

water

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Upcoming Events

July 8: Antidegradation Negotiated Rulemaking, Boise, IDEQ Conference Rm D, 9 a.m.

July 13: Raft River Ground Water District Board Meeting,

American Falls, AAFGWD office

July 14: Food Producers of Idaho Boise, Idaho Grain and Ag Center, 9 a.m.

July 14: State Water Plan Subcommittee Meeting
Boise, Idaho Water Center, 10 a.m.

July 20: Reclamation and Reuse of Municipal and Industrial Wastewater, Boise, IDEQ Headquarters, 9 a.m. (Tentative)

July 21: Antidegradation Negotiated Rulemaking, Boise, IDEQ Conference Rm D, 9 a.m.

July 30: Treasure Valley CAMP, Meridian City Hall, 9 a.m.

August 4: Drinking Water and Wastewater Professionals Board, Boise, IBOL office, 700 W. State, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. *Please note IBOL office has moved.*

Lower Boise River Interim Feasibility Study: Boise/June 30, 2010: Four public information meetings were held around the Treasure Valley last week to discuss the scope of the Lower Boise River Interim Feasibility Study and accept public comment. In this feasibility study, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) are partnering to develop technical data to evaluate and document existing conditions on the Boise River, public safety related to flooding, water storage opportunities, and planning recommendations for phase two of the study.

This phase of the feasibility study is projected for completion by April 2012. The Corps' authority and funding is contingent on securing additional federal funding and partnering with local, non-federal entities. At present, there is no federal appropriation in the current administration's budget to continue with the study. IWRB is providing matching funds for the study largely because it overlaps the Treasure Valley Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP) and a legislative mandate to assess long-term water planning in the region. There is an opportunity for other local groups to become funding partners.

Increased water storage capabilities are one potential strategy to address future water demand and reduce flood risk. The Corps, building on a recent Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) study that identified twelve prospective sites to build or expand dams, narrowed those sites to six and then three. They used a two-part screening analysis to assess the impacts to water supply, flood control, cost, hydropower potential, social impacts, the environment, and resource management. The final three sites (Arrowrock, Twin Springs and Alexander Flats) were identified for further analysis if the Lower Boise Interim Feasibility Study is funded and moves forward by using a weighted, summary compilation of those seven criteria.

Both the Corps and IWRB representatives stressed that their intent that this be a fully integrated study where increased storage is one potential option, that exploring increased storage capacity was part of the initial funding equation that allowed a more comprehensive study, and that other alternatives will be considered.

In addition to water storage, the Corps wants to update information related to potential flood risk and the associated impacts from the three dams (Lucky Peak, Arrowrock and Anderson) that it jointly operates with the BOR. Presenters stressed that major flooding in this area is not a matter of "if" but "when". Potential contributing factors could be, for example, some combination of limited capacity at existing dams, a forecasting or operational error, severe weather event and timing.

Public comment is being accepted on the proposed study and the screening analysis through July 31, 2010. At the Boise meeting, most of the public comment appeared to come from environmentalists who stressed their interest in other options, primarily alternatives to dams, limiting flood plain development and conservation. They asked that the cost of lost recreation, habitat, fish and wildlife, and boating be considered even though those costs are more difficult to quantify. In responding to those comments, the Corps noted that it is required to consult with other federal agencies on some of those issues later in the process; that, like other projects it has undertaken, this is a phased process; and, in the end, the results of following that process are usually good.

We did not attend the meetings in Caldwell, Eagle, and Idaho City. However, in speaking to others who did, it appears that each meeting was varied in attendance and tenor, with comments ranging from other options to local impacts and flood plain development. Irrigated agriculture appeared to be present at all, but not vocal in any of these meetings.

With respect to public comment, the Corps requested public input on three questions: specific water resource problems and issues to address in the Lower Boise River Feasibility Study; potential solutions and alternatives to consider in addressing those water resource problems and issues; and feedback on the criteria used to evaluate surface water storage as a potential strategy to reduce flood risk and meet future water demand.

Written comments on the interim study and screening analysis may be submitted through July 31, 2010 on-line, by fax or by mail.