC provides payments when the market year average price for an eligible commodity falls below the crop's reference price in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Crop insurance will remain the primary safety net, Fortenbery said, but rates of return for insurers and participation restrictions may

be on the table.

Economics research and training consultant Matt Roberts, founder of the Kernmantle Group, also expects a one-year extension with small changes, and then "the real bill" will be written in 2019 and will be a "relatively minor update" of the 2014 bill.

"We don't have widespread dissatisfaction with the Farm Bill like we've had in some previous years," he said. "There are some groups that are unhappy with it — cotton's very unhappy, dairy's very unhappy. Most others may not love it, but we're generally not seeing hatred of it."

## No quick Hirst fix, Farm Bureau told

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Rural Democrats may join Republicans on specific issues but don't expect them to give Republicans a majority in the state Legislature, a legislative watcher says.

Democrats will control the state Senate by one vote starting in January and already control the House by one vote. While such thin margins have caused switch overs in the past, don't expect it next year. That's what Todd Myers, director of the Center for the Environment at the Washington Policy Center, told attendees at the Washington Farm Bureau annual meeting at the Yakima Convention Center.

Democrats are talking about passing a state capital budget but they still need 60 percent of the vote so it probably will remain in stalemate over the unpopular state Supreme Court Hirst ruling on water, said Myers, a former executive team member of the state Department of Natural Resources and author of "Eco-



Todd Myers

Fads: How the Rise of Trendy Environmentalism is Harming the Environment."

The Hirst decision is shutting down development by requiring studies for authorization of new wells. Senate Republicans, in control until they lost a seat in the Nov. 7 election, refused to pass a capital budget without relief from the Hirst decision.

"Will it be the fix we all want? It will not. I can tell you that right now. There will be elements we will all cringe at but it will be better than what it is now," Myers said of any legislative Hirst resolution. He also said it won't happen anytime soon.

Myers said he and a couple other members of the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council were able to dissuade the council from working for legislation to codify the Hirst decision. He mentioned that as an example of what the Washington Research Coun-

cil, an independent, nonprofit think tank, is doing through its new agricultural component.

He said the Building Industry Association of Washington estimates a \$37 billion loss in property values in the state due to the inability to drill wells because of the Hirst decision.

"Even if the number is half that, it's a huge cost and compared to the benefit is excessive," he said.

The state Department of Ecology has said domestic well use is about 1 percent of total consumptive water use in the state so curtailing well expansion doesn't save a lot of water, he said. While more water in streams helps reduce water temperature for fish, it's hard, he said, to evaluate the connection between wells, streams, temperatures and fish, making it hard to abide by the ruling.

"The frustrating thing to me is the ruling is very divisive and has set us back in working to solve water issues. That's as high a cost as the financial cost," he said.