Idaho, Nez Perce Tribe, and Federal Government Finalize Snake River Water Agreement

For release immediate release

The State of Idaho, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the U.S. Department of the Interior finalized a major water rights agreement for the Snake River today. The settlement resolves a number of water rights issues as part of the Snake River Basin Adjudication (SRBA).

Since 1998, the Nez Perce Tribe, the United States, the State of Idaho, and local communities and water users in Idaho have been working to resolve the claims of the Nez Perce Tribe in the Snake River Basin. The SRBA is the legal inventory of about 150,000 water rights in 38 of Idaho's 44 counties. The Nez Perce claims had been the largest outstanding issue in the Snake River Basin.

The parties have now finalized a settlement of the case. It defines the rights and responsibilities of the parties over a broad spectrum of terms, ranging from quantified tribal water rights to collaborative Endangered Species Act agreements. It also provides federal funding for tribal water and fisheries projects, tribal water supply systems, and mitigation funding for several counties in Idaho.

Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Carl Artman, praised the significant accomplishment "I am pleased that all of the parties have been able to come together to resolve a number of long-standing issues. This settlement will provide benefits to the Nez Perce Tribe, help rebuild salmon and steelhead runs, and provide needed certainty about water rights. It is a model for tribes, states, and the federal government working together."

Governor Butch Otter noted the significant effort that went into the Settlement. "I want to thank the Idaho Congressional Delegation, members of the Legislature, the Attorney General and his staff, the Idaho water users, and the Nez Perce Tribe for all of their dedication and hard work in finding creative solutions that will provide benefits to the people of Idaho for many years."

Rebecca Miles, the Chair of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, said "This settlement has been a difficult decision for the Tribe. For generations to come, however, we think it will provide benefits to the Tribe and help rebuild salmon and steelhead runs that are so important to our community."

Congress passed the Snake River Water Rights Act in 2004 to implement the settlement and authorize Federal funding. The Idaho Legislature and Nez Perce Tribe ratified the settlement in March 2005. The SRBA Court Consent Decree process was completed in March 2007. Today's actions certify that all preconditions for finality of the Settlement have been completed.

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