The History of Reclamation Efforts on the Mountain Home Plateau

Submitted to: Elmore County Board of Commissioners



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List of Abbreviations

BLM BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

BOR BUREAU OF RECLAMATION (SUCCESSOR TO THE U.S. RECLAMATION SERVICE IN 1923)

CGWA CRITICAL GROUNDWATER AREA
DOI DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FERC FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION (PREDECESSOR OF THE FEDERAL POWER

COMMISSION)

FPC FEDERAL POWER COMMISSION (SUCCESSOR TO FERC IN 1977)

GWMA GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AREA

IRS INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

IDWR IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

IWRB IDAHO WATER RESOURCE BOARD

MHID MOUNTAIN HOME IRRIGATION DISTRICT

SRFA SNAKE RIVER FARMERS ASSOCIATION

USFWS U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

USGS U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

USRS U.S. RECLAMATION SERVICE (PREDECESSOR OF THE BOR)

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Introduction

The Mountain Home Plateau, a vast, rolling, upland plain in southwestern Idaho, has long been a focal point for irrigation development. Situated between the Boise and Snake Rivers, this region, part of the Western Snake Plain Aquifer, encompasses 750,000 acres of sagebrush desert running through Ada and Elmore Counties (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Mountain Home, the county seat of Elmore County, sits near the eastern edge of the plateau, midway between the South Fork of the Boise River and the Snake River.

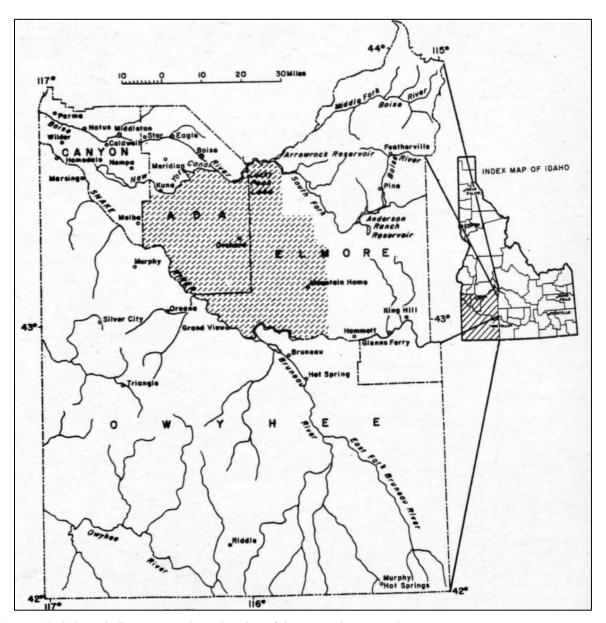


Figure 1. Shaded area indicates approximate location of the Mountain Home Plateau.

Source: H. W. Young, "Reconnaissance of Ground-Water Resources in the Mountain Home Plateau Area, Southwest Idaho," Water Resources Investigations 77-108, Open File Report (Boise: U.S. Geological Survey and Idaho Department of Water Resources, December 1977), 4.



Figure 2. A view of the Mountain Home Plateau.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Snake River Project, Idaho–Oregon, Composed of Mountain Home Division and Garden Valley Division: Report Summary, Mountain Home Division Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, May 1965), Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

The Mountain Home area has long been inhabited by Shoshone peoples who found sustenance in the rivers, on the plateaus, and in the forested mountains. In the 1860s, the discovery of gold in the mountains north of Mountain Home brought an influx of immigrants to the region—some seeking gold, and others seeking to supply the miners with manufactured goods or food. Raising food on the arid plateau required the development of irrigation works. Since the late nineteenth century, residents, supported by the Elmore County commissioners, have tirelessly pursued reclamation projects to bring water to the plateau, driven by a vision of economic prosperity and agricultural growth. Early homesteaders, struggling to make a living on the plateau's dry lands, witnessed the transformation of the neighboring Boise River Valley through federal reclamation efforts. Inspired by this success, community members advocated for similar federal irrigation projects on the Mountain Home Plateau while private companies established the foundational reservoir and canal system upon which subsequent reclamation proposals would rely.

Irrigation proposals for Mountain Home often involved diverting water from nearby rivers, such as the Snake or Boise Rivers, and constructing canals or tunnels to transport the water to the plateau. Throughout the twentieth century, the federal government investigated multiple Mountain Home reclamation proposals, which were inspired by plans originally designed by community members. However, a chronic lack of funding coupled with national and global events such as

World War II, the Vietnam War, and various economic downturns prevented the federal government from turning plans into reality.

When the federal government moved away from funding largescale reclamation projects in the West, the State of Idaho stepped in. In collaboration with the Idaho Power Company, the State spent ten years formulating a plan to develop hydropower and use power sale revenue to fund irrigation development on the Mountain Home Plateau. Despite this diligent effort, environmental concerns led to the demise of the State project in the last third of the twentieth century. Additional reclamation possibilities have emerged sporadically in the early twenty-first century but have not developed into full-fledged proposals.

While the implementation of a Mountain Home reclamation project has been elusive thus far, the possibility of implementing the goal long sought by federal, state, and local officials, remains. Groundwater currently supplies the primary water source for domestic and irrigation use in the Mountain Home area. Rapidly declining aquifer levels prompted the Elmore County commissioners to pursue recharge projects. They have also worked with the State to obtain funding for studies and water permits to pump storage water from Anderson Ranch Dam, a federal reservoir partially located in Elmore County but historically serving Ada and Canyon Counties. The commissioners are actively seeking to participate in conversations involving water resource development in southwestern Idaho, continuing a 150-year legacy of advancing Mountain Home's reclamation.

Method

Dylan Lawrence of Varin Thomas, LLC, and the Elmore County commissioners hired Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), in January 2023 to investigate the history of proposals for water deliveries to the Mountain Home Plateau. HRA's investigation into past efforts to bring water to the plateau involved research in several repositories in Idaho, the Denver branch of the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA-Denver), and various online databases. The first phase of research, undertaken in early 2023, sought to clarify how the U.S. Reclamation Service (USRS), and its successor, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), approached irrigation on the Mountain Home Plateau, beginning with the inception of the Boise Project in 1902. We collected historical newspaper articles, accessed through Chronicling America and Newspapers.com, to create a timeline of events related to federal reclamation and early advocacy efforts in Mountain Home. We reviewed local publications such as the *Mountain Home Maverick*, *Mountain Home Republican*, and *Elmore County Republican*; Boise-based newspapers such as the *Idaho Statesman* and *Evening Capitol News*; and other regional publications such as the *Twin Falls News* and *Burley Herald*. These articles offered a window into the discussions and concerns surrounding early twentieth-century irrigation in southwestern Idaho.

To learn more about the state and federal government's perspective on reclamation, we reviewed digitized government documents available through HathiTrust Digital Library. These included the Idaho Department of Reclamation Biennial Reports; USRS Annual Reports; articles published in the USRS's monthly magazine, the *Reclamation Record*; BOR project reports and publications; and irrigation-focused periodicals. Published secondary sources obtained from the BOR's website, such as project histories, complemented this research by providing established narratives and interpretations of past events, helping us situate our findings within a broader historical context.

