

Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CAMP

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A fortuitous combination of geography, geology, and hydrology combined to create Idaho's Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). The aquifer covers about 10,800 square miles in Eastern Idaho. The ESPA rose dramatically beginning around 1910 as irrigation from the River contributed substantial volumes of water to the aquifer from canal losses and deep percolation. A second phase of development ensued after World War II when improved pump technology facilitated substantial development of ground water pumping. As a result of ground water pumping and reduced incidental recharge due to efficiency improvements by surface water users, aquifer levels and discharge have declined since they peaked in about 1955. Declining water levels and spring discharge associated with development of the aquifer and changing irrigation practices were exacerbated by the intense drought which began in 2000. Citing diminished discharge from the ESPA, several water calls were made beginning in 2005 to regulate ground water pumping. An intense debate has ensued as the State and water users have wrestled with the concept of conjunctive management of ground water and surface water. Several administrative actions have been taken in the form of hearings, pleadings, and administrative orders. Essentially every final order by the Director of the Idaho Water Resources Department has been appealed to the courts. Early efforts to negotiate a solution to these conflicts were unsuccessful, and Governor Otter established an advisory committee to address the problems. The Legislature also authorized the development of an ESPA Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP). A plan was submitted to the Idaho Water Resources Board in January 2009 and approved by the Legislature. Improvements have been undertaken but the funding concept provided in the plan has not been implemented due to disagreements among the prospective participants.