The 1980 Idaho Legislature . . .

Solons oppose changes in water plan, streams

The Post-Register

The political pulse

B-8 Idaho Falls, Idaho, Thursday, Jan. 3, 1980

(Editor's note: This is the 14th in a series of 15 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session).

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

East Idaho legislators are unenthusiastic over changes in the present Water Plan and generally oppose any minimum streamflow legislation.

This appears the consensus in response to questionnaires sent them by The Post-Register.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the Senate Natural Resource and Environment Committee which would have a major voice in such legislation, however, indicates some action could be taken.

He asserts there are some water projects that could be developed and he also favors implementation to bring some statutory changes and method of funding.

"It boils down to the fact if we are to maintain minimum streamflow, we must acquire storage reservoir sites," he said. "This can save water from the spring runoffs."

He suggested the state use a revolving fund or management fund to purchase sites for reservoirs.

Likes compromise

Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, member of the Natural Resources and Conservation committee, feels "the Idaho Water Plan has worked well into a good compromise."

Regarding water quality, he commented the water quality standards below American Falls Dam "are evidence that a rigid parts per million standards may not be necessary in all cases, nor desirable. In this case, a slightly lower and still safe count would greatly benefit in a cost ratio."

Another member of the committee, Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, also dimly views changes in the water plan. He said in the matter of American Falls water quality, it "could be corrected to a satisfactory level with additional plant facilities by the power company."

He labeled arguments over water quality "overly dramatized."

Also a committee member, Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Iona, said the water plan should include a plan for water projects in Idaho.

"It does little good to propose projects without funds," he said. "If we do not develop our water, we will lose it. The federal government is not actively promoting projects. The state must pick up the initiative."

Sees no changes

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead sees little need for changes and lauded the water board when it lowered the American Falls oxygen requirements to 5 ppm. He opposes any minimum streamflow legislation.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, also turned thumb downs on minimum streamflow measures, saying the irrigators already provide this with their reservoirs.

Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, commented "water quality below the dam is a trade off for energy."

He then said "I am against minimum streamflow regulations. Even the Lord doesn't guarantee this."

Nearly all of the other East Idaho legislators opposed changes in the water plan, minimum streamflow and water quality.

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, observed "it will be interesting to see what the tests show for this past summer flow below American Falls."

Against transfer

Sen. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, said he favors passage of a bill that would limit transfer of underground water, such as in the Upper Snake River Valley for the Salmon Falls project south of Twin Falls.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, said he did not believe minimum streamflow requirements are too practical.

"On certain occasions," he said, "they could be very damaging to agriculture. We should be developing more upstream storage than minimum streamflow.

Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, said it is possible strengthening of some policies will be needed for the water plan.

Opposes minimum rules

"Minimum streamflow is out until all water rights are recorded in 1983," he said. "Then we can tell if there is any appropriated water."

Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, said "I think we need to protect our irrigators and keep enough water for electric power generation."

Rep. C. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, said he believes the oxygen content of the water below American Falls Dam should be kept at the agreed to level.

"Minimum stream flows should be established on streams that are not principally irrigating streams," he said.