HRA initiated a second phase of research with a visit to NARA-Denver in April 2023. Here, we meticulously combed through 120 boxes of BOR records, encompassing proposals, reports of investigations, and correspondence related to various water delivery plans for Mountain Home from the 1910s to the 1960s. These documents shed light on the BOR's long-term plans for bringing irrigation to the region and local interest in the BOR undertaking reclamation of the Mountain Home area. In June 2023, HRA conducted research in the Albertsons Library Special Collections at Boise State University. We accessed records of former Idaho senators and governors to learn more about non-federal Mountain Home reclamation projects.

Concurrent to the archival research effort, we reviewed digitized copies of the Elmore County commissioner minutes spanning 1889 to 1992. These records revealed a persistent local interest in water development for Mountain Home. Starting from the late 1800s to the 1920s, residents actively participated in regional irrigation conferences, raised funds for initial surveys, and collaborated with neighboring counties to investigate the irrigation potential of the Mountain Home Plateau.

We also submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the BOR to uncover information beyond the circa 1960s cutoff of NARA-Denver material. The goal of the FOIA request was to provide a deeper understanding of the BOR's post-1960s involvement in Mountain Home reclamation efforts. While the FOIA-delivered documents overlapped with the NARA-Denver material, they provided valuable confirmation of previously gathered information.

The third and fourth phases of research, undertaken in January and April 2024, focused on extending Mountain Home's water story beyond the 1960s. HRA conducted targeted newspaper research in the *Idaho Statesman* to identify any BOR involvement after this period. The findings of this research led us to conduct on-site research at the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) and the Idaho State Archives. Additionally, we explored IDWR's online database, which contained important digitized documents. We reviewed published plans and IDWR meeting minutes, which documented Mountain Home reclamation efforts through the early 2000s.

Finally, between January and February 2025, we conducted newspaper research and archival research at the Mountain Home Irrigation District (MHID) on the history of the formation of the MHID. MHID's irrigation system was established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It comprises three reservoirs, miles of canals, and several tunnels. This infrastructure was a crucial component in the reclamation proposals explored throughout this report.

This multifaceted approach, incorporating a diverse range of historical sources, allowed us to construct a detailed and comprehensive account of the long-standing pursuit of water delivery to the Mountain Home Plateau.

Community Water Development Advocacy and Proposals, 1870s to 1920s

Mountain Home residents have long shown interest in irrigation development and have had the county's support in their endeavors. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) records reveal that early homesteaders struggled to make a living on the plateau's arid lands. Many canceled their land applications before receiving patents, highlighting the critical role of water resource development for the area's future prosperity.¹

Early Mountain Home Irrigation Proposals and Advocacy, 1870s-1910s

Irrigation on the Mountain Home Plateau was limited in the late nineteenth century, with small-scale efforts relying on diversions from Canyon Creek and its tributaries. Commodore Jackson, an employee of the Overland Stage Line, secured an early water right to Canyon Creek, a tributary of the Snake River, in 1877, intending to irrigate land near the future town of Mountain Home (Figure 3).² Jackson's improvements to the land attracted the attention of others interested in developing irrigation in the area.

Jackson sold the land during the 1880s, and with the arrival of the Oregon Short Line Railroad through southern Idaho, Mountain Home's location shifted seven miles southwest, down Rattlesnake Creek, to its present location. As the population of the area increased, the residents succeeded in getting the Idaho State Legislature to designate Elmore County in 1889. In 1891, Mountain Home became the Elmore County seat, replacing Rocky Bar.³

¹ U.S. General Land Office [GLO], "Historical Index, Township 3 South, Range 6 East of the Boise Meridian Idaho," n.d., The Official Federal Land Records Website, accessed May 30, 2023, https://www.glorecords.blm.gov. (AEC218)

² Jackson was an employee of Ben Holladay's Overland Stage Company. Holladay opened a stage station on Rattlesnake Creek named Rattlesnake Station in 1864. Rattlesnake Station, located at the junction of Rocky Bar Road and the Oregon Trail, was a vital stop on the route to the Rocky Bar gold mines. After Jackson purchased the property from Holladay in 1872, he ran the station for three years. Jackson also operated a ranch on the land and served as the station's first postmaster. Rattlesnake Station was renamed Mountain Home in 1878. Sources: General Land Office, "Homestead Patent No. 131, Commodore Jackson," November 10, 1877, Record Group 49: Records of the Bureau of Land Management & General Land Office, U.S. National Archives, Washington, DC.; Idaho State Historical Society, "Rattle Snake Station, Number 187," 1, Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series, 1984, https://history.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/0187.pdf; Dorine Goertzen, "Paragraphs of Idaho: Elmore County," *Kellogg Evening News*, March 14, 1963, 2; "Mountain Home Postmaster was Odd Character," *Times-News*, September 4, 1963, 22;; [O. E. Cannon], Untitled Memorandum, ca. 1916, Folder #52 History, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the Mountain Home Irrigation District [MHID], Mountain Home, Idaho; Henry T. Williams, *The Pacific Tourist: Williams' Illustrated Trans-Continental Guide of Travel, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean* (New York: Henry T. Williams, 1878), 171; W. C. Howie, "Short History of Mountain Home," *Mountain Home Maverick*, December 23, 1909, 21; "History of the System that Supplies Mountain Home Water for Irrigation," *Mountain Home Maverick*, December 23, 1909, 10. (AEC491, AEC488, AEC479, AEC478, AEC465, AEC490, AEC440)

³ "From Stagecoach Stop to 10,000 People," Times-News, May 5, 1997, 1. (AEC477)

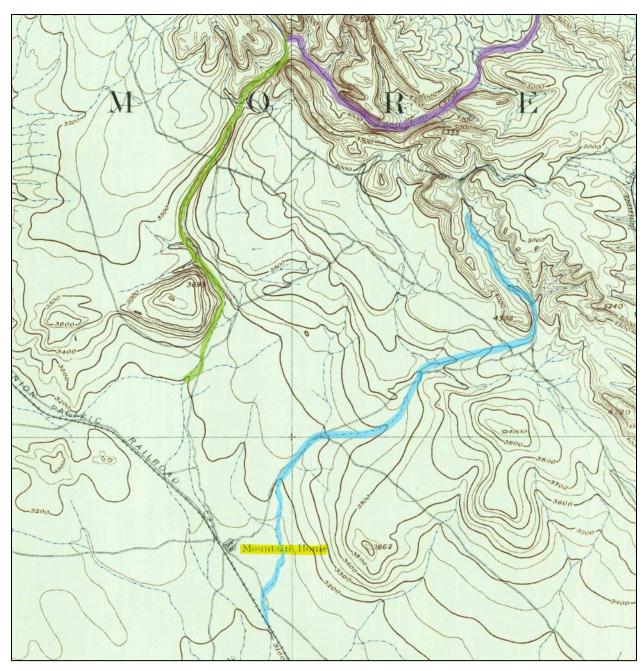


Figure 3. Portion of an 1893 U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] map showing the location of Long Tom (highlighted in purple), Canyon (highlighted in green), and Rattlesnake (highlighted in blue) Creeks and Mountain Home (highlighted in yellow) within Elmore County. Canyon and Rattlesnake Creeks are shown as intermittent creeks.

