



Op-Ed Submission
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We Must Invest in Idaho's Water Future This Session

By Lt. Governor Scott Bedke

If you turn on a faucet today, you care about water policy. It's that simple. Water is the foundation of our daily lives, our economy, and Idaho's future. It fuels our farms, powers our communities, and ensures our families have the resources they need to thrive. That's why Idaho must take decisive action to invest in long-term storage and infrastructure projects now before we find ourselves facing a crisis we could have prevented.

Over the past year, I have been directly involved in negotiations between senior surface water users and junior groundwater districts, working alongside Idaho Water Resource Board Chairman, Jeff Raybould, to reach a workable mitigation plan. These discussions were not easy, but they were necessary. I am proud of the progress we have made in securing a path forward that ensures all water users have a reliable and sustainable future.

However, one thing became abundantly clear during these negotiations: *without dedicated ongoing funding for water infrastructure projects, this plan will not work.* This was the one point that every stakeholder in the discussions agreed upon, and it reflects the reality for water users around the state.

Governor Brad Little's commitment to an ongoing investment of \$30 million annually in Idaho's water projects during his 2025 State of the State Address was a critical first step. This funding will support critical infrastructure upgrades statewide, improve water storage, and help implement the recently enacted 2024 Stipulated Mitigation plan between surface and groundwater users. It would also help recharge the ESPA, ensuring our state's primary source of irrigation, power generation, and drinking water remains viable for generations to come.

We cannot afford to ignore the realities of water scarcity. The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer has faced significant challenges, and our state's rapid growth places new strains on our limited water supply. Drought cycles are intensifying, and if we don't act now, future generations will pay the price. Investing in water supply today is an investment in Idaho's prosperity, independence, and agricultural strength.

Beyond the ESPA, we must look at additional storage solutions. Senate Joint Memorial No. 101 calls for updating studies on water storage availability and identifying new projects. This includes evaluating the feasibility of rebuilding the Teton Dam and expanding storage capacity at key locations such as Minidoka Dam, Jackson Lake Dam, and Twin Springs Dam. These projects, if pursued, will provide long-term benefits in irrigation, flood control, power generation, and recreation. But if we are going to be able to afford these projects, we need to begin budgeting a predictable and steady stream of funding.

The stakes are high. If we fail to act, water shortages will ripple through every sector of Idaho's economy. Farmers and ranchers depend on certainty in their water supply. Our power grid relies on stable hydroelectric resources. Growing communities need sustainable access to drinking water. Every aspect of Idaho's way of life hinges on responsible water management.

This is not just about budget lines items and infrastructure plans. This is about Idaho's way of life. Water policy may not always grab headlines, but its impact is felt every day by every Idahoan. Whether you're a farmer in the Magic Valley or Eastern Idaho, a business owner in the Treasure Valley, or a family in the Panhandle, you rely on the decisions we make now to ensure water security for future generations.

I applaud Senator Van Burtenshaw and the many cosponsors who introduced Senate Bill 1128 to provide the funding to implement the agreement we reached after a summer of hard work. Today is the time to invest in Idaho's water future so we don't pay the price tomorrow. Let's make the responsible choice.