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**Practical
Paths
To
Water Use
In The
21st Century**

Presented by

**Idaho Council
On Industry
And The
Environment**

Idahoans were called to take up the “grand challenge” of rethinking the infrastructure and policy issues necessary to successfully manage future water use while sustaining economic and population growth. The future will be dominated by competing demands for a finite resource in a state where, historically, water conflicts have been intensely disputed and current water usage is second only to California’s. The Practical Paths seminar held in Boise on October 1st and 2nd was an ambitious forward look at some of the multi-faceted issues water users face in the 21st century.

Paul Deveau, Boise Board of Control, perhaps best summed up the challenges and potential conflicts, saying “What’s important to you is important to me.” People need water; he said, and the future will be determined by the choices we make now. For him, the issues are basic: public safety, demand, additional storage to meet demand.

Deveau also debunked the myth that agriculture is out and residential usage is in. He and other panelists acknowledged that urbanization does impact water management through changes in use, demand profiles, watering practices, and delivery systems. However, Bruce Smith, a Boise attorney with Moore, Smith, Buxton & Turcke, said that municipal expansion may have less impact on agriculture than the rural residential household. Here the conflicts may center around water supply issues such as well interference, differing standards and levels of regulation, and quality of life issues like population density.

Better integration of water management and land use planning, according to various speakers, might address some of the conflicts expected to arise from increased demand, supply variability, flood plain development, climate change and even changing societal priorities. In discussing changing priorities, Donna Cosgrove, formerly Idaho Water Resources Research Institute and now a private consultant, noted the increased emphasis on species protection and the shift to conjunctive management of hydrologically connected ground and surface water. She foresees a crucial connection between water use and energy production, whether the energy source is hydropower or ethanol.

Over the course of the two-day seminar, other options to preserve and protect both water quantity and quality ranged from conservation to building additional storage, investing in technology to more efficiently use the resource, public education, community outreach, and public policy. To that end, public and private activities relating to dam building or expansion, pollution controls, storm water management, wastewater re-use, water budgeting and modeling, aquifer storage and recovery, and recharge were discussed.

Hal Anderson, Idaho Department of Water Resources reported that the state water plan is being updated and strengthened. Instate issues on the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, completion of the Snake River Basin Adjudication, and a recently mandated statewide aquifer management study are expected to significantly impact future water management decisions. Idaho Water Users Association intends to at least open a dialogue this year to consider the role and impact of domestic water use going forward.

At the federal level, Layne Bangerter, State Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources for U.S. Senator Mike Crapo, reported on efforts to revise or revamp the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act. There are two schools of thought in Congress: one favoring less federal regulation, oversight and a narrower interpretation of law while the other seeks far broader regulation, oversight and interpretation. At present neither side has the votes to advance their position.

Overall an ambitious, informative program that would have been even better if several key players, among them ground water users (agricultural and municipal), Northwest Power & Conservation Council, Bonneville Power Administration, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and hydroelectric interests, both public and private, had participated.

Practical Paths is an annual presentation by Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment. ICIE is committed to a scientifically factual, non-partisan approach to environmental issues.