



## Meeting Minutes - December 20, 2023

The meeting of the commission was called to order by Chairman Lew Pence at 1:02 pm.

Present:

**Commissioners**

Brent Reinke – Twin Falls County  
Ron Buhler – Gooding County  
Nathan Schutte – Lincoln County  
Dan Schaeffer – Minidoka County

**Commission Members**

Lew Pence – Chair - Gooding  
Roger Morley – Executive Director  
Bethany Muffley – Executive Asst.  
Duane Turner – TF P&Z  
Dan Suhr - Jerome  
Arlen Morgan – Jerome  
Dean Edgar - Cassia

**Agency/Other**

Josh Morell – IDWR – Boise (virtual)  
Steve Hines – UofI Ext. – Jerome  
Nicholas Howell – IDEQ – Twin Falls (Virtual)  
Kathryn Elliott – IDEQ (virtual)

Lew Pence began the meeting and asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting. The minutes were approved with a motion made by Dan Suhr and seconded by Arlen Morgan.

Lew asked if there were any current bills and Bethany indicated that bills were only those for member mileage reimbursements and compensation for executive director duties (\$550). A motion was made by Duane Turner and seconded by Arlen Morgan to approve.

Lew asked if there had been any correspondence since the previous meeting. Roger Morley expressed how much he has been learning since entering the commission and he shared personal statements in relation to his hopes in moving the commission forward. He relayed information on research he has been doing in relation to nitrates, phosphates, aquifer depletion, and how these issues are not just Mid Snake issues but all of Idaho. He indicated speaking with his son-in-law who works as director for the Boise City Sewer District and that he was updated on situations Boise City has faced with industry in their area. Roger also relayed that he attended the last WAG meeting and has been interacting with DEQ in the goal of establishing partnerships for addressing water-related problems in the Mid Snake area. He also listed efforts to find such partners in the ISDA, IDWR, U of I, Counties, Cities and Magic Valley Businesses. He mentioned gathering information from well data at all testing sites so that we can provide compiled data for the people who need it and have the authority to use it. He went on to indicate the importance of recharge efforts, keeping track of INL reactor projects that could impact water quality, and the decreases observed in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA). He referenced a news article published in November 2023 by Logan Ramsay with Eastern Idaho News that interviewed Alan Jackson (manager of the Bingham County groundwater district) who stated that the average amount of the water added by the aquifer to the river has decreased by 432,000-acre ft. Roger also relayed that air temperature increases and rainfall decreases have been occurring since 1980 as reported in the Southern Idaho Climate Impact Planning program. These factors can lead to increasing water demands and increased evaporation which will in turn, decrease the amount of water entering the aquifer. Roger indicated that this was all information he had been looking up and researching over the past month. He expressed that according to this information, the climate is changing and it is something we need to take into account in future planning. He conveyed that if water declines, the dilution needed to ensure TMDLs will not be there. Roger reported that statewide, the decrease in precipitation equals 900,000-ac feet of water. He went on to relay information from Russel Qualls (the State Climatologist) that higher temps lead to increasing demands of water for irrigation, and that recharge efforts have become paramount. Roger mentioned one question asked during the Idaho Water Summit was, “at what point will Southeast Idaho not have enough water to meet population increases and be able to create new irrigated farmland?” Roger indicated that the answer was, “Eastern

Idaho is there right now.” Roger expressed that the time to just sit back and watch is past. He communicated that he wants this commission to be proactive and form the necessary partners so we can do whatever we have to, to fix the situation.

Lew introduced our guest speaker, Josh Morell - Recharge Project Manager at IDWR. Josh introduced the ESPA is a highly valuable resource in Idaho. HE indicated it as the largest and most productive aquifer in the world and accounts for about 20-33% of Idaho’s economic output. The aquifer provides for 60% of total irrigated lands in Idaho, water to support aquiculture (we supply a large portion of the Nation’s trout demands), and 50% of Idaho Power’s water needs. Josh’s presentation went on to show how the groundwater is flowing in the area, and highlighted discharge at American Falls and 1000 Springs. He relayed that the information they use is gathered from well sites that are measured in the fall and spring. He also indicated that water quality is tested throughout the aquifer. He went on to show charts that track changes in volume and relayed that between 1912 and 1952 we were adding about 450,000-acre feet to the aquifer due to flood irrigation using surface water. From 1950 to 2015, he reported that we lost about 215,000-acre feet of recharge per year due to changes in watering practices that included decreased water use and ground water pumping, as well as varying drought cycles. With the decreases observed in the past 50 years, stakeholders and legislators adopted CAMP (Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan - 2009) with the goal to add 600,000-acre feet to the aquifer water budget. They seek to average 250,000-acre feet and reduce groundwater pumping by 240,000-acre feet per year. Cloud seeding is also a part of this plan. Josh expressed that managed recharge is a key component to CAMP.

