



PRESS RELEASE

February 6, 2009

Contact:

For immediate release

Andy Munter, Legacy Board Chair, o) (208) 726-8818
Kevin Lewis, IRU Conservation Director, o) (208) 343-7481
Greg Stahl IRU Assistant Policy Director, o) (208) 343-7481

PO Box 633
Boise, ID 83701
800-574-7481
Fax 208-343-9376
www.idahorivers.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Bill Sedivy

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Buck Drew
Ketchum

Rick Eichstaedt
Spokane

Al Espinosa
Moscow

Peter Grubb
Coeur D'Alene

LuVerne Grussing
Juliaetta

John Heimer
Boise

Jessica Holmes
Boise

Tom Kovalicky
Grangeville

Jonathan Long
Rexberg

Andy Munter
Ketchum

Jackie Netzger
Boise

Keith Stonebraker
Juliaetta

Tom Stuart
Boise/Stamley

Legacy Project enters second year

In-stream flows program seeks more water donations in 2009

BOISE—The goal is to put more water in the Big Wood River, and the Wood River Legacy Project is the means by which that is being accomplished.

Entering its second year, the Legacy Project is an innovative amendment to Idaho Code that last summer facilitated contribution of 3 additional cubic feet per second of water to the Big Wood above Bellevue. The goal this year is to more than triple the program's initial success, and Boise-based Idaho Rivers United is working this winter and spring to secure water right donations for the 2009 irrigation season.

The Legacy Project is an innovative program approved by the Idaho Legislature in March 2007 following 18 months of bipartisan work. Managed by Idaho Rivers United, the program provides for donated water rights to increase flows in the Big Wood River, Silver Creek and the Little Wood River. Unique to the legislation is a provision providing the donated water to be used for recreational uses in the Wood River Valley and then revert to agricultural uses as it leaves the valley for the lower basin.

"We're trying to move water downhill," said Carl Pendleton, a member of the Legacy Advisory Board and Lincoln County representative of the project. "The result is increased flows in the river and more water for crops downstream."

Legacy Project Board Chair Andy Munter, also owner of Backwoods Mountain Sports in Ketchum, stressed the ease with which water can be donated.

"It's a one-page form, and it's for as short as one year," Munter said. "It's designed so people keep ownership of the water, so they retain long-term control of the water. This is a safe, effective, efficient way to protect your water right while helping fish, wildlife and down-basin irrigators."

Idaho Rivers United Conservation Director Kevin Lewis said 2009 will provide a continued opportunity to the residents of the Wood River Valley to safeguard their water rights by placing them in the Legacy Project while simultaneously bolstering the Wood River Valley's ecology.

—more—

“The Legacy Project is a huge step for rivers in Idaho,” Lewis said. “It truly is an example of how people with different interests can come together to find common ground. The Legacy Project benefits anglers and farmers, wildlife and wetlands, rivers and fish.”

Many people expressed initial surprise at the development of the Legacy Project coalition, which included five basin counties, the Idaho Water Users Association, Idaho Rivers United and that ultimately achieved state support. Previous attempts by the Legislature to change Idaho water law to allow for the protection of water rights for in-stream flow purposes failed by wide margins. But by mobilizing project support from down-basin irrigation districts and counties the Legacy Project was able to secure the bipartisan support needed for passage.

The concept is getting traction. The Idaho Department of Water resources in late January passed a draft of its Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan, a document that seeks long-term solutions to managing supply and demand issues on the Snake River Plain. Though the document is still pending approval by the Legislature, the Legacy Project is cited among tools to be used in that effort.

“It’s refreshing that the state is looking at new and innovative solutions to assist in solving long-term water problems in Eastern Idaho,” Lewis said.

To consider a donation, contact Idaho Rivers United for a one-page form.

Idaho Rivers United is a statewide river conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring Idaho’s rivers. For more information please contact Kevin Lewis at (208) 343-7481 or visit www.idahorivers.org.

