

**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**

June 15, 2004

Attendees: Chairman Representative Bert Stevenson
Committee members: Representatives Doug Jones and Peter Nielsen
Senator Tom Gannon
Members of the public: Sign-up sheet available from Legislative Services Office

Chairman Bert Stevenson called to order the meeting of the Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group at 9:40 a.m. on Tuesday, June 15, 2004, in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. After introductions, the working group's first order of business was to approve the minutes of its previous meetings. Representative Nielsen moved to approve the minutes of April 27, 2004. Senator Gannon moved to approve the minutes of May 19, 2004, with the following corrections on page 1 to indicate that: Senator Fred Kennedy attended the May 19, 2004, meeting but is not an ad hoc member of the working group. The minutes of April 27, 2004, were unanimously approved; and the minutes of May 19, 2004, were unanimously approved as corrected.

The working group continued its discussion of supplemental and domestic water rights. Helen Harrington, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), presented a map entitled "Supplemental Irrigation Wells in Mountain Home Ground Water Management Area." John Westra, IDWR, discussed a handout outlining supplemental and domestic water rights.

Supplemental water rights are outlined in three broad categories:

1. Water needed early and late in the season. IDWR calls these water rights "bookends" or "shoulder" uses.
2. Water needed to replace a shortage of water provided by the primary water right.
3. Water needed to supply a steadier stream of water not available because of traditional rotation.

A supplemental water right is established by category and with specific conditions pertaining to its use. It is possible for water rights to change over time. Under some circumstances, a supplemental water right could become a primary water right or vice versa. Supplemental water rights are not always monitored.

Domestic water rights are defined in *Idaho Code* and are limited to ½ acre plus house, driveways and outbuildings or 13,000 gallons per day. Historically, application includes in-house usage, stock watering, and irrigation. Domestic use of ground water is exempt from water rights, but surface water is not.

Reports on irrigation and domestic water use from the Mountain Home Groundwater Advisory

Committee were postponed. The “Final Draft of Mountain Home Ground Water Management Plan” will be reviewed for discussion at the next meeting.

Short and long term solutions. Eventually each working group will identify common themes and make recommendations to the larger committee that could include statutory changes and financing of projects. Short-term solutions should address water quantity issues that are practical, economically feasible, return the most water and provide the best return on the dollars invested. Long-term solutions need to protect water rights, the basin and the aquifer. Everyone should share in these solutions because everyone will benefit. One option may be to buy and permanently retire water rights. Since the prior appropriation doctrine will be upheld, curtailment is certainly an option on a year to year basis, but a harsh one.

Domestic water use is one of the common themes being identified around the state as impacting aquifers. Land use planning may offer an opportunity to maximize domestic land and water use. Developers could be required to install community systems instead of individual wells in subdivisions, keep water shares with property instead of selling them prior to development, or use canal water and pressurized systems for domestic irrigation. Land use planning could also address issues like density, lot size, development in and outside the area of impact, low impact landscaping, protection of open space, and cooperation between city and county governments. If adopted on a statewide basis, this could level the playing field for development in Idaho and help avoid problems experienced in other areas of the West like Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Spokane.

Water quality. Along with water quantity issues come water quality issues which are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Quality. Discussion touched briefly on the need for public awareness and involvement.

Diversion and recharge. The working group briefly discussed the impact of diversion and recharge. There appears to be some kind of hydrological boundary or divide that parallels Interstate 84 and prevents lands south of the interstate from getting recharged like they once did.

The next meeting is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Friday, July 16, 2004, in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.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.html>.

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