



State of Idaho

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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C. L. "BUTCH" OTTER
Governor

GARY SPACKMAN
Interim Director

June 8, 2011

Idaho Transportation, Eric Verner
PO Box 97
Rigby ID 83442

RE: Application to Appropriate Water in the Upper Salmon River Basin 74-15892

Dear Water Right Applicant:

The Department of Water Resources' (IDWR) records show you filed an application to establish a new use of water in the upper Salmon River basin. Idaho Code § 42-203A(5) requires IDWR to determine whether each water right application satisfies all the criteria necessary for appropriating water in Idaho. One statutory criterion requires IDWR to determine the local public interest relative to the proposed water use. Idaho Code § 42-202B(3) defines the local public interest as "the interests that the people in the area directly affected by a proposed water use have in the effects of such use on the public water resource." The local public interest has many facets, including the effects of a proposed water use on aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife resources.

The upper Salmon River basin is home to stocks of chinook salmon, sockeye salmon, steelhead trout, and bull trout, all of which are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since the early 1990s, local water users, conservation districts, and federal and state agencies have cooperated to implement conservation measures intended to protect and restore habitat for ESA-listed species in the upper Salmon River watershed. For example, at the request of local water users the Idaho Legislature directed the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) to establish a minimum stream flow in the lower Lemhi River for fish passage. The minimum stream flow is maintained through a water supply bank and temporary or permanent acquisition of additional water supplies by willing buyers from willing sellers.

Pursuant to the Snake River Water Rights Agreement of 2004, Idaho has been developing a long term conservation plan for the benefit of ESA-listed species in the Lemhi River basin. Improving conditions in flow-limited river reaches and streams is a fundamental component of the Lemhi plan. In addition to IDWR, numerous state agencies, including the Office of Species Conservation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and Idaho Department of Lands, have committed and continue to commit significant resources toward this objective under the following programs:

- Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program
- National Marine Fisheries Service Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund
- U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service Aquatic Species Conservation Fund
- Salmon and Clearwater River Basins Habitat Fund
- 2008 Columbia Basin Fish Accords

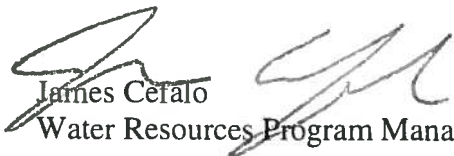
A myriad of habitat restoration projects are being constructed/implemented in other parts of the upper Salmon River basin. These projects have been coordinated with the local communities and water users through the Upper Salmon River Basin Watershed Program and predecessor programs, including the model watersheds. Furthermore, the Snake River Water Rights Agreement of 2004 contemplates the development of additional conservation plans for other upper Salmon River basin watersheds. Accordingly, the draft Comprehensive State Water Plan under revision by the IWRB contains policies for the Salmon River basin that focus on the protection and restoration of instream habitat for ESA-listed species through voluntary participation in conservation programs.

Because of the ESA-listed species recovery efforts in the upper Salmon River basin, IDWR must determine on a case-by-case basis whether it is in the local public interest to authorize proposed water uses that would further deplete flow-limited stream reaches.

Pursuant to Rule 40.04.c of the Water Appropriation Rules (IDAPA 37.03.08.040.04.c), the applicant has the ultimate burden of persuasion regarding the items that must be evaluated in connection with each water right application. Before proceeding further with your application, IDWR requests you submit additional information about how your proposal invokes any local public interest concerns for ESA species recovery. Within 30 days, please submit any additional information you believe IDWR may need to evaluate and determine the local public interest in the water you propose to divert and use. If IDWR has not received a response from you within 30 days, IDWR will assume you have no comment regarding the local public interest, and processing of your application will resume with the information currently on file. Processing will include public notice and the potential for formal protests by other interested parties. Applications that are not in the local public interest will be denied. If you wish to withdraw your application before it is processed, please notify IDWR in writing.

If you have any questions, please call me at 208-525-7161, or email me at james.cefalo@idwr.idaho.gov.

Sincerely,


James Cefalo
Water Resources Program Manager

Enclosure

JC:sc