Source: USGS, *Idaho, Mountain Home Sheet*, December 1893, (Denver: USGS, December 1948), USGS Historical Topographic Map Collection.

Just three years after the county's founding, Elmore County commissioners began to research ways of bringing irrigation to the Mountain Home Plateau. Beginning in 1892 and continuing for at least the next two decades, the commissioners funded residents to attend the National Irrigation Congress. There, they learned about irrigation developments in the western United States and

advocated for irrigation on the Mountain Home Plateau.⁴ Once the federal government became involved in reclamation in the early 1900s, these conference delegates pushed the USRS to conduct feasibility studies of proposed reclamation plans for the broad swath of land surrounding Mountain Home.

Between the late 1800s and 1910s, local citizens and companies proposed several water development plans. Their proposals provided the foundation for later studies.⁵ Civil engineer Arthur D. Foote presented one of the earliest known largescale reclamation plans in 1888, suggesting diverting water from the Snake River to the Mountain Home Plateau via a long canal. However, the logistical challenges of constructing a canal from the proposed diversion locations of the present-day site of Minidoka Dam or Thousand Springs to Mountain Home made this plan impractical.⁶

Civil engineer William Kimmel offered another option in 1905, when he advised that the plateau could be irrigated by diverting the waters of the South Fork Boise River through a tunnel. While historical research did not confirm whether Kimmel's proposal led to an investigation, South Fork Boise River diversion remained a prominent component of future plans. In 1906, as USRS work began on the Boise Project nearby, rancher and entrepreneur Ira Burton Perrine began developing his own plan to irrigate the Mountain Home Plateau. Inspired by his successful irrigation project near Twin Falls, Perrine grew increasingly convinced that a large area around Mountain Home could be irrigated. Following a visit to the Stanley Basin in the Sawtooth Mountains, Perrine proposed building a tunnel at Alturas Lake to divert its waters to the South Fork Boise River and then to Mountain Home. He self-financed studies of Alturas and Redfish Lakes to assess their potential as reservoirs for Mountain Home-area reclamation.

Perrine also collaborated with the Kuhn brothers of the Kuhn Irrigation and Cattle Company on another irrigation plan. In 1908, the Kuhns conducted a preliminary survey for a canal running from the Milner Dam on the Snake River to the Mountain Home Plateau. In 1909, they expanded the plan to include diverting South Fork Boise River water through a tunnel to supplement the Snake River water supply. Perrine kept working on details of the plan, using the Kuhns' research and his own, for the next decade, as discussed in a subsequent section titled, "Elmore County Development League Advocacy and Snake River Plan, 1913–1920."

⁴ "[October 14, 1891, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 1, n.d., 246; "[January 15, 1892, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 1, n.d., 277; "[September 14, 1903, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 3, n.d., 242; "[April 11, 1907, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 3, n.d., 485. (AEC212)

⁵ S. H. Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home" (Boise: n.p., 1921), 1, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, Record Group 115: Records of the Bureau of Reclamation (hereafter RG 115), U.S. National Archives, Denver (hereafter NARA-Denver), Broomfield, CO. (AEC159)

⁶ Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 1. (AEC159)

⁷ Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 1. (AEC159)

⁸ Hugh T. Lovin, "Dreamers, Schemers, and Doers of Idaho Irrigation," *Agricultural History* 76, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 239.

⁹ Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 2. (AEC159)

¹⁰ Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 1. (AEC159)

Yet another proposal emerged during this period. In 1910, a group of Mountain Home residents who had organized into the Mountain Home Commercial Club suggested collaborating with the Boise Commercial Club to bring Boise Project water to the Mountain Home Plateau. The plan involved utilizing "the surplus water that the government has available" to irrigate 700,000 acres between Kuna and Mountain Home. When presented with the proposal, the Boise club responded positively, expressing their intention to send a representative and engineers to Mountain Home to "thoroughly investigate the conditions." However, this investigation did not take place until 1920. 12

Throughout this early period of community development, Mountain Home residents demonstrated determination in their pursuit of expanding irrigation on the plateau. The efforts of individuals like Ira Burton Perrine, the support from county officials, and the collaboration with neighboring communities showcased a collective commitment to realizing the dream of growing the Mountain Home area through enhanced water development. While the aim of most Mountain Home irrigation advocacy was to obtain federal support for a largescale irrigation project on the plateau, private companies were simultaneously developing a local network of reservoirs and canals.

Formation of the Mountain Home Irrigation District, 1880s-1925

Starting in the late 1880s, local citizens and private companies laid the foundation for an irrigation district that would provide water to landowners in Mountain Home. However, their path to success was not a smooth one. The high elevation of the area, the arid climate, and the scarcity of perennial streams crossing the plateau combined to make irrigation development costly and challenging for individuals and small-scale operations. Miner Kemp Van Ee, for instance, organized a local irrigation company in the 1880s, but "[l]ocal difficulties" quickly ended the venture. Despite the failed attempt, others remained determined to irrigate Mountain Home and several failed starts eventually led to irrigation infrastructure and an irrigation district to manage it.

Local Irrigation Infrastructure

Over the course of approximately thirty years, a series of irrigation companies gradually developed a network of irrigation structures that came to serve approximately 7,000 acres. The Mountain Home and South Boise Canal Company made a concerted effort at enhancing irrigation on the plateau in the late 1880s. In 1887, the company obtained water rights to Canyon and Rattlesnake Creeks and developed plans to connect the two through a 12-foot-wide, four-foot-deep ditch. The ditch would run "from the mouth of Canyon creek to Rattlesnake," where the company

¹¹ "To Co-Operate in Great Project," *Idaho Statesman*, August 8, 1910. (AEC212)

¹² Ernest G. Eagleson, Mayor, to Franklin K. Lane, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, January 31, 1920, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC160)

¹³ "Survey Contract Signed by Official of Government," *Mountain Home Republican*, June 25, 1921, 1, 4. (AEC481)

planned to install a dam and irrigation system.¹⁴ Although this plan never materialized and the company forfeited its water rights and presumably dissolved, the company's efforts demonstrated that the use of streams alone would not be sufficient to provide steady irrigation on the arid plateau.¹⁵ Water storage was clearly crucial for successful reclamation at Mountain Home.

The necessity of storage reservoirs to capture the abundant spring runoff from the surrounding hills and mountains and hold it until it was needed during the irrigation season led to new initiatives on the Mountain Home Plateau. In 1891, Chicago entrepreneurs A. W. Hager, John E. Harper, Richard Tuthill, and Samuel Doll formed the Elmore County Irrigation Company to build reservoirs on Rattlesnake Creek, a tributary of the Snake River, and Long Tom Creek, a tributary of Canyon Creek. By 1892, they had completed Rattlesnake Creek Reservoir (also known as Mountain Home Reservoir) and a six-mile-long canal from Canyon Creek to the new reservoir. Water first reached Mountain Home through this canal in early spring 1892. The company had plans to develop this system further by building a reservoir at Long Tom Creek, followed by three additional dams in the area. However, the Elmore County Irrigation Company faced internal conflicts and dissolved in 1893.

