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Idaho Climate
and Water
Resource
Forecasts for
the 2009 Water
Year

Presented by

The Climate
Impacts Group
(CIG) at the
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&
Idaho
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Resources
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La Nada: The 2009 forecast is a wash as there appear to be no strong or emerging indicators for either a La Nina or an El Nino water year. Likewise 2008 was summed up as “average on average” characterized by average runoff and average diversions.

Snowpack overall in 2008 was near normal except for some basins in northern and southeastern Idaho where snow was still on the ground into May. The latest snowfall on record—June— and the earliest fall snow—October— offset a summer that posted the fifth lowest precipitation on record. Late season snowfall and cooling temperatures delayed runoff, actually creating two runoff peaks.

Irrigation demand responded to the delayed runoff, allowing an extended reliance on natural flow earlier in the season. However, in July and August, irrigation demand increased in response to above average temperatures and below average precipitation. Drought was a less a factor this year except in a few basins where its impacts are lingering.

In the final analysis, 2008 was similar to 2006 in terms of supply and usage. With carryover storage projected at almost average, 2009 may be shaping up to be a good water year with adequate supplies for irrigation.

Climate scientists struggle to correlate annual variables like temperature, precipitation, runoff and flow variables with long-term trends, global warming and potential impacts to water supply and management. While almost all climatologists now acknowledge a connection between greenhouse gases and climate change, the scientific community is still at odds over the degree to which these trends are caused by human activity, their real or potential impact to humans, and the approaches or tools needed to quantify, analyze, counter or minimize them.

Within the region, a number of studies and tools are being developed, among them Idaho’s Comprehensive Aquifer Management and Planning Program and an EPSCoR project “Water Resources in a Changing Climate.”

Idaho’s Aquifer Management Study is a 10 year . \$20 million program implemented to avoid the water conflicts currently being experienced on the Eastern Snake Plain in other areas of the state. The project will be split between technical studies that focus on monitoring, hydrologic framework, water balance and ground water modeling and planning studies that consider water demand, climate impacts on future supply and demand, alternatives to meeting projected demand and the development of a management plan.

The Water Resources in a Changing Climate program is a 5 year, \$15 million interdisciplinary project designed to explore the connections between water and climate, economic policy and ecology. Scientists from the state’s major universities and CIG will use the Snake River Plain and the Salmon River Basin as “natural labs” to research how the impacts of climate, fire, insects and other natural or man-made phenomena differ between a large, managed hydrologic system and a more pristine, relatively unmanaged system. The scientists will work closely with similar studies being undertaken in Nevada and New Mexico. EPSCoR stands for “Experimental Programs to Stimulate Competitive Research” and refers to a federal-state partnership for science and technology programs funded by seven federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation.