

April 27, 2004

**Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group
of the
Expanded Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room
160 South 3rd East
Mountain Home, Idaho 83647**

Attendees: Chairman Representative Bert Stevenson
Committee members: Representatives Doug Jones and Peter Nielsen,
Senator Tom Gannon
Members of the public: See attached sign-up sheet

Chairman Bert Stevenson called to order the first meeting of the Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, April 27, 2004 in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. Other committee members attending the meeting were Representative Doug Jones, Representative Peter Nielsen and Senator Tom Gannon.

The Chairman opened the meeting with introductions. He commended community members for their previous efforts to work together to identify problems and solutions relating to their aquifer. He acknowledged that, while the problems are easy to identify, the solutions always come harder. He urged participants to stay at the table and work through this.

Mountain Home Ground Water Advisory Group: Tim Corder, a member of the Mountain Home Ground Water Advisory Group, presented an overview of the advisory group's work to date. The ground water advisory group formed eight years ago to address aquifer declines and is delighted to work with the legislative interim committee in identifying overall solutions for the area. Members of the advisory group toured the area with legislators prior to the meeting.

The advisory group includes representatives from numerous stakeholders, including the city of Mountain Home, Mountain Home Air Force Base, domestic and rural water users, and agricultural users. Recognizing that each stakeholder group is a unique and separate entity, the advisory group asked stakeholders to establish entity plans identifying problems and potential solutions. While some entity plans have been developed, no draft plan has been accepted or approved by the advisory group.

Hydrology: Gary Spackman, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), briefly reviewed the hydrology of the Mountain Home aquifer. The Mountain Home aquifer system consists of a shallow perched aquifer that rests over an impervious clay layer that is widely dispersed and inconsistent. The shallow aquifer is not always reliable in short surface water years and overlies a deeper regional aquifer system. Ground water flow is estimated to generally flow northeast to southwest.

Steady aquifer declines have been recorded in the area for approximately 35 years. IDWR designated the area around Cinder Cone Butte as a critical ground water area in 1981. A larger ground water management area that was designated in 1982 and includes the city of Mountain Home surrounds the critical ground water area. These designations were based upon rapid agricultural development, declining ground water levels, the projection of future declines, and the number of pending applications for further appropriation of water. While there are anomalies, IDWR is particularly concerned that aquifer levels appear to continue a steady decline with no indication of recovery in some areas in spite of reduced pumping and other interventions.

A water budget for the basin estimates an annual water supply of 42,700 acre/feet, annual usage of 73,600 acre/feet, and an annual water deficit of approximately 30,900 acre/feet.

Major Concerns and Expectations: Committee members and stakeholders then discussed major concerns and expectations from the interim committee. Participants identified the need for accurate information, modeling, technical expertise, resources and leadership. They are looking to the state of Idaho to meet these needs.

Economic viability is of particular concern and needs to be balanced with continued growth and other interests. Continued growth in the area is expected and desired. The city of Mountain Home anticipates additional growth and the Hammett area is said to be already expanding rapidly.

Mountain Home Air Force Base makes a significant contribution to the area economy. With the U.S. Department of Defense in the process of restructuring and closing military bases around the country, it is essential to demonstrate sufficient water availability to successfully meet the base's mission.

Agriculture is responsible for an estimated 95% of ground water pumping, but also makes a significant contribution to the tax base. Forced curtailment could impact an estimated 15,000 acres or $\sim 1/2$ of the ground water irrigated acres. Drought, declining aquifer levels and rising electrical costs of high lift pumping may mean irrigators can no longer afford to pump. While this may resolve the problem, it would create economic hardship and suffering for those whose property rights are compromised.

The prior appropriation doctrine cannot be compromised or weakened in any way. The Chairman was emphatic that it is not the intent of the interim committee or IDWR to compromise prior appropriation doctrine, but to work in conjunction with it. Even if the prior appropriation doctrine is implemented, no one knows how long it will be before aquifer levels improve.

All stakeholders and interested parties must be at the table. **Domestic water users** are part of the solution. Domestic water rights and use must be identified and accounted for.

OPTIONS:

Recharge was identified as the most viable option. There has been no water available since the Initial Water Level Testing for Mountain Home Ground Water Advisory Committee 1999 Recharge Project was developed. Stakeholders suggested that IDWR has the expertise to identify water available for recharge along with the resources to implement projects. Recharge projects need to be in place so they can be used when water is available.

Other options being implemented or considered include: conservation, wastewater applications, conversions, pumping water from the Snake River for recharge, buying out farmers, and other exchanges and transfers within the confines of state law and established water rights.

Assignments: At the next meeting, IDWR was asked to provide the following information:

1. The number of new domestic wells developed over the last 10 to 15 years.
2. The number of acres of surface water rights using ground water as a supplement.
3. The number of acres under surface water rights being highlifted from the Snake River.

The Chairman also requested that all documents discussed in the meeting be available to the public on IDWR's website.

The next meeting will be held on May 18, 2004 at 9:30 a.m. in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3 p.m.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Copies of the maps, studies and handouts are available to the public on the IDWR website at www.idwr.state.id.us/Committee

Meeting notices, agendas and minutes are available to the public at <http://www2.state.id.us/legislat/legislat.htm1>.

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