

**BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
OF THE STATE OF IDAHO**

IN THE MATTER OF A DECLARATION)
OF DROUGHT EMERGENCY FOR)
THE STATE OF IDAHO)
_____)

**ORDER DECLARING
DROUGHT EMERGENCY**

WHEREAS, the peak snow water equivalent (SWE)¹ in all basins in Idaho, except for the Big Wood, Little Wood, Big Lost, and Little Lost basins, registered below the 20th percentile on SNOTEL indices—indicative of Moderate Drought conditions—with seven basins recording peak SWE below the 2nd percentile, reflecting Exceptional Drought conditions; and

WHEREAS, these abnormally low SWE levels were primarily attributable to the second warmest snow accumulation season (October through March) recorded in Idaho since 1896, as documented by the PRISM dataset², with only the winter of 1933–1934 being warmer; and

WHEREAS, elevated temperatures that set new records across Idaho basins during this period raised the base elevation of the snowpack to approximately 6,500 feet, compared to typical base elevations of approximately 4,000 feet in southern Idaho and 3,000 feet in northern Idaho; and

WHEREAS, March 2026 was the 2nd warmest March on record in Idaho dating back to 1896, according to the PRISM index, with a heat dome across the southwestern United States and southern Idaho resulting in temperatures exceeding the 98th percentile impacting basins as far north as Lemhi and Custer Counties through the headwaters of the Snake River and Bear River, and across the Snake River Plain and southern tributaries to the Owyhee Basin; and

WHEREAS, these extreme temperature conditions resulted in accelerated snowmelt beginning on March 17th, including at elevations above 10,000 feet where snow typically accumulates or persists for at least an additional month, leading to unprecedented early-season snow loss; and

WHEREAS, because of these conditions, record low snowpack levels were observed across Idaho by April 1; and

WHEREAS, the April 1 snowpack in Idaho was the lowest on record according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) SNOTEL index, with 54 snow course locations and 45 SNOTEL sites within the Snake River Basin reporting record low SWE values; and

¹ Snow Water Equivalent Indices are published by the Idaho Snow Survey, which is part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service within the United States Department of Agriculture: <https://nwcc-apps.sc.egov.usda.gov/basin-plots/?state=ID>

² PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University. *PRISM Climate Data: Daily Mean Temperature*. Accessed April 2026. <https://prism.oregonstate.edu>.

WHEREAS, ten of these snow course sites, spanning from Kilgore in the Centennial Mountains through the headwaters of the Henrys Fork and Snake River, have more than 90 years of April 1 measurements, underscoring the historical significance of these records; and

WHEREAS, all basin SNOTEL SWE indices in Idaho were classified within drought conditions as of April 1, with the sole exception of the Big Lost Basin, which was categorized as “Drier than Normal,” after declining from slightly above normal snowpack on March 17 to a snowpack that was 57 percent of normal by April 1, even though peak snowpack in that basin typically occurs around April 6th; and

WHEREAS, streamflow forecasts issued by the NRCS indicate that streamflow in three Idaho basins will be normal, two basins will be drier than normal, and the remaining 19 basins will be in some level of drought, with four of those basins forecast to be at or below the 2nd percentile, which represents exceptional drought; and

WHEREAS, the Surface Water Supply Index calculations³ performed by the NRCS indicate that under normal hydrology from April 1 to September 30 there is a 50% chance of irrigation shortages on the Boise & Snake Rivers, and that water supplies are short by 6% in the Owyhee basin, 14% in the Big Lost basin, 44% in the Oakley (Goose Creek) basin, 53% in the Big Wood basin, and 58% in the Salmon Falls Creek basin; and

WHEREAS, between March 30 and April 2, 2026, the Board of County Commissioners for Blaine, Cassia, and Fremont Counties in Idaho have requested that the Governor and the Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (“Director”) declare a drought emergency for each county to allow administrative actions to lessen severe impacts of drought conditions in each county; and the Director has been advised that additional counties are currently preparing similar requests; and