Josh went on to present information on historic Idaho recharge efforts and the status of the aquifer today. He highlighted online resources available for public access. He relayed that IDWR added recharge sites throughout the ESPA to capture water during big snow years. He indicated that as of today, Idaho has recharged about 2,124,000-acre feet with an average of 236,000 per year. He explained that the recharge program is trying to capture water from heavy spring flows or flashing flooding events. Josh reported that the current recharge status for this year is at 41,000-acre feet (as of Dec 12<sup>th</sup>). He mentioned that Twin Falls Canal Company has recharged 1,600-acre feet, SWID at 3,500-acre feet, and Northside Canal Company with 36,000-acre feet. He also displayed a graph that indicated water available for recharge and showed a gap starting Dec 1<sup>st</sup> due to an agreement between IWRB and Idaho Power to let 200 CFS pass over Milner. Josh also reported that from October 13-28<sup>th</sup>, the Surface Water Coalition donated a significant amount of storage water for recharge based on an agreement they had with the IWRB. He indicated that the program was able to put a lot of water back into the ground, however, the goal they had of 100,000-acre feet, was not possible due to the capacity available. Josh displayed information on current recharge construction sites and indicated the potential capacity for each. He mentioned that they are currently working on projects in the Lower and Upper Valleys.

Josh addressed commission concerns in relation to quagga mussels in the Mid Snake. Josh displayed a map of recharge sites near the mussel impacted area that showed their recharge diversion locations are positioned above where the mussels were found. He mentioned that IDWR is in close contact with responding agencies to make sure they are not missing anything. He stated that they have added copper testing to the water quality sampling they conduct as copper was what had been used during the quagga mussel treatment. He also indicated that IDWR is making sure to thoroughly clean water-related equipment after each use to ensure they would not accidentally transport mussels.

Josh gave a demonstration on how to access recharge information on IDWR’s website. He also navigated to a dashboard highlighting storage water a portal that featured groundwater quantity and quality data which is updated in real time. Roger asked if there are any monitoring wells south of the river. Josh indicated that most of the recharge sites are north of the river and that the wells they use are usually near the recharge sites so they can monitor the level and quality of water going in. He relayed that they do have water quality and quantity data south of the river, however, it is not directly associated with the recharge program. Josh explained that canal fed recharge does occur south of the river, but that the south side does not have large recharge basins like what occurs on the

north side. He commented that the recharge program tries to partner with canal companies to use their existing infrastructure and that they just haven't expanded south yet. Josh did indicate that entities are encouraged to develop proposals and send them to the IWRB because they are always looking for new areas to develop.

Lew thanked Josh for presenting to the group and expressed that he gave us a lot of good information that we can now access. Lew moved on to new business... Roger gave an update on the WAG meeting he attended. He relayed discussions on planning for source water quality, water projection planning, looking at critical areas for cleanup, \$4.6 million 2023 grant funding, cover crop projects and alternative water sources for cattle. They also had discussions about water quality credits in relation to water quality trading. Steve mentioned that it was an interesting concept, but he wondered about the functionality of it. Roger agreed and indicated that the more he researched it, the less attractive it seemed. Dan indicated that this program was designed for dischargers that are trying to keep in compliance. Lew asked who the grant money was available for. Roger relayed that canal companies can apply for that money through the WAG but was unsure about more specifics. Lew expressed that if it could be used by canal companies for recharge sites that may take a financial burden off stakeholders. Roger indicated that that is a great thought that he will keep in mind when speaking to canal companies and counties. In relation to the importance of recharge locations, Dan expressed to the group that the Upper Valley is the most critical. He also relayed that the Twin Falls Canal Company made a call on eastern Idaho because Twin Falls uses river flow primarily as their water right, and only about 10-15% of their capacity is based on storage. He stated the Northside Canal Company as 100% storage. He explained that Twin Falls Canal Company has a vested interest in keeping the level below American Falls at the level they are used to and is why the call was made. He indicated that this situation is in the courts right now and that it is not being very well publicized. Dan made the statement that this is why the upper reach of the aquifer is a more critical point for recharge over the lower reach because it has more time to raise the level that comes down. He finished with the thought that the adjudication of the pumbers in eastern Idaho needs to be done, and that it hasn't happened yet.

Lew asked if we had any new commission appointments. Commission Reinke indicated that he had been having discussions with Twin Falls Planning and Zoning but did not have anything to announce today. Lew moved on to announced that he will be stepping down as chairman and plans to stay on till April 2024, then retire. He expressed that he feels good about where the commission is heading and is very pleased with the commissioner participation we have been getting from each county. He indicated that at the next meeting, we need to have a chair and a vice chair assigned. With that Lew, adjourned the meeting with a motion and second at 2:10pm.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bethany Muffley', written in a cursive style.

Bethany Muffley, Executive Assistant