



State of Idaho

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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Governor

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Director

January 10, 2002

VERNON LOLLEY, CHAIRMAN
MARY ELLEN PUGH, SECRETARY
WATER DISTRICT 67
2165 SEID CREEK RD
CAMBRIDGE ID 83610

Re: Watermaster Compensation

Dear Chairman Lolley and Secretary Pugh:

I am gingerly writing this letter on my own volition. As a preface to what I say, Chapter 6, Title 42 of the Idaho Code, which governs the operation of water districts, grants local users great independence in the affairs of the district and its operation. Only when there are questions regarding the proper delivery of water by the watermaster or when the district does not properly organize should the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) exert authority over the internal operations of a water district. This is particularly true in the adoption of a budget, the selection of a watermaster, and the determination of his compensation.

Nonetheless, over the past several years I have personally been concerned about the compensation paid to the Weiser River watermaster. The Weiser River watermaster oversees a very large area comparable to the area regulated by the Boise River watermaster and the Payette River watermaster. The Weiser River watermaster's compensation is approximately one-fifth the compensation paid to the Boise River and the Payette River watermasters.

The watermasters in the Payette River and the Boise River have two luxuries that the Weiser River watermaster is not afforded. First, in both the Boise and the Payette River drainages, there is substantial storage water available to users when the natural flow declines. Many users receive storage water that is adequate to supply their needs during all but the driest of years. The watermasters' function is often a measurement and bookkeeping job rather than a direct regulatory job. On the other hand, the Weiser River watermaster must curtail junior priority water rights and deal with the emotions associated with the loss of an agricultural crop. In this way, the job of the Weiser River watermaster is more difficult than the job of the watermasters where storage water can supply the needed water when natural flow is not available.

The second luxury not afforded the Weiser River watermaster is the infusion of federal dollars into the water district through the water rental pools operated by the water districts.

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These federal monies often add to the available money that can be paid as compensation to the watermasters.

As a result of the availability of storage water and the money generated for the water district from storage water, I expect the salaries of the Boise River and the Payette River watermasters to be higher. Their salaries have ranged from \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year during the last few years. In addition, the water district has contributed to health insurance and retirement benefits for these watermasters. As a result, the watermasters in the Boise and Payette River are compensated at several times the rate received by the Weiser River watermaster.

I am not suggesting that assessments be raised significantly to additionally compensate the watermaster. I believe, however, that the salary paid to the Weiser River watermaster is enough lower than the salaries for comparable watermaster services that this subject should be discussed at the annual meeting. I also believe that the district is spending money in other areas that could be dedicated to watermaster services if the district does not want to raise assessments to pay the watermaster a higher salary.

I will be attending the water district meeting on February 4, 2001. I will bring summaries of the compensation for watermasters in the Boise and Payette Rivers, or will send them earlier if requested. I am also happy to discuss the details of the past water district budgets and offer alternatives for restructuring the water district budget to avoid an increase in cost to the users but still increase the compensation paid to the watermaster.

I want to reiterate again that the purpose of this letter is to point out the disparity in watermaster compensation and offer some information to the district. As always, the district is free to elect its own watermaster and set the compensation for his services. This is a matter that is solely within the right of the district itself to determine unless the district fails to elect a watermaster or fails to determine the compensation for the watermaster, at which time IDWR would assert its authority.

I look forward to seeing you on February 4, 2002.

Sincerely,



Gary Spackman

GS:st

BCC: Bosco Basler