Some of the members of the defunct Elmore County Irrigation Company determined to carry out the plans of the dissolved company under a new operation, the Mountain Home Canal and Land Company. The Mountain Home Canal and Land Company began construction on Long Tom Reservoir in June 1893, hoping to complete the work by the end of the year.²² However, like its predecessor, the company was short-lived. Its assets fell into the hands of creditors before it could complete the dam at Long Tom.²³

The unrealized potential of Mountain Home again proved to be a draw for outside interests when, in 1899, eastern entrepreneurs D. B. Horton, John H. Garrett, and S. G. Rhoades formed the

¹⁴ Although the quoted source indicates a ditch running from the mouth of Canyon Creek, we believe this to be the mouth of the Canyon Creek canyon, since the mouth of Canyon Creek is at the Snake River. Running a ditch from the mouth of the Canyon Creek canyon would allow easy access to Rattlesnake Creek. "Pacific Coast: Idaho," *Idaho Statesman*, October 25, 1887. (AEC441)

^{15 &}quot;Pacific Coast: Idaho." (AEC441)

¹⁶ "At Mountain Home," *Idaho Statesman*, June 18, 1892; "General Report on the Elmore Irrigation Company's Project," March 1, 1911, 4, Folder #60 Reports on Water Possibilities, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC436, AEC470)

¹⁷ "Mountain Home News," Ketchum Keystone, September 18, 1866, 3. (AEC492)

¹⁸ "History of the System that Supplies Mountain Home Water for Irrigation," *Mountain Home Maverick*, December 23, 1909; *Third Biennial Report of the State Engineer to the Governor of Idaho for the Years 1899–1900* (Boise: Capital Printing Office, 1900), 32. (AEC11, AEC485)

¹⁹ Howie, "Short History of Mountain Home," 21; "The Mountain Home Reservoir," *Caldwell Tribune*, April 2, 1892; "[W. C. Howie]," *Delamar Nugget*, July 16, 1892. (AEC440, AEC442, AEC444)

²⁰ "At Mountain Home." (AEC436)

²¹ Howie, "Short History of Mountain Home," 21. (AEC440)

²² Although the preferred option for increasing the irrigable acreage in the Mountain Home area during this time was to divert water from the Snake River, this option was impractical due to limitations posed by topography. Sites nearer to the Mountain Home area, such as Long Tom, surfaced as viable alternatives. *Third Biennial Report*, 33; "Mountain Home News," *Idaho Statesman*, June 16, 1893. (AEC485, AEC435)

²³ Howie, "Short History of Mountain Home," 21; "Important Transfer," *Mountain Home Maverick*, February 25, 1893. (AEC440, AEC439)

Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association. The Association's founders took a two-pronged approach to development at Mountain Home. First, they purchased the Mountain Home Canal and Land Company's irrigation system and made plans for enhancing its infrastructure. ²⁴ Second, they organized the Idaho Beet Sugar Company to acquire the Mountain Home townsite, aiming to maximize its potential and attract sugar beet farmers. ²⁵ As part of its vision to expand development around Mountain Home, in spring 1902, the Association also explored methods of harnessing the waters of Lime, Cat, Wood, and Little Camas Creeks by building additional reservoirs. ²⁶

The Association's ownership of Mountain Home's irrigation system shifted in 1902 when the Great Western Beet Sugar Company absorbed the Idaho Beet Sugar Company. Through this transaction, Great Western assumed ownership of all of Mountain Home's irrigation system except the Mountain Home Reservoir, which remained in the Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association's ownership. For the next few years, Great Western enhanced the irrigation network at Mountain Home. In 1904, Great Western constructed a reservoir on Long Tom Creek and began planning a significantly larger reservoir on Little Camas Creek, a tributary of the South Fork Boise River (Figure 4). In spring 1907, the company finished the Little Camas Reservoir and a connecting tunnel to Long Tom Reservoir. With this, Mountain Home's major irrigation infrastructure was complete, though Great Western planned to continue building reservoirs outside of Mountain Home. Although reported storage capacities of each of the reservoirs varied throughout the historic period, the Snake River Basin Adjudication decreed a combined storage capacity for the three reservoirs of 31,494 acre-feet. The decreed Mountain Home Reservoir's storage capacity is 4,244 acre-feet, while Long Tom's is 4,320 and Little Camas's is 22,910 acre-feet.

²⁴ "Now Mt'n Home Should Grow," *Mountain Home Maverick*, April 4, 1901. (AEC425)

²⁵ "Now Mt'n Home Should Grow"; "The Dream Years Finally Realized," *Mountain Home Maverick*, July 2, 1908. (AEC425, AEC428)

²⁶ Fourth Biennial Report of the State Engineer to the Governor of Idaho for the Years 1901–1902 (Boise: Capital Printing Office, 1902), 10. (AEC486)

²⁷ "Certificate of Incorporation of Great Western Beet Sugar Company," July 5, 1902, Folder #243 Great Western Beet Sugar Company, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC464)

²⁸ "[The Last Payment]," Mountain Home Maverick, August 29, 1901. (AEC446)

²⁹ "Water in Elmore," Parma Herald, May 27, 1905; "[The Last Payment]." (AEC447, AEC446)

³⁰ "North Dakota Visitor Tells of Mountain Home," Mountain Home Maverick, November 15, 1906. (AEC448)

³¹ Idaho Department of Water Resource, "Water Right Report: 61-263 (Decreed/Active), last accessed April 1, 2025,

https://research.idwr.idaho.gov/apps/shared/WrExtSearch/Reports/WaterRightReport?basin=61&seq=263&suffix=.

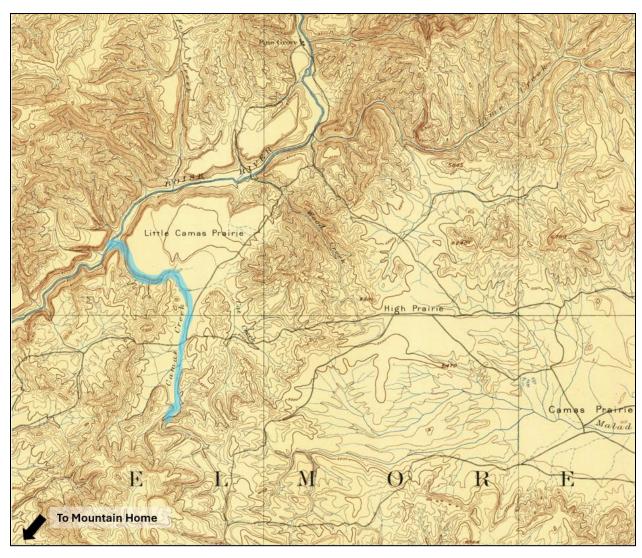


Figure 4. Portion of an 1892 USGS map showing the location of Little Camas Creek (highlighted in blue) within Elmore County.

Source: USGS, *Idaho, Camas Prairie Sheet*, January 1892, (n.p.: USGS, 1892), USGS Historical Topographic Map Collection.

