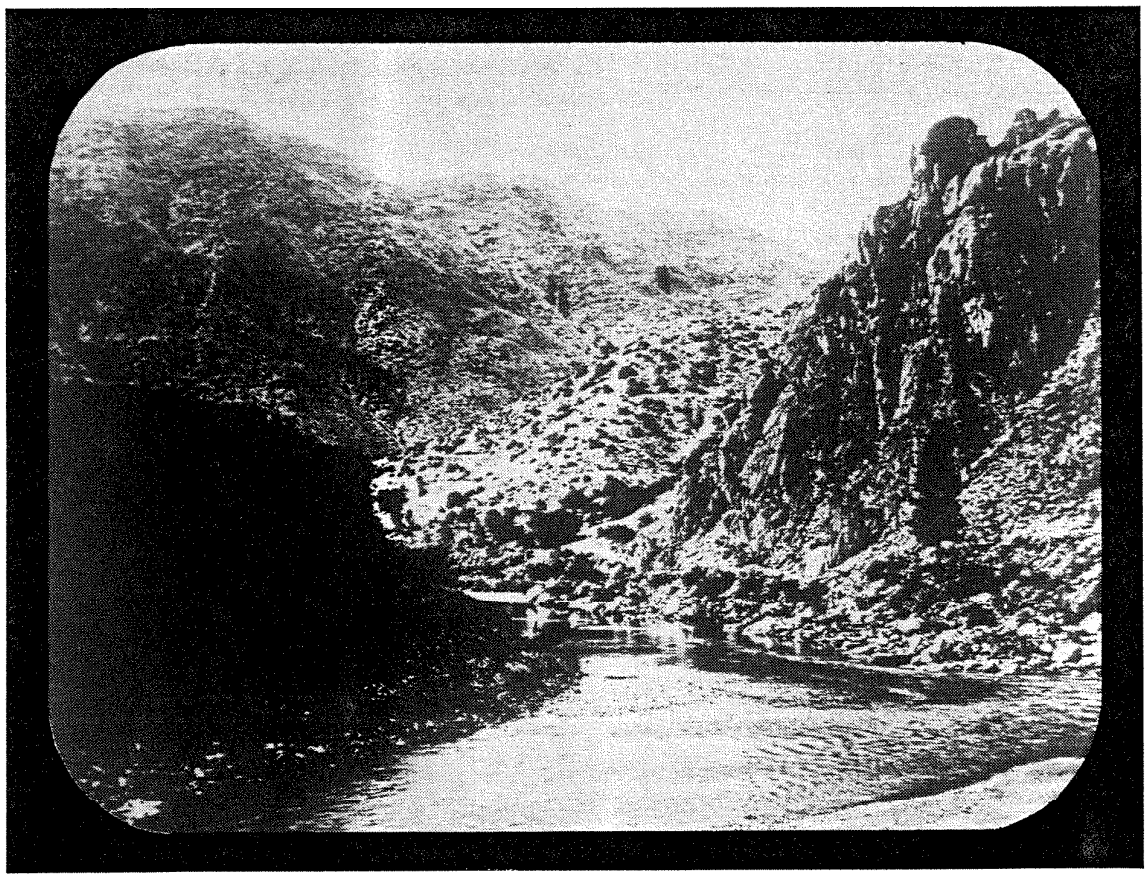
Comprehensive
STATE WATER PLAN
Upper Boise River Basin



Arrowrock Damsite - circa 1910

Credit: Idaho Historical Society

Idaho Water Resource Board
1992

COMPREHENSIVE STATE WATER PLAN

Upper Boise River Basin

Idaho Water Resource Board

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December, 1992

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This component of the Comprehensive State Water Plan is prepared by the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) for the upper Boise River basin (Fig. 1). This includes the Boise River and reservoirs upstream from Lucky Peak Dam, the North and Middle Forks of the Boise, and Mores Creek drainage. It does not include the South Fork of the Boise River; the South Fork Boise River basin Plan was completed by the Board in 1990 and approved by the legislature. There are roughly 1130 miles of rivers and their tributaries in the basin. While a portion of the basin is included in the Sawtooth Wilderness Area, reach descriptions and designations go only to the boundary of the Sawtooth Wilderness Area. Water development in the wilderness area is precluded by the federal government.

The average annual precipitation in the basin ranges from 20 to 50 inches per year, with the highest values in the eastern portion of the watershed. Stream flow rises in March, peaks in April through June and recedes to a base near the end of July. Low flows generally prevail from August through February. This basin contributes the majority of the runoff of the Boise River. Throughout most of the basin little groundwater exists. The water quality in the basin is generally considered to be good.

The basin lies in Ada, Elmore, and Boise counties. Though the past 30 years have seen Ada County experience a 145 percent population increase and Elmore County 222 percent, the basin is still sparsely populated (USDA, 1990a). Within the basin, there are two incorporated communities, Idaho City (1990 pop. 322) and Placerville (1990 pop. 14) and 5 unincorporated communities (Atlanta, Centerville, New Centerville, Pioneerville, and Quartzburg).

There is a total of 881,000 acres in the basin; 81% of that is within the Boise National Forest, 1.2% is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, 6.7% is state land, 9.6% is private and the remaining 1.5% is managed by the Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The major commercial activities in the basin are timber, agriculture, mining, recreation, and power generation.

Protected river designations are made to protect and preserve the highly valued water resources of the basin (Final Actions and Recommendations, p. 52; Figure 4). Sheep Creek, including its forks and selected tributaries; the upper portion of the Roaring River, including its forks and selected tributaries; the North Fork Boise River from the Middle Fork Boise River to Rabbit Creek; the North Fork Boise River from Hunter Creek to Johnson Creek including selected tributaries; and Johnson Creek from its mouth to the Sawtooth Wilderness Area boundary including selected tributaries are designated as state Natural Rivers to preserve their aesthetic, recreational, and

biological values. Portions of the Boise River, the Middle Fork Boise River, the North Fork Boise River, Roaring River, Crooked River, Bear River, and Big Silver Creek are designated as state Recreational Rivers to preserve and protect recreational and biological values. Recreational designations are conditioned as needed to allow alterations in the streambed for construction and maintenance of bridges and culverts. The Board has made several recommendations primarily to state and federal resource management agencies, to further protect and manage the water resources in the basin.

The Board will apply for the establishment of minimum stream flows to protect the water quality and fish and wildlife habitat for portions of the Middle Fork Boise River, the Yuba River, the East Fork Montezuma Creek, Crooked River, and Elk Creek.

This plan does not impact existing water rights and uses or other vested rights, and has no direct impact on timber harvest or stock grazing. When a river reach is designated for protection in this plan, it is the purpose of the plan to protect the streambed from disturbances that are not in the public interest, and the stream water from diversion to out-of-stream uses. The plan does not impact private property rights in the riparian area. Implementation of this plan will not interfere with rights to water vested under state law or the delivery of water to its rightful user.

Unless the plan designating a particular waterway as a state protected river specifically requests the governor to seek inclusion of the waterway in the national wild and scenic rivers system, the designation of a waterway as a protected river shall not be a basis for seeking inclusion of such waterway in the wild and scenic rivers system [Idaho Code, Sec. 42-1734I].