

**Meeting Notes**  
**Henry's Fork Watershed Conference**  
**December 2, 2008**

The annual Henry's Fork Watershed Conference was held December 2, 2008 in St. Anthony at Fremont-Madison Irrigation District's conference room. More than 30 participants were in attendance to learn more about the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Comprehensive Management Plan or Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP).

The meeting began with community building and introductions. Following that, a panel discussion ensued with members of the CAMP committee. Jerry Rigby, an attorney in Rexburg and chair of the CAMP committee, filled in for Jonathan Bartsch who serves as facilitator but was unable to attend at the last minute. Jerry kicked off the discussion with background information about the process.

The Idaho Water Resource Board presented a framework to the Idaho Legislature in 2007 to establish policies for future management of the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer. A public process would follow that would meet the state's goals to culminate a long-range plan for conjunctively managing the water resources that will integrate hydrologic realities with social needs. A committee was formed with representation from many diverse interests and backgrounds in order to have a broad-based representation from the public including irrigation companies, ground and surface water users, spring water users, developers, environmental & wildlife interests, hydropower interests, municipalities, and domestic well owners. Overall goal of the committee:

“Sustain the economic viability and social and environmental health of the Eastern Snake Plain by adaptively managing a balance between water use and supplies.”

Over the years as water supplies have met with challenges in the face of drought situations and demands increase, declining aquifer levels resulted in a number of lawsuits in the state.

The committee has been meeting for 18 months to develop the plan to present to the 2009 Legislature. The draft plan presents a range of management options that provide hydrologic benefits including:

- Managed and incidental recharge
- Groundwater to surface water conversions
- Demand reduction strategies
  - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
  - Dry year leasing
  - Crop mix (incentives to plant low-water use crops)
  - Buyouts and subordination agreements
  - Water conservation measures
- Additional surface water storage
- Weather modification
- Below Milner Dam salmon flow augmentation exchanges

Management alternative packages will be presented to the legislature as follows:

- Small (300 KAF); least expensive and quickest to implement
- Medium (600 KAF); more expensive and takes more time to fully implement
- Large (900 KAF); most expensive and will take decades to fully implement
- Demand Reduction and Recharge Emphasis

Additional recommendations will include restructuring the committee, continuing to integrate environmental and other considerations, and to evaluate options to implement a flexible mechanism that connects willing participants in the implantation of ESPA water management projects.

Rigby noted that funding will be challenging in these economic times but concluded that the state cannot delay action on implementing the plan. He said that Idaho has been commended by other states for taking a collaborative approach to looking into the future of its water issues and that these issues will not go away

without action. He stated that the committee, even though their viewpoints were not always the same, worked well together and made much progress toward a future for management of water in Idaho.

The next speaker was Rebecca Casper representing development interests from Ball Ventures. Rebecca commented on how the committee and its work was a great success. She said that the plan would be a good model of adaptive management where science and citizens can explore innovative and practical ways to address Idaho's water future using this collaborative process.

Rebecca shared her concerns and hopes for the future. She called attention to how Idaho with its Prior Appropriations Doctrine does not recognize development interests with equal representation to agriculture. Her hopes for the future include a change in that thinking and more toward equal thinking. She also stated that she hopes more data will continue to be gathered for the models to help guide future scenarios and that we can create more storage through innovative thinking. Rebecca noted that Idaho is a heavy water use state and is behind many other states concerning water storage. Idaho, in its best predicament, has roughly one year of storage. Rebecca concluded that she hopes Idaho will spend money on action instead of litigation.

Don Parker from Water District 110-100 was the next panelist to speak. Don reflected on his past years farming in the Mud Lake area and how irrigation practices have changed along with the water table and subsequently, the crops. He said that we are in a situation where we now have to address circumstances from a drought perspective and although it puts it into a more dire state, it creates a context for action now. Don said that he is hopeful that the ongoing litigation will cease and that the plan will address concerns and help the state manage its water efficiently and effectively. He said that more storage is necessary and although building more dams is expensive and environmentally hard to justify, recharge is easy. Don alluded to the aquifer as a massive storage space that could be utilized successfully. He is optimistic for the future and for the plan to facilitate water management well into the future.