Like its predecessors on the plateau, however, Great Western found it challenging to finance its grand irrigation and land development schemes. In seeking to avoid financial ruin, the company possibly undertook water rights sales that undermined the system. After a year of financial struggles, Great Western collapsed in October 1909.³² In 1911, over 100 Mountain Home water users sued Great Western, alleging that its owner, John H. Garrett, had sold water rights on mortgaged land at drastically reduced prices due "to the gravity of the extremities in which he found himself at the time when his plans were going to pieces." Garrett had "sold out the capacity of the system," resulting in insufficient water to supply even a fraction of the rights he had sold. Great Western had defaulted on its debts and was "wholly insolvent and without means or money with which to pay its

³² "A United Community," *Mountain Home Maverick*, December 24, 1908; "History of the System that Supplies Mountain Home Water for Irrigation." (AEC9, AEC11)

obligations." The plaintiffs argued that Great Western had managed the system "carelessly and improvidently," demanding that the court prevent the company from selling more water rights and appoint a receiver.³³

The company's financial ruin, along with its involvement in the over-obligation of water delivery, cast a shadow over the future of irrigation on the Mountain Home Plateau. In January 1912, Great Western's receiver, O. E. Cannon, sold Great Western's irrigation system to former Idaho governor James H. Brady.³⁴ This system, capable of irrigating between 1,500 to 2,000 acres, comprised the Little Camas and Long Tom Reservoirs, the canal connecting the two structures, and a distribution network of laterals and ditches.³⁵ Brady subsequently established the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company to operate and manage the system. ³⁶ Meanwhile, the Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association continued to operate the Mountain Home Reservoir, supplying water to the systems branching off of Canyon and Rattlesnake Creeks. The Co-Op's system came to be referred to as the "upper works" while the Association's became the "lower works." The land irrigated by the infrastructure was entirely within four townships surrounding the town of Mountain Home (Figure 5 through Figure 8).

During the summer of 1912, the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company began a push to "materially enlarge" its irrigation system. 38 Between winter 1912 and January 1913, the company raised Little Camas and Long Tom Dams and cleaned and upgraded the canals and flumes.³⁹ From 1914 to 1915, the Co-Op rebuilt its canal system, which included replacing the wooden flumes with steel and lining the tunnels with cement. 40 In 1916, the Co-Op added eight

^{33 &}quot;Mountain Home Case is Up," Mountain Home Maverick, June 29, 1911, 1. (AEC482)

³⁴ Commissioner of the GLO, "Action on Mountain Home Cooperative Irrigation Company," 1915, Folder #69 Correspondence with Federal Officials, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC472)

³⁵ Madeline F. Witter, Plaintiff, vs. The Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company, a corporation, and James H. Brady, Defendants, Complaint, 1914, Folder #89 1918 Dept. of Interior/Witter, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Report is Filed by Engineer on Water Supply," Evening Capitol News, December 1, 1912. (AEC474, AEC414)

³⁶ Witter vs. The Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company; "Articles of Incorporation of Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company," February 20, 1912, Folder #67 Statements Concerning Contracts of M.N. Co-Op Irrig Co., File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; State of Idaho, "Mountain Home Cooperative Irrigation Company Certificate of Incorporation," Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Co. Vault, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; GLO "Action on Mountain Home Cooperative Irrigation Company"; "Certificate to Sell Water Rights, Mountain Home Cooperative Irrigation Company," June 10, 1912, Folder #18 1912–1920 State Board of Land Commissions, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC474, AEC471, AEC469, AEC472, AEC460)

³⁷ MHID, "Minutes of Mountain Home Irrigation District, Special Meeting, July 24th, 1925," Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Memorandum," n.d. [ca. 1917], Folder #2 History of Mtn. Home Irrigation & List of Water Users, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC467, AEC458)

³⁸ "[The Water Contracts]," Elmore County Republican, July 6, 1912; "Report is Filed by Engineer on Water Supply." (AEC412, AEC414)

³⁹ "Report is Filed by Engineer on Water Supply"; "Contract Let for Completion of System," Elmore County Republican, September 7, 1912; "The Irrigation Co.," Elmore County Republican, January 10, 1914. (AEC414, AEC413, AEC421)

⁴⁰ "Big Contract Let," Elmore County Republican, August 7, 1915. (AEC422)

tunnels to the system and by 1919 had over 5,000 acres under irrigation.⁴¹ In summary, by the mid-1910s, all signs pointed to continued irrigation development.

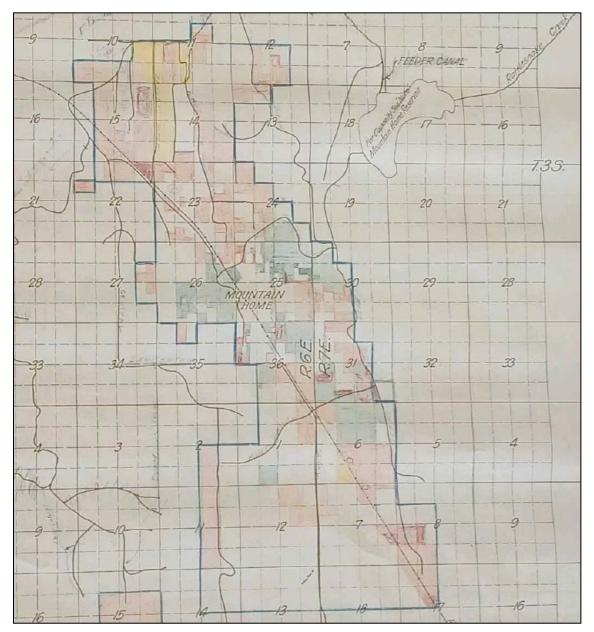


Figure 5. Map showing land irrigated by the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company (*red*) and the Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association (*green*), ca. 1917. A few outlying parcels are not shown.

Source: W. G. Sloan, "Mountain Home Cooperative Irrigation Company and Elmore County Irrigated Farms

Association Service Areas," n.d., MHID Map Collection, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho.

⁴¹ "Coming Into Its Own," *Mountain Home Republican*, March 4, 1916; "Rout Land Board from Hearing at Water Conclave," *Idaho Statesman*, September 19, 1919. (AEC423, AEC424)

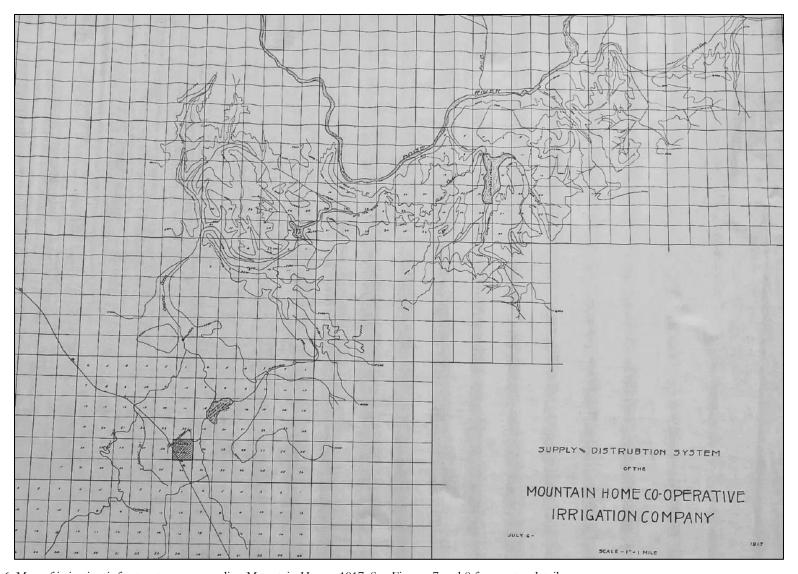


Figure 6. Map of irrigation infrastructure surrounding Mountain Home, 1917. See Figures 7 and 8 for greater detail.

