



North Ada County Foothills Association

One voice. One goal. One plan.

1.29.07

Is There Enough Groundwater To Support 100,000 Additional Residents In North Ada County In The Next 20 Years?

Several large scale developments/planned communities (Avimor (SunCor), M3, Connolly Ranch, Kastera, JMM-Dry Creek Ranch, and others) are being proposed in the Foothills northwest and northeast of Eagle. These developments when added together have the potential for an additional 100,000 water-using residents along with the associated businesses, schools, parks, fire stations and sewage treatment facilities.

An independent, reliable answer to the question of water is critical before planned communities that will change the area permanently are approved. Most other development impacts can be wholly or partially offset through modern planning processes and large financial commitments. But what amount of money would it take to mitigate the loss of value to a community AFTER thousands of new houses are built should the water supply prove to be inadequate for the increased demand?

As Mark Twain is famous for saying, "You never miss the water till the well runs dry."

As the proposals for planned communities stack up at the city and county P & Z offices, are alternative sources to local groundwater being equally offered up for consideration? Even if ground or surface water *could* be found and imported to the North Foothills from other sources to augment strained aquifers, who would bear the enormous cost? The cumulative effects of the increased demand on groundwater needs to be fully understood for the orderly development of the North Foothills--either affecting or affected by other developments.

If a water shortage should occur due to new municipal waters rights granted to these planned communities, preserving the rights of current residents and senior water users would be a long, divisive and vastly expensive scenario for all parties. In the event of such a shortage, there is simply no guarantee that all users would be able to obtain enough *affordable* water to maintain prior commercial or residential value. The recent over-allocation of water in east and south-central Idaho painfully bears this out. We need only to look at States like Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Nevada where poor prior planning and over-development has resulted in drastic impacts and high costs to communities.

...citizens helping to create a sustainable vision for the future of Ada County's Northern Foothills...

Who Is Interested In North Foothills Groundwater Information?

Idaho Department of Water Resources, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Ada County Planning & Zoning, Ada County Development Services, Ada County Commissioners, Boise City Planning & Zoning, Boise City Mayor & Council, Eagle City Planning & Zoning, Eagle City Mayor & Council, Star Mayor & City Council, thousands of current property owners in the Boise/Dry Creek/Eagle/Star Foothills, Planned Community Developers, and many wildlife and recreational enthusiasts throughout the Treasure Valley and southwest Idaho.

Planning & Information & Action.....

1. With so many motivated parties, it makes sense to form a Foothills Groundwater Task Force. This group, under the leadership of IDWR, would plan, fund and study the macro and micro issues associated with the North Foothills aquifers. The Task Force would be composed of representatives of the groups listed above.
2. Under the direction of the IDWR and based on a "best practices" methodology established by the Task Force, the group would examine multiple independent studies...some from the past, several that are underway, and possibly several newly commissioned studies...to fill in knowledge gaps and establish a reliable, comprehensive basis for final water rights allocation determinations.
3. The Task Force would establish a water budget for the North Foothills, using the findings and determinations from the water studies. In addition to being expressed in technical parlance, the water budget could also be stated in metrics that the non-hydro public and agencies could easily understand and converse in (e.g., water needed for an average household, water needed by square foot of commercial use, water needed by acre for parks, common landscape, golf courses & ball fields, etc.).
4. Funding for the Foothills Groundwater Task Force would largely come from the developers, a smaller portion from Ada County and the benefiting cities, and the remainder from IDWR.

The Practical Results of a Water Budget?

- IDWR fulfils its responsibility to the public trust and long-term management of groundwater resources.
- City and County officials and agencies considering applications for large new developments have critical, authoritative water information on which to base their decisions. Abiding by the water budget greatly improves the odds of averting over-allocation of water and the resultant harm to existing communities for which elected officials would be accountable.
- The development approval process is smoother, quicker and less contentious and expensive since the public and senior water rights holders are assured that their interests have been considered and protected.