

Gov. Little signs executive order to protect Idaho water sovereignty

Wednesday June 26, 2024

Pocatello, Idaho – Governor Brad Little and Lt. Governor Scott Bedke were joined by surface water users and groundwater users today in Pocatello to celebrate the successful resolution of water conflicts this irrigation season while charting a path forward on a new long-term agreement between water users that works for all farmers while providing for a healthy aquifer.

“We did what Idahoans do best – worked together to find a solution. Everyone compromised, and now we’re focusing on a long-term solution that fits the latest science, meets the needs of all water users, and conserves our water for future generations. The solutions shouldn’t come from the government. They should be carefully crafted by the water users themselves,” Governor Little said.

Governor Little noted a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last week that blocked an agreement between water users in Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado, allowing the federal government to assert control of water in times of disagreement.

“My goal all along was to avoid the heavy hand of government by bringing farmers to the table and hashing out a plan to keep crops wet this year and into the future. The stakes are higher than they have ever been. We as Idahoans must continue to work together to control our own destiny,” Governor Little added.

[Executive Order 2024-06, the Protecting Idaho Water Sovereignty Act](#), builds upon previous actions to protect Idaho’s water for this generation and future generations. Governor Little and the Legislature put half a billion dollars toward water quantity investments over the past three years and Governor Little hosted a Water Summit in August of 2023 with hundreds of Idaho stakeholders to identify challenges and potential solutions to water issues in Idaho. In addition, Governor Little directed the Idaho Department of Water Resources to create the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Groundwater Management Plan Advisory Council which has met regularly since 2023 with a goal of creating a groundwater management plan for the aquifer.

To bolster past efforts to protect Idaho’s water sovereignty, Executive Order 2024-06 calls for the following actions:

1. To improve understanding of the aquifer, the Idaho Department of Water Resources will coordinate efforts to bolster and improve water supply modeling technology through partner organizations. The effort will require the partnership of universities, industry, farmers, ranchers, and others.
2. Governor Little will recommend the Idaho Legislature convene the Interim Natural Resources Committee prior to the 2025 legislative session to identify predictable and consistent opportunities to enhance the state's water infrastructure.
3. The Idaho Water Resource Board will prioritize funding for projects that have net benefits to the ESPA while making water use more efficient.
4. Governor Little will bring together industries and stakeholders to propose solutions to long-term water sustainability because the ingenuity of the private sector is far more desirable in seeking solutions than relying on the government to do so.
5. The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Groundwater Management Plan Advisory Council will continue to meet to create a Groundwater Management Plan to be submitted for review by the Idaho Department of Water Resources, as required by law, by September 1, 2024.
6. As required by the 2024 agreement, the groundwater users and surface water users will meet to establish an improved mitigation plan as soon as possible, no later than October 1, 2024.

“Water is truly the lifeblood of Idaho. It supports our communities, energy production, recreation, our economy and, most of all, agriculture. Farmers will always be the backbone of our state and our country. Agriculture is our way of life in Idaho,” Governor Little said.