Source: Inter-Mountain Map Co., "Supply and Distribution System of the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company," July 6, 1917, Canister: Reservoirs & Canels [sii], Distribution System, MHID Map Collection, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho.

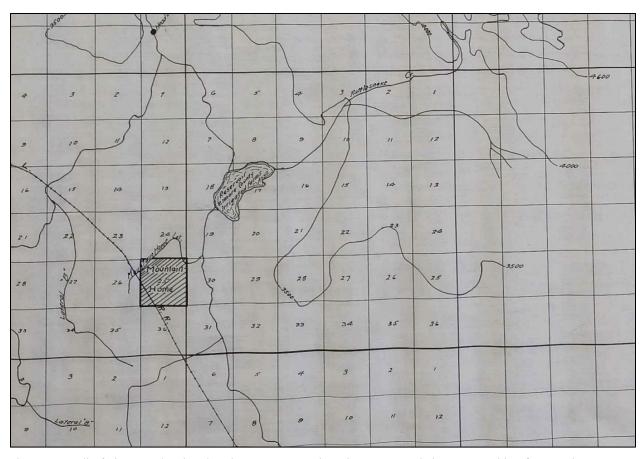


Figure 7. Detail of Figure 6, showing the Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association's ownership of Mountain Home Reservoir and the feeder canal (the lower works), 1917.

Source: Inter-Mountain Map Co., "Supply and Distribution System of the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company," July 6, 1917, Canister: Reservoirs & Canels [sii], Distribution System, MHID Map Collection, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho.

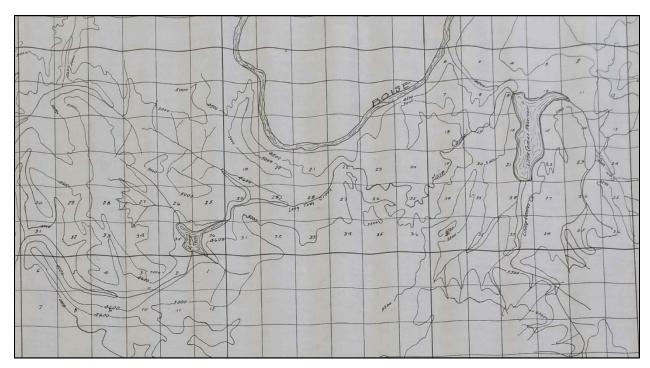


Figure 8. Detail of Figure 6, showing Mountain Home Co-Operative's irrigation system, including the Long Tom and Little Camas Reservoirs, along with connecting canals (the upper works).

Source: Inter-Mountain Map Co., "Supply and Distribution System of the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company," July 6, 1917, Canister: Reservoirs & Canels [sii], Distribution System, MHID Map Collection, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho.

Formation of an Irrigation District

Despite the expansion of the upper works under the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company's ownership, and the delivery of water through the upper and lower works by the two ownership companies, by the mid-1910s company owners and Mountain Home residents alike were dissatisfied with irrigation operations in the area. Local water users were expressing interest in forming an irrigation district and James Brady, who by then had an ownership stake in both Mountain Home irrigation companies, encouraged their interest.⁴² Like other operators before him, Brady had found that "[t]his investment at Mountain Home has been a very unfortunate one indeed," requiring frequent repairs and involving numerous water rights disagreements.⁴³ Consequently, he planned to cooperate with water users "in order to enable them to properly organize their district." However, nearly a decade passed before the irrigation district came to fruition.

⁴² "Mountain Home Water Application is Argued," *Idaho Statesman*, June 3, 1917; W. G. Sloan to Reclamation District Bond Commission, May 4, 1926, 1; "Mountain Home Irrigation District," October 4, 1926, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC437, AEC468).

⁴³ [James Brady] to E. M. Wolfe, August 14, 1914; James Brady to Carter Tobey, August 14, 1914, Folder #5 1914 Letter Between Will Gibson and Sen. Brady, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC459)

^{44 [}James Brady] to E. M. Wolfe, August 14, 1914. (AEC459)

Between 1914 and 1923, the Co-Op continued to own and operate the upper works system, but farmer dissatisfaction was rising. In September 1919, the Co-Op applied to the State of Idaho for a permit to irrigate 1,200 additional acres of land north and west of Mountain Home. Forty farmers receiving water from the Co-Op opposed this application, arguing that the company consistently failed to provide sufficient water to its existing lands.⁴⁵ In 1920, the State of Idaho approved only 640 of the requested acres, a mere half.⁴⁶

The push to establish an irrigation district intensified in the early 1920s, driven by persistent system deficiencies. In 1923, Mountain Home water users formed a committee to explore purchasing the irrigation system.⁴⁷ In October 1924, they petitioned the Elmore County commissioners to organize the MHID.⁴⁸ The petitioners argued that allowing the farmers, rather than a private company, to run the system would keep irrigation more tethered to the realities of water supply. The petitioners proposed reducing the irrigated land to approximately 5,000 acres, an area manageable under the existing water supply, rather than the current network covering 7,000 acres.⁴⁹

The formation of an irrigation district required merging the two existing irrigation companies, collectively owned by the Brady family, followed by a vote of the district's water users to determine whether they wanted to purchase the irrigation system.⁵⁰ The consolidation took place in September 1924, allowing landowners of the proposed district to forge ahead with their vote.⁵¹ After nearly a year of delays, the commissioners finally scheduled an election on the formation of the irrigation district in the summer of 1925.⁵² On June 15, landowners within the district voted 120 to 12 in favor

⁴⁵ "Rout Land Board from Hearing at Water Conclave," *Idaho Statesman*, September 19, 1919; "Mountain Home Water Application is Argued," *Idaho Statesman*, June 3, 1917. (AEC424, AEC437)

⁴⁶ State of Idaho, Department of Reclamation, "In Re Application of the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company for Certificate of Authority to Sell Additional Water Rights," February 10, 1920, Folder #18 1919–1920 State Board of Land Commissions, File Cabinet Upright List, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC460)

⁴⁷ "Irrigation District is Talked Over," Mountain Home Republican, April 28, 1923, 1. (AEC343)

⁴⁸ "Mountain Home Irrigation District: Notice of Filing Petition for Organization," *Mountain Home Republican*, October 24, 1924, 6; Oppenheim & Lampert, *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho Confirmation Proceedings*, "Petition: In the Matter of the Organization of the Mountain Home Irrigation District and its First Bond Authorization," 1925, 1–2, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC346, AEC466)

⁴⁹ This reduction primarily affected the Brady family's land, not that of local water users. W. G. Sloan to MHID Board of Directors, July 7, 1925, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Consolidation of Two Irrigation Districts Assured," *Mountain Home Republican*, September 26, 1924, 1, 6; "Mountain Home Irrigationists Elect Officers," *Idaho Statesman*, June 24, 1925, 1. (AEC467, AEC483, AEC358)

