Groundwater Management Area created for East Snake Plain Aquifer

In a move he hopes will ease the most arduous administrative burden faced by the Idaho Department of Water Resources, Director Gary Spackman has created the state’s largest groundwater management area, encompassing the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region. Hoping “to stop the drop” of the aquifer level, which has experienced an annual rate of decline estimated at 200,000 acre feet, Spackman signed the order designating Idaho’s 12th GWMA. He announced the action to the Idaho Water Users Association on November 3. His intent, Spackman said, was to bring all of the region’s water users “into the fold” with efforts to restore the aquifer. Although this was partly accomplished by the 2015 settlement agreement between ground water and surface water groups within the conjunctively managed ESPA region, users who were not members of a ground water district did not have an opportunity to take part. “This is a tool to manage the aquifer so everyone is participating,” said Spackman, noting that the eventual management plan for the GWMA will work in cooperation with the settlement agreement. He offered no timeline for the development of the management plan, but it is expected to take at least two years.

The ESPA region GWMA extends from the upper eastern corner of the state, near Saint Anthony, to Thousand Springs near Hagerman where the ESPA discharges into the Snake River. Existing GWMAs and critical groundwater management areas — four of which located near Oakley — have been excluded from the ESPA region GWMA.

Additional information can be found on the IDWR website at