

IDAHO GROUND WATER APPROPRIATORS, INC.

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IGWA Optimistic About Curtailment Negotiations

Farmers Working Hard to Find Solution in 2024

Idaho Falls, Id. - The Idaho Groundwater Appropriators (IGWA) and the groundwater districts it represents in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer are optimistic that negotiations to end the state's destructive water curtailment will result in a fix for 2024, narrowly avoiding catastrophe.

But district members warn that any band-aid agreement reached in 2024 will not fix the underlying issues caused by the state's interpretation of the 2015 agreement governing water mitigation.

"This cannot be a moment where the state kicks the can down the road," said IGWA Chair Stephanie Mickelsen. "Farmers in eastern Idaho need an agreement that doesn't prioritize drying up our farmland before other reasonable alternatives are exhausted. Without assurances that there will be lasting change, it will be very difficult for us to say yes to any short-term deals."

On May 30, the Idaho Department of Water Resources issued a curtailment order that would cut off the water supply for more than 500,000 acres of farmland, ruining family farms and cratering Idaho's economy.

The order came after a projected 74,100-acre-foot shortfall in surface water in the Magic Valley. Groundwater districts respect the need to provide water to senior water rights holders and offered on several occasions to provide the full shortfall using stored water, but the state declined, instead opting to dry up private farmland to solve the issue.

T.J. Budge, IGWA attorney, said there must be changes to the current agreements that create fair ways to measure mitigation efforts and don't threaten families with ruin every time a minor shortage is projected.

"People cannot have their livelihoods and their way of life threatened year after year," Budge said. "I am optimistic we can find a solution for 2024, but it is critical that state leaders develop a more effective and pragmatic water management strategy going forward. What IDWR did this year does not give the people who make up the agricultural backbone of our state stability, nor does it give them a future here in Idaho. A new path must be charted before the 2025 growing season."

Much more work needs to be done. All sides must be willing to stay at the table to deliver meaningful solutions, including legislation if needed. The IGWA members are eager to do their part protecting the aquifer and water resources across Idaho, it expects water resource management to be modernized in return.

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