

April 4, 2016

Bureau of Reclamation
Pacific Northwest Regional Office
1150 North Curtis Road, Suite 100
Boise, ID 83706-1234

Re: 2016 Basin Study Program for the Wood/Malad River Basin

Dear Director Lee and Staff,

The Wood/Malad River basin is the largest river basin tributary to the north side of the Snake River between Idaho Falls and the Oregon border. The basin includes a highly developed recreation area, cities and diverse irrigated agricultural areas as it makes its way from the headwaters in the Soldier, Smoky, Boulder and Pioneer Mountains and Sawtooth National Recreational area at the north end of the basin to the Snake River at the south end of the basin. The Big Wood River and its major tributary Camas Creek join with the Little Wood River to form the Malad River near the City of Gooding. Ground water in the basin is divided into three general areas, the Camas Prairie area, the area south of Bellevue, frequently referred to as the Bellevue Triangle, and a portion of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) that underlies the southern part of the basin.

Even with the large drainage area, the basin is typically water short for the current level of development. Surface water storage opportunities are generally considered to be limited to the Little Wood River Reservoir, Fish Creek Reservoir and Magic Reservoir already in existence. Recent years have not typically provided sufficient runoff to fill the existing surface water storage reservoirs. Ground water storage is relatively limited except in the most southern portion of the basin where the ESPA is accessible.

The Pacific Northwest Climate Impacts Research Consortium (CIRC) has recently analyzed a portion of the Wood/Malad River basin to estimate if climate change is likely to change the characteristics of the water supply available in the basin. The CIRC predicts that climate change is likely to occur with warming trends resulting in reduced snowpacks and earlier runoff reducing the available water supply when water is most needed. <http://explorer.bee.oregonstate.edu/studyareas/bigwood/Conclusions.aspx> The study goes on to say that “more managed” water use can help keep water demand fairly stable into the future, but does not provide the information needed to implement the “more managed” water use scenario.

The South Valley Ground Water District, the Galena Ground Water District, the Big Wood Canal Company, the Big Wood and Little Wood Water Users Association and The Nature Conservancy, the Applicants, seek assistance from the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) under the 2016 Basin Studies program to analyze how the existing infrastructure will work in response to changing water conditions and to assist with the

development of adaptation and mitigation strategies to achieve a “more managed” water management strategy to supply adequate water for the future.

As noted above, the basin is water short in most years under current conditions with the prospect of water supplies becoming more limited in the future. There is water distribution and curtailment of surface water deliveries in every year under current conditions and a call for conjunctive administration between surface and ground water is also currently in play with another call for conjunctive administration pending. The Applicants, who represent both those calling or planning to call for conjunctive administration and ground water users responding to the call, seek the assistance of the BOR to aide them to work together to resolve the current and pending delivery calls with a win-win strategy.

Ten years of litigation regarding water calls on the ESPA has helped the Applicants understand that joint problem solving can provide the best opportunity to preserve the interests of all the water users involved. The Applicants have begun discussions to attempt to settle the conjunctive administration delivery call and pending call and now seek the assistance provided by the BOR through the 2016 Basin Studies program to develop the foundation of an amicable resolution to the pending conflict in the Wood/Malad River basin.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Sharon Lee in care of the South Valley Ground Water District, P.O. Box 223, Bellevue, ID 83313.

Yours truly,

Sharon Lee
South Valley Ground Water District

Pat McMahon
Galena Ground Water District

Carl Pendleton
Big Wood Canal Company

Rod Hubsmith
Tom Faulkner
Big Wood and Little Wood Water Users Association

Mark Davidson
The Nature Conservancy