



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Surface water, ground water interests and cities agree to terms of three-year conjunctive management agreement in the Big Wood and Little Wood River Basins**

BOISE - (Jan. 24, 2022) – Ten organizations representing surface water, ground water and municipal interests have agreed to a term sheet that sets the way for development of a ground water management plan that will regulate ground water use in the Big Wood River Basin over the next three years, staff officials announced to the Idaho Water Resource Board on Friday.

“I’m happy to report that we have agreement on the final term sheet by the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Area Advisory Committee,” said Tim Luke, Water Compliance Bureau Chief for the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR).

The terms of the agreement envision moving forward with detailed water management practices within the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Area (BWRGWMA) and the Wood River watershed over the next three years, officials said. The agreement will be revisited after that time to see if anything needs to be changed, officials said.

Next steps would be to finalize a draft ground water management plan, present the final plan to the BWRGWMA Advisory Committee for review and recommendation, and then present the final plan to the Director of IDWR for review and adoption.

Water Board member Dean Stevenson of Rupert commended IDWR staff and the advisory board members for reaching agreement. “This has been a hard task to get done,” he said.

“I’m glad they’ve made it this far,” added Peter Van Der Meulen, Water Board representative based in the Wood River Valley.

The parties to the agreement include: Big and Little Wood Water Users Association, Big Wood Canal Company, South Valley Ground Water District, Galena Ground Water District, Sun Valley Company, the City of Hailey and Water District 37B Ground Water Association. In addition, the City of Bellevue, City of Ketchum, and Sun Valley Water and Sewer District also are signatories to the agreement.

The purpose of the agreement is to balance the interests of owners of senior surface water rights with the interests of ground water pumpers whose water rights are junior to the seniors, officials said. Under

the Prior Appropriation Doctrine, parties with senior water rights have priority in times of water shortages.

Key terms of the agreement include groundwater use reductions, a specific river flow target, creation of a water Conservation, Infrastructure and Efficiency Fund (CIEF), ground water irrigation season of use limits and more.

Specific terms on the Little Wood River include:

- Delivery of 1,500 acre-feet of water per year to Little Wood River senior water right holders from the Big Wood and Little Wood Water Users Association. The water would be acquired and paid for by the Galena Groundwater District.
- Streamflow target on the Little Wood River: 32 cubic feet per second at Station 10 near Richfield, May 1-Sept. 30.

On the Big Wood River:

- Delivery of over 900 acre-feet of water per year to Big Wood River senior water right holders from the Big Wood and Little Wood Water Users Association.
- The water would be acquired by the Galena Ground Water District and paid for by the CIEF.

Participating ground water districts will fallow irrigated farmland to achieve annual or baseline levels of reduced ground water use. This portion of the agreement calls for: 1,500 acres of land to be fallowed per year in the South Valley Ground Water District, and up to 500 acres of land per year within the Galena Ground Water District.

There are additional restrictions and limits on ground water use detailed in the agreement. In drought years, determined by snowpack and streamflow levels, groundwater districts will implement additional ground water use reductions as outlined in the agreement.

The agreement calls for contributions to the CIEF to help finance various water conservation or infrastructure projects and pay for some storage water delivery. The term sheet calls for \$210,000 dollars in CIEF contributions annually, with funding coming from water users and the Idaho Water Resource Board.

CIEF projects and storage water purchase decisions would be made by a CIEF Committee, comprised of an equal number of surface water and groundwater users within Water Districts 37 and 37B, plus a Water Board representative. That group will need to develop bylaws for the agreement moving forward, officials said. CIEF Committee decisions would be reviewed and approved by the Water Board. The agreement proposes that the funds be held and administered by the Wood River Resource Conservation & Development Council.

The full terms of the agreement will be posted to the IDWR web site: <https://idwr.idaho.gov/water-rights/groundwater-management-areas/big-wood-ground-advisory-committee/>

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