



NEWS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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Public Lands Foundation, BLM honor Wesley Hipke with Land Stewardship Award

BOISE – (March 31, 2022) - The Public Lands Foundation presented a Landscape Stewardship Certificate of Appreciation award to Wesley Hipke, manager of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) recharge program for the Idaho Water Resource Board, during the Board's regular work session meeting today.

Hipke has worked to develop the ESPA recharge program for the Board since 2015, when the Idaho Legislature began setting aside substantial funds to create a number of aquifer-recharge sites across the Eastern Snake Plain. Up to that point, the ESPA was being over-drafted by about 200,000 acre-feet of water annually.



Wesley Hipke at the Milepost 31 recharge site near Eden, Idaho.

Since then, Hipke and Water Board staff have partnered with multiple canal companies and irrigation districts to develop approximately 10 aquifer-recharge sites in the Upper Snake River Basin above Idaho Falls and in the Magic Valley region to meet a goal of recharging about 250,000 acre-feet of water into the aquifer each year.

Many of the aquifer-recharge sites are located on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management such as the Egin Bench site in the Upper Valley and the Milepost 31 site near Eden.

The rapid buildup of aquifer-recharge sites in the ESPA region has enabled the Board to significantly increase recharge flows. For example, the Board recharged approximately 447,950 acre-feet of water into the ESPA in the winter of 2019-2020. It was the fourth year in a row that the Board has exceeded its goal to recharge 250,000 acre-feet annually.

"Working in collaboration with the Idaho Water Resource Board on these aquifer-recharge projects is really important," said Idaho BLM Acting State Director Pete Ditton, who attended the award presentation. "We're feeling a lot of pleasure and gratitude today."

"The importance of this effort cannot be overstated for the future of Idaho," said Codie Martin, Manager of the BLM Shoshone Field Office, who nominated Hipke for the award. "The health of the aquifer has tremendous positive implications for the BLM's multiple-use mission and resources as well, including wildlife habitat, ecosystem health and vigor, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation, wildland fire, and wild horse herds."

"Watching this program develop from afar, we are impressed with the partnership between Mr. Hipke, the Water Board and the BLM for working together to create aquifer-recharge sites across the Eastern Snake Plain to ensure the long-term sustainable health of one of the largest freshwater aquifers in the Western United States," said Mary Jo Rugwell, President of the Public Lands Foundation.

"Everyone in Idaho – from Governor Little, to the Idaho Legislature, to water users, cities, businesses and citizens – understands the value of restoring the aquifer to sustainable levels."

Jenna Whitlock, the Idaho PLF representative, presented a plaque to Hipke for his exemplary public service and provided a tray of fresh-baked cookies to the Water Board and staff.

Hipke and support staff have made remarkable strides in a short amount of time to work through all of the many steps involved in researching aquifer-recharge sites, working with the BLM to get the sites approved and permitted, taking water samples with staff, and making modifications to canal-delivery systems with irrigation districts and canal companies to bring the sites into full operation.

After the first five years of the ESPA-recharge program, hydrologists with the Idaho Department of Water Resources have documented an increase of 1.8 million acre-feet of water into the Lake Erie-sized aquifer over that period of time.

Board officials have noted that it will take a long-term strategic effort to continue to restore the ESPA to sustainable levels.

(see award photo below)



L-R, Codie Martin, BLM, Mike Courtney, BLM, Jenna Whitlock, Public Lands Foundation, Wesley Hipke, Aquifer Recharge Program Manager, Idaho Water Resource Board, Pete Ditton, Idaho BLM Acting State Director, Jeff Raybould, Chairman, Idaho Water Resource Board.

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