

**Chairman's Summary - Representative Bert Stevenson
Mountain Home Working Group
October 13, 2004**

At its October meeting, the Mountain Home Working Group received an update on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). It's estimated that enrolling an estimated 100,000 acres in CREP could result in targeted water savings of 150,000 acre/feet. A draft proposal will be presented at the November meeting of the Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee.

CREP Overview: CREP pays individual farmers or landowners to convert irrigated acres to permanent wildlife habitat. The irrigated rate will vary based on the Hydrologic Unit (HUC) in which the enrolled acres are located. The statewide average is \$118 per acre. For the first three years, some irrigation will be allowed to establish a cover crop. After that, no pumping will be allowed. The water right cannot be transferred, but will be protected from forfeiture by the CRP exemption in *Idaho Code*. The federal government also provides \$5 per acre maintenance and 50% of the costs associated with the cover crop (seed, grass, diesel).

The biggest obstacles to an Idaho CREP are cash payments and surface water issues. The state must provide a 20% match, some combination of in-kind services and cash. At the moment, no one knows how much cash will be required. Since it can come from any source, IDWR suggested ground water districts provide the cash as part of their overall settlement. Discussions are also on-going as to whether or not land irrigated with surface water diversions should be enrolled due to the difficulty of calculating and monitoring water savings.

Enrollment Caps: Federal restrictions limit CRP enrollment to 25% of the eligible acres in any one county. CREP enrollment is proposed at 50% of the CRP cap, meaning that an estimated 18,141.8 acres in Elmore County would be eligible. An entity must be identified that could provide the cash match. A petition is circulating to form a ground water district, but there were questions about the number of signatures necessary. Helen Harrington, IDWR, will check the statute. The issues of surface water and supplemental wells is particularly relevant to Mountain Home. At \$118 per acre, the rental rate is very close to the purchase price, perhaps an option for the state but not the federal government.

Nez Perce Agreement: Norm Semanko, IWUA, provided an overview of the Nez Perce Agreement.

CAFOS: Several members of the public expressed concern about the number of CAFOs being approved in the area and their effect on the aquifer. Land use and siting are county issues. Once sited, state agencies are responsible for regulating CAFOs. A dairy's usage is metered and reported; the total amount of water consumed under the original water right cannot be exceeded.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 10th at 9:30 a.m. in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room.