



News Release

IDAHO WATER USERS ASSOCIATION, INC

205 North 10th St., Suite 530, Boise ID 83702
TEL: (208) 344-6690 -- FAX: (208) 344-2744

IWUA ENDORSES WATER RIGHT ELEMENT OF OWYHEE WILDERNESS INITIATIVE

**For Immediate Use
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**For Information Contact:
Norm Semanko – (208) 344-6690 or 863-
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Idaho's largest and most powerful water user group has given its stamp of approval to water rights protection language in the Owyhee Initiative Implementation Act, officials with the Idaho Water Users Association said today.

Idaho Senator Mike Crapo introduced the Owyhee Initiative in the Senate on August 6 after five years of work on the measure. It goes before a Senate subcommittee on September 27. IWUA plans to submit a letter to the Subcommittee outlining its support of Crapo's legislation for the Subcommittee's official public hearing record. A copy of the letter will be available the day of the hearing on the IWUA web site: www.iwua.org.

"After very careful scrutiny of Senator Crapo's legislation, we are satisfied that Idaho sovereignty over its waters is fully protected. The detailed subordination language included in the agreement, and incorporated through the legislation, makes clear that water rights for the Wild and Scenic Rivers will be treated as junior in priority, not just to existing water rights, but also to future development. These provisions are consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers settlement in the SRBA which was widely supported by water user interests and the State of Idaho," said Norm Semanko, IWUA Executive Director.

The IWUA Board of Directors voted to support the water rights element of the Initiative at a meeting September 6 following a teleconference with Senator Crapo. At that time the Senator assured Board members that the legislative history of the measure would clearly document that creation of a Wilderness Area in Idaho does not create with it a federal reserved water right, a principle already recognized by the stakeholders in the Initiative.

"One of IWUA's critical goals is to assure future stability and certainty regarding our water supplies. IWUA supports the water rights provisions in the Owyhee Initiative precisely because they will provide this kind of certainty to water users in the Owyhee and Bruneau River basins," Semanko added.

The Association also gave its blessing to provisions of the Initiative that ensure that water from the Owyhee and Bruneau River basins will not be shipped out of State. IWUA officials describe those provisions as "an important safeguard for local water users."

IWUA restricted its support of the measure to an endorsement of the water right provisions in the measure. The Association took no position regarding the proposed wilderness or wild and scenic designations and other land management issues included in the Initiative and the implementing legislation. IWUA's interests lie solely in the water rights language of the bill and the agreement.

IWUA has tracked the Owyhee Initiative process with great interest since 2001. Following the Board's vote on September 6, Association leaders praised Senator Crapo's effort to bring various stakeholders together through a collaborative process to resolve the issues addressed in the Owyhee Initiative.

“This type of process was successful in the Snake River Water Right Settlement, approved by Congress in 2004 and can serve as a great example for the resolution of other complex environmental and natural resource issues,” Executive Director Semanko noted.

The Association represents more than 300 irrigation districts, canal companies, water districts, ground water districts, public water suppliers, municipalities, hydroelectric companies, aquaculture interests, agri-businesses, professional firms and individuals in Idaho.