WHEREAS, Idaho Code § 42-222A, states that, upon declaration of a drought emergency for an area designated by the Director and approved by the Governor, the Director is authorized to allow temporary exchanges of water rights and temporary changes in the point of diversion, place of use, and purpose of use for valid, existing water rights when the Director determines that such changes can be accomplished in accordance with the provisions of Idaho Code § 42-222A; now,

THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that, pursuant to the authority of the Director provided in Idaho Code § 42-222A, a drought emergency for purposes of Idaho Code § 42-222A is hereby declared for all Idaho counties.

IT IS FURTHER HEREBY ORDERED that pursuant to this declared drought emergency and the provisions of Idaho Code § 42-222A, Idaho Code, the following procedures and

³ The Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI) is published by the Natural Resource Conservation Service in Idaho: <https://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftrpref/support/states/ID/>. The SWSI is composed of reservoir storage on March 31 plus the 50% exceedance forecast of runoff from April – September. A threshold of irrigation demand is set in many basins as the minimum water supply to meet irrigation demand. This index can be used to predict the likelihood and potential magnitude of water shortages.

requirements shall apply to the filing, processing, and approval of any application for a temporary change to an existing water right during the pendency of this declared drought emergency:

1. An application for a temporary change to an existing water right shall be made upon forms provided by the department and shall be accompanied by an application fee of fifty dollars (\$50.00) per application.
2. The Director is not required to publish notice of the proposed change pursuant to the provisions of Idaho Codes §§ 42-211, 42-222(1), or 42-240, and is not required to make findings as provided in said sections. A temporary change may be approved upon completion of the application form, payment of the filing fee, and the Director's determination that the proposed change can be properly administered and that there is no information indicating that the change will injure any other water right. If the right to be changed is administered by a watermaster within a water district, the Director shall obtain and consider the watermaster's recommendations before approving the temporary change application.
3. All temporary changes approved pursuant to the provisions of this order shall expire on the date shown in the approval, which shall not be later than December 31, 2026, and thereafter, the water right shall revert to the point of diversion and place of use existing prior to the temporary change. Nothing herein shall be construed as approval to authorize construction of a new well as a new point of diversion or to alter a stream channel.
4. The recipient of an approved temporary change issued pursuant to this order shall assume all risks of curtailment or mitigation, should the diversion and use of water under the temporary change cause injury to other water rights or result in an enlargement in use of the original right.
5. Temporary changes shall only be approved for the purpose of providing a replacement water supply to lands or other uses that normally have a full water supply, except for the current drought conditions. Temporary changes may not be approved to provide water for new development or to expand the use of water under existing water rights. If the right to use the water is represented by shares of stock in a corporation, or if the diversion works or delivery system for such right is owned or managed by an irrigation district, no change in point of diversion, place, or nature of use of such water shall be made or allowed without the written consent of such corporation or irrigation district.
6. Any applicant for a temporary change who is aggrieved by a denial of the Director for a temporary change pursuant to this order and the provisions of Idaho Code § 42-222A, may request a hearing pursuant to Idaho Code § 42-1701A(3), and may seek judicial review of the final order of the Director pursuant to the provisions of Idaho Codes § 42-1701A(4).

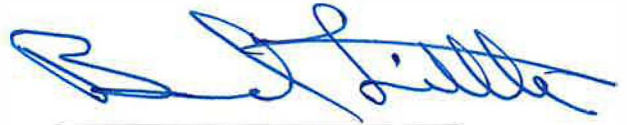
IT IS FURTHER HEREBY ORDERED that this order is effective upon approval of the Governor and expires on December 31, 2026, unless extended or terminated by order of the Director.

DATED this 13th day of April 2026.



MATHEW WEAVER
Director

APPROVED this 13th day of April 2026.



BRAD LITTLE
Governor