⁵⁰ "Mountain Home Irrigationists Elect Officers"; Sloan to Reclamation District Bond Commission, May 4, 1926; "Mountain Home Irrigation District," October 4, 1926. (AEC358, AEC468)

⁵¹ "Consolidation of Two Irrigation Districts Assured," 1, 6; "Notice of Election to Create Mountain Home Irrigation District," *Mountain Home Republican*, May 15, 1925, 10. (AEC483, AEC498)

⁵² "Notice of Hearing of Petition for Formation of Mountain Home Irrigation District," *Mountain Home Republican*, November 21, 1924, 5; "Irrigation Matter is Postponed," *Mountain Home Republican*, December 12, 1924, 1; "Commissioners Proceedings," *Mountain Home Republican*, January 16, 1925, 2; "Commissioners Proceedings," *Mountain Home Republican*, March 13, 1925, 5; "Notice of Hearing of Petition for Formation of Mountain Home Irrigation District," *Mountain Home Republican*, April 17, 1925, 5; "Commissioners Proceedings," *Mountain Home Republican*, April 24, 1925, 5; "Notice of Hearing of Petition for Formation of Mountain Home Irrigation District," *Mountain Home Republican*, May 1, 1925, 5. (AEC347, AEC348, ACE349, AEC350, AEC352, AEC353, AEC354)

of establishing the MHID.⁵³ Clay Groefsema was elected chairman, with O. E. Norrell as secretary and O. E. Cannon as treasurer. Groefsema, H. J. Kniefel, and Carl Johnson were elected directors of the three divisions comprising the new irrigation district.⁵⁴

At their first meeting, the board of directors proposed issuing \$250,000 in bonds to purchase the irrigation system.⁵⁵ The directors hired engineer James Spofford to survey the existing system and assess the necessary repairs.⁵⁶ Spofford's August 1925 report revealed that \$43,000 was required to restore the system, which had deteriorated under the Brady family's management.⁵⁷ Following the report, in October 1925, the MHID directors negotiated a \$187,500 purchase agreement with the Bradys.⁵⁸

The *Mountain Home* Republican lauded the agreement, celebrating the prospect of transitioning the irrigation system from private hands to the farmers themselves. The paper declared,

Doing away with private ownership the entire system will be operated much more cheaply as it will not, within itself, be operated for the express purpose of making money . . . but will be maintained for the sole purpose of providing the life giving fluid for five thousand acres of the best land that exists in the country. ⁵⁹

Finalization of the agreement, however, depended on district voters approving the bond issue.⁶⁰ While awaiting a vote, MHID crews began the necessary task of repairing the canal system and

60 "Work Progressing on Water System," Mountain Home Republican, November 6, 1925, 1. (AEC374)

⁵³ "Commissioners Proceedings," *Mountain Home Republican*, July 3, 1925, 5; MHID, "Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners Creating District," June 22, 1925, 2, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC360, AEC467)

⁵⁴ "Mountain Home Irrigationists Elect Officers"; MHID, "Organization Meeting of Board of Directors," June 22, 1925, 10–11, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC358, AEC467)

⁵⁵ "Irrigation Heads Organize Monday," *Mountain Home Republican*, June 26, 1925, 1; "Notice of Special Bond Election," *Mountain Home Republican*, July 10, 1925, 5. (AEC359, AEC361)

⁵⁶ "Engineer Employed to Investigate Condition of Local Irrigation Systems," *Mountain Home Republican*, July 31, 1925, 1; "Making Survey of Irrigation System," *Mountain Home Republican*, August 14, 1925, 1; MHID, "Minutes of Mountain Home Irrigation District, Special Meeting," July 24, 1925, 40, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC366, AEC367, AEC467)

⁵⁷ James Spofford, "Report of the Condition of the Entire Irrigation Works and System of the Mountain Home Co-Operative Irrigation Company and the Elmore County Irrigated Farms Association," August 1925, 18, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Spofford Gives Detailed Report," *Mountain Home Republican*, September 18, 1925, 1; "Water Users Discuss Problems," *Mountain Home Republican*, October 2, 1925, 1; "The Irrigation Situation," *Mountain Home Republican*, October 16, 1925, 4. (AEC467, AEC369, AEC370, AEC372)

⁵⁸ The contract was not finalized until October 1926. MHID, "Minutes of Mountain Home Irrigation District, Adjourned Meeting: October 10, 1925," 2, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Mountain Home Irrigation District Hold Bond Election on November 16," *Mountain Home Republican*, October 16, 1925, 1; MHID, [Meeting Minutes], October 4, 1926, n.p., MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho. (AEC467, AEC371, AEC468)

⁵⁹ "The Irrigation Situation." (AEC372)

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reservoirs.⁶¹ On November 16, as repair work neared completion, landowners within the district voted 92 to 20 to approve the bond issue.⁶² This vote ended private ownership of Mountain Home's irrigation system, ushering in the beginning of the MHID.

The MHID's formation represents the culmination of decades of private irrigation ventures, stretching back to the 1880s. These early, often challenging, efforts ultimately yielded a functional irrigation system, and, critically, a network of reservoirs—Little Camas, Long Tom, and Mountain Home—that would prove indispensable for later, larger-scale reclamation proposals. The intricate system, fed by Little Camas, Long Tom, Canyon, and Rattlesnake Creeks, provided a vital foundation upon which future irrigation plans for the Mountain Home Plateau emerged.

Elmore County Development League Advocacy Efforts and the Snake River Plan, 1913-1920s

Concurrent to private irrigation development within the vicinity of Mountain Home, the Elmore County Development League organized in 1913 to promote Mountain Home's overall development. With financial support from the Elmore County commissioners, the league succeeded in gaining federal attention for irrigation planning on the plateau in 1914.⁶³ In March 1913, the league's president, F. E. Austin, petitioned the Elmore County Board of Commissioners to allocate funds for "procuring data and all other matters which may be necessary to procure the aid of the United States Government in promoting an Irrigation system to irrigate our lands in Elmore County." The Board approved the petition, signed by 100 county residents, authorizing a \$200 appropriation.⁶⁴

A few months later, league members met with A. P. Davis, USRS supervising engineer, at the 1914 Interstate Irrigation Conference in Denver. They presented various "preliminary plans" to extend the Boise Project to Mountain Home, proposing the Snake, Salmon, Payette, or Boise Rivers as potential sources for irrigation. Following the meeting with Davis, the league sent a proposal outlining these options to the secretary of the Interior and urged him to immediately investigate the reclamation of Mountain Home. The proposal included a map illustrating one of the league's

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⁶¹ Clay Groefsema to Carl Valentine, October 22, 1925, 1931 Letter Box, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Irrigation Board Meets," *Mountain Home Republican*, November 27, 1925, 1. (AEC475, AEC378)

⁶² Although the MHID secured a lower purchase price for the irrigation system due to its poor condition, the district proceeded with issuing \$250,000 in bonds. The surplus funds were reserved in the treasury for maintenance and operating expenses. MHID, [Meeting Minutes], November 24, 1925, 104, in *Mountain Home Irrigation District Elmore County, Idaho, Minutes, Organization and First Bond Authorization*, MHID Meeting Minutes, Records of the MHID, Mountain Home, Idaho; "Irrigation Bond Issue is Carried," *Idaho Statesman*, November 19, 1925, 13; District Bond Election Carries," *Mountain Home Republican*, November 20, 1925, 1. (AEC467, AEC376, AEC377)