Kim Goodman Trotter from Trout Unlimited (TU) represents environmental and conservation interests on the committee. She first spoke generally about the ESPA being a natural resource that serves *all* Idahoans, and that the CAMP process is not about resolving disputes between water rights.

Kim addressed the group about TU's stand regarding the rebuilding of the Teton Dam. She said that TU does not endorse rebuilding and neither does the CAMP but that the option was on the table as a means to increase storage. Kim suggested that TU would endorse expanding water supply in other ways including weather modification and storing water in the aquifer through recharge or conversions and demand reduction. Kim offered that years of litigation have not produced any meaningful protection of the aquifer and that CAMP represents a positive step toward protecting this vast resource. Kim also added that if the plan was to be successful, it would need support from all interests affected by Upper Snake water management. She said that she would like to caution the State when excerpting selections from the plan; that they should respect the compromises that were reached by the collaborative process. According to Kim, a balanced approach can avoid significant harm to the Snake River.

Kim suggested that further review of weather modifications should monitor the effects on water yield in target areas and the impacts on downwind precipitation and the overall environmental effects. She also said that weather modification activities that would have an adverse effect on wintering game, water quality or public safety should be suspended.

Kim concluded that Idaho must address the ESPA decline. She is optimistic about the plan and commented on the overall process and appreciates the Governor's invitation to be a part of the process.

Next on the agenda was Jeff Raybould, Fremont-Madison Irrigation District. Jeff began with a history about the aquifer. He said that the aquifer was artificially enhanced in the early 1900s, about the same time that agriculture in the state was expanding. Beginning in the 1970s the aquifer was achieving much less recharge when irrigation practices changed from flood to sprinkler to be more efficient and, coupled with cycles of drought, drew the aquifer down. The CAMP process, according to Raybould, came up with a Phase I approach to take care of the immediate concerns of ground and surface water management. The CAMP advisory committee developed "packages" that modeled management alternatives. The hydrologic analyses show management actions from year-to-year and the effects of the ESPA management actions. Jeff reviewed a few of the scenarios and about

the general patterns that emerge from running the models. He finished by speaking of the benefits to water users of the Phase I Plan. He encouraged people to go to the public meetings and to get behind the plan and support it.

The final speaker on the panel was Mike Beus from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Mike began by speaking about recharge and that it is very important to know where it goes once it gets into the aquifer. It is also important to know how long it takes to get where it is going once it enters the aquifer. Mike talked about weather modification and how it is dependent on clouds being present. He also talked about new storage playing a role in the future of water management. He talked about the years that we have excess and should consider ways to store into the following year. Mike also talked briefly about what we have learned through the years on the effect of downstream areas when the hydrologic system is altered upstream.

Mike gave the group a setting to demonstrate the decline of incidental recharge where the Bureau's management decision caused a decline in a specific area. Consequently, after many years, there was a measurable problem. He continued by talking about the Bureau's ability to "relax" its policies to accommodate things like recharge when ample water is present, but that discretion must be used to assure that water is stored to fulfill delivery demand when needed.

Mike finished by stating that the Bureau strives to be efficient, transparent, and accountable in managing Idaho's water. He said that part of being accountable is to be held responsible for the prior commitments it has made. The Bureau is bound by process and cannot make drastic changes to its management process but would like to consider all options and keep a dialogue going.

The session wrapped up with the committee updating participants on the public meetings scheduled in the next few weeks. The meetings will provide an opportunity for the public to learn about the project and to express any concerns they may have. Public comments can also be submitted in electronic form to [IDWRIfor@idwr.idaho.gov](mailto:IDWRIfor@idwr.idaho.gov).