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**Water
Resources
for
Sustainable
Economies
and
Ecosystems**

**University
of
Idaho
President's
Sustainability
Symposium**

Climate change from Ice Age to present, the legacy of 19th and 20th century to today's water user, the political, social, economic, environmental and infrastructure challenges of the 21st century was all part of the 2nd Annual University of Idaho's President's Sustainability Symposium in Boise on October 20-21, 2008. Presenters offered a wide-ranging discussion of past, present and future water use.

For Idaho, a major challenge will be developing the infrastructure to make an abundant water supply available where and when it is needed. At present the state captures an estimated 13 million acre feet, mostly on the Eastern Snake Plain, of the 95 million acre-feet that flows out of the state annually. There is room to improve on this is 1 to 6 ratio. Idaho is still at a place where it can learn from other states in the region where water supplies are already more constrained. And, for the West, there is a growing realization that the region cannot sustain unlimited population growth and maintain quality of life.

Federally we need the legal framework to address emerging issues like climate change and a political climate conducive to work collaboratively and move forward to address the issues before us, whether that is building infrastructure or adopting a regulatory framework. A significant problem at this time is that legislation such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Endangered Species Act were largely developed in the 1970's when some of the current issues were not even on the radar screen.

What is different today? We have a physical infrastructure that is aging and failing; shifting societal attitudes about environmental issues, government's role and duties, and even personal responsibility. To achieve the changes needed, individuals need to be held personally accountable for their own actions and also pressure Congress to act. If there was a buzz word at this meeting, it was collaboration. Several of the speakers emphasized the need to act collaboratively, forging new partnerships between the public and private sector as well as the environmental community, undertaking more extensive research, investing in new technology, engaging in better planning to develop alternatives, and identifying the funds to make it all happen.

It was noted that water issues have not risen to the level of public interest as transportation and other energy issues. Competition for water supplies due to growth or new uses, along with water quality issues and infrastructure needs, are expected to spur public interest. As that occurs, state sovereignty will remain an issue near and dear to Idahoans' hearts. With respect to funding, there has been some discussion in Congress about a Water Interest Trust Fund, but it was noted that somehow a gas tax is more acceptable to the public than a water tax. State and regional actions range from building and maintaining infrastructure to research, regulatory and administrative actions like conjunctive management and adjudication, modeling, planning, incentivizing water conservation and efficiency, and penalizing misuse.

Next year's Sustainability Symposium addressing energy issues will be held in Idaho Falls.