Legislative Services Office
Idaho State Legislature

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Press Release

Lawmakers Authorize Initial work on Proposed Settlement Agreement to Solve Water Dispute

An interim committee of Idaho lawmakers working to prevent a water crisis in the Magic Valley has authorized efforts to begin determining the level of interest among people that might be willing to sell their water rights as part of a proposed settlement agreement being considered by the Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee.

The interim committee on Thursday unanimously passed a motion to finalize and distribute Requests for Proposals to holders of water rights above Hells Canyon Dam after seeking concurrence from Governor Dirk Kempthorne. The purpose of the RFP is to identify who would be willing to sell their water rights and for what price.

Acquisition of existing water rights is just one element of the proposed settlement agreement that aims to reduce pressure on the East Snake Plain Aquifer by creating an annual positive change in the aquifer's ground water supplies of 600,000 to 900,000 acre-feet, stabilizing discharge in the Thousand Springs area and other surface water supplies.

If water rights acquisition proceeds, as much as 220,000 to 280,000 acre-feet of natural flow or storage water rights would be purchased to help meet remaining demands and avoid a potential legal battle between surface and ground water users.

The Idaho Water Resources Board would administer the acquisition program and the purchases could be paid for with revenue bonds issued by the board or other potential means.

The Request for Proposals could be distributed as early as November 1st. Interested water right holders would have a month to submit their proposal back to the state to be evaluated before the legislative session.

The interim committee also passed another motion supporting efforts of a working group put together by the Farm Service Agency, which is considering a proposal to place 100,000 acres of Idaho farm ground in a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. The CREP proposal sets a goal of conserving as much as 200,000 acre-feet of water and is another component of the proposed settlement agreement.

Committee members stress this is just the first step in determining whether it is viable and feasible to proceed with the proposed settlement agreement. For additional information please contact Katharine Gerrity or Toni Hobbs at 334-2475.

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