⁶³ "[March 19, 1914, Meeting Minutes]," *Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 4*, n.d., 437. (AEC212)

^{64 &}quot;[March 19, 1914, Meeting Minutes]," 437. (AEC212)

⁶⁵ F. E. Austin, President, Elmore Development League, to A. P. Davis, U.S. Reclamation Service, May 25, 1914, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver; Elmore Development League to Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, May 25, 1914, 1, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC169)

⁶⁶ President, Elmore Development League, to Hon. Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, May 25, 1914, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC169)

favored plans, Salmon River diversion. This plan, inspired by Perrine's 1906 Stanley Basin proposal, envisioned collecting Salmon River water into Alturas Lake, conveying its waters to the South Fork Boise River through a five-mile-long tunnel, and delivering these waters to Syrup Creek for ultimate distribution to the Mountain Home Plateau (Figure 9).⁶⁷

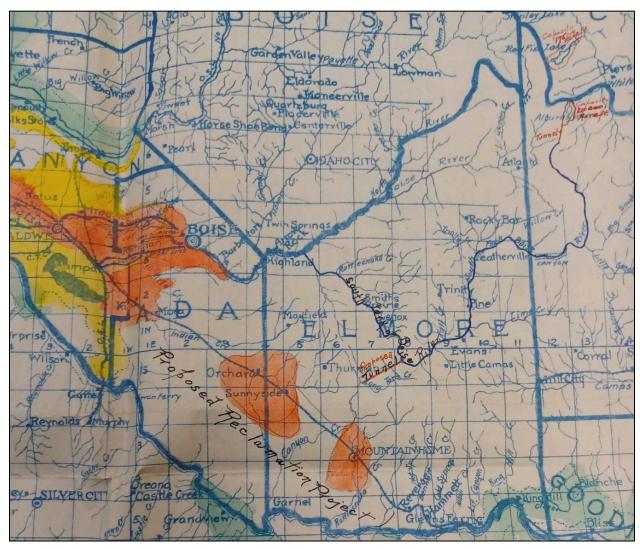


Figure 9. Portion of a 1913 map showing an Elmore County Development League proposal: diverting Salmon River water from Alturas Lake to the South Fork Boise River and then to Mountain Home from Long Tom Creek.

Source. F. C. Horn, "Map of Southern Idaho and Vicinity Including Portions of Oregon, Nevada & Utah," 1913, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308: Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

In response to the league's actions, the USRS tasked consulting engineer A. J. Wiley with investigating the best method of irrigating Mountain Home for potential "future action." Wiley

⁶⁷ Elmore Development League to Lane, 3–4. (AEC169)

⁶⁸ A. P. Davis, Chief Engineer, to [F. E.] Austin, First National Bank, June 1, 1914, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC169)

produced a preliminary report in November 1914 examining the league's suggestions for supplying water to Mountain Home. Rather than conducting new research, which required funds that the USRS did not have, Wiley weighed the merits and disadvantages of each method based on extant information. He ultimately recommended that the USRS should undertake reconnaissance studies of Salmon River, Payette River, and Snake River diversion plans to determine which was the most suitable. However, any further federal study of the Mountain Home irrigation plans had to wait until after the USRS completed the Arrowrock Division of the Boise Project. This involved construction of Arrowrock Dam on the Boise River to store water for Boise River Valley irrigation. When the USRS finished Arrowrock in 1915, the league wrote to inquire about commencing Mountain Home studies. Unfortunately, by that time, the USRS's reclamation fund, which was dependent upon appropriations from Congress, had no available funds for a Mountain Home investigation.

Undefeated, the league persisted in keeping the USRS aware of the need for Mountain Home irrigation throughout the late 1910s. In 1916, the USRS announced a proposal to use water stored at Arrowrock not needed on Boise River Valley lands to irrigate part of the Black Canyon district of the Boise Project's Payette Division. The league drafted a formal letter of protest, arguing that Mountain Home deserved the water instead. They suggested that the Payette River, not Arrowrock storage water, would better serve Black Canyon.⁷³

Although the USRS was not swayed by the Mountain Home argument, the agency continued to consider local ideas for how to bring Mountain Home under irrigation. In 1918, area resident Perrine submitted his detailed proposal (which he began developing in 1906) to the federal government. Calling it the Franklin K. Lane Project (in honor of the secretary of the Interior), Perrine outlined a plan for the reclamation of one million acres along the Snake River in Idaho, including four hundred thousand acres north of the Snake River in and around Mountain Home. Perrine's plan envisioned diverting the Snake River at Milner Dam, storing water at American Falls and three other unspecified sites to enhance the water supply, and diverting the water of the South Fork Boise River to Mountain Home. However, ongoing federal reclamation efforts in the Boise River Valley were rapidly allocating the waters of the Boise River to lands in the Boise Project, making it necessary to find a replacement for the diverted South Fork Boise River water. Perrine's plan suggested diverting Salmon River waters into the Boise River for ultimate storage at the recently completed federal dam, Arrowrock.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ A. J. Wiley, Consulting Engineer, to Chief Engineer [Reclamation], Memorandum Re: Mountain Home Project, December 12, 1914, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—thru 1914, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC169)

⁷⁰ F. E. Austin to Hon. Arthur P. Davis, Director, U.S. Reclamation Service, September 28, 1916, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

⁷¹ A. P. Davis, Director and Chief Engineer, to Mr. F. E. Austin, First National Bank, October 3, 1916, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

⁷² Davis to Austin, October 3, 1916. (AEC170)

⁷³ "Club Protects Water Right," *Mountain Home Republic*, December 9, 1916. (AEC109)

⁷⁴ I. B. Perrine and H. L. Hollister, "The Franklin K. Lane Reclamation Project, Southern Idaho," (Boise: n.p., 1918), 6, 8–9, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

The Mountain Home ideas seemed well timed to take advantage of the federal government's interest in finding feasible projects that could employ soldiers returning from abroad after World War I. Inspired by the strong local interest, the USRS conducted reconnaissance of a Snake River plan over the spring and summer of 1918. However, conducting the detailed studies required before implementing any such plan required an influx of funding.⁷⁵ The reconnaissance surveys also indicated that the construction of the project would be expensive, given the number of lava beds and canyons a canal from the Snake River to Mountain Home would encounter.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the governor of Idaho requested that the BLM withdraw the lands under consideration for reclamation in the event that irrigation development proceeded.⁷⁷A 1918 map created by the USRS illustrates the proposed Snake River diversion plan (Figure 10).

⁷⁵ A. P. Davis, Director and Chief Engineer, to Hon. William E. Borah, U.S. Senate, June 8, 1918, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

⁷⁶ A. P. Davis, Director and Chief Engineer, to F. E. Austin, August 15, 1918, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

⁷⁷ Morris Bien, Acting Director, to F. E. Austin, April 25, 1919, File: 932-14 Idaho—Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

