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# Idaho Water Transaction Program

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ABSTRACT  
UCOWR/NIWR Conference, July 20-24, 2004  
Idaho Water Transaction Program

The Idaho Department of Water Resources and the Idaho Water Resource Board applied to the Bonneville Power Administration in 2001 to become the qualified local entity in Idaho to implement Action 151 of the Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion for 2000. The application, supported by the Idaho members of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council and the Idaho Office of Species Conservation was accepted, and the Department along with the Board became the qualified local entity for the State of Idaho.

Idaho is unique in that state law does not currently provide legal authority for water trusts. However, the Idaho Legislature provided many functions of water trusts, including a water brokerage mechanism, to the Water Resource Board and the Department of Water Resources.

A key strength of the Idaho Water Transaction Program lies in the collaborative relationships developed over the first year. The Department of Water Resources is an active member of the Technical Team for the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project, and works closely with the Project to ensure that water transactions are coordinated with other habitat improvement projects, and implemented on a priority basis. The Department collaborates with the Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate Action 151 activities with the Action 149 responsibilities of Reclamation. The Department also works closely with the Idaho Office of Species Conservation in developing and implementing conservation agreements that provide safe harbor for local residents in return for commitments to improve or increase habitat for fish listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The Idaho Program relies on a number of tools to enhance tributary flows. Water previously diverted for consumptive uses is obtained through a variety of transactions with willing land owners. Water is obtained through donations, leases, or purchases using the Board's water bank. Conservation agreements and other legally binding documents may be used to obtain and shepherd conserved water through critical stream reaches. Water administration tools, such as transfers and exchanges allow diversions to be relocated, thus replenishing flows in critical stream reaches. Irrigation scheduling using water distribution models provides opportunity to coordinate diversions and maximize instream flows.

Although the Idaho Water Transactions Program was brand new in 2003, the Department and its partners made significant progress. We accomplished three transactions in the first year resulting in reduced diversions from priority tributaries of over 9 cubic feet per second. More important, we developed an

effective program based on agency collaboration, public outreach, a variety of water acquisition tools and a reliable monitoring process.

Idaho is looking forward to a fruitful year in 2004. We are taking steps to expand the program into the Clearwater River Basin. We are increasing our efforts in collaboration with Reclamation to develop additional water distribution modeling capabilities in the Upper Salmon basin. We are implementing a monitoring process that includes continuous measurement of key instream flows and use of habitat models to evaluate water transaction projects. We are currently involved in nine flow enhancement projects relying on a number of transaction processes including permanent acquisitions, partial season leases and use of the transfer process.

The Water Transaction Program is a valuable element of recovery for anadromous and other ESA-listed fish species. Through enhanced flows and by reconnecting stream systems, miles of anadromous fish habitat are being reinstated in the Columbia Basin.

Bill Graham, the presenter, is Chief of the Water Planning Bureau in the Department of Water Resources. He holds a Master of Science degree in biology with an emphasis in limnology. He has been with the Department since 1974. His technical specialties are aquatic biology, water chemistry, limnology, contaminant transport, and natural resource planning. His program experience lies in the areas of underground injection, water resource planning, minimum stream flows, funding programs, and water transactions. He currently provides oversight in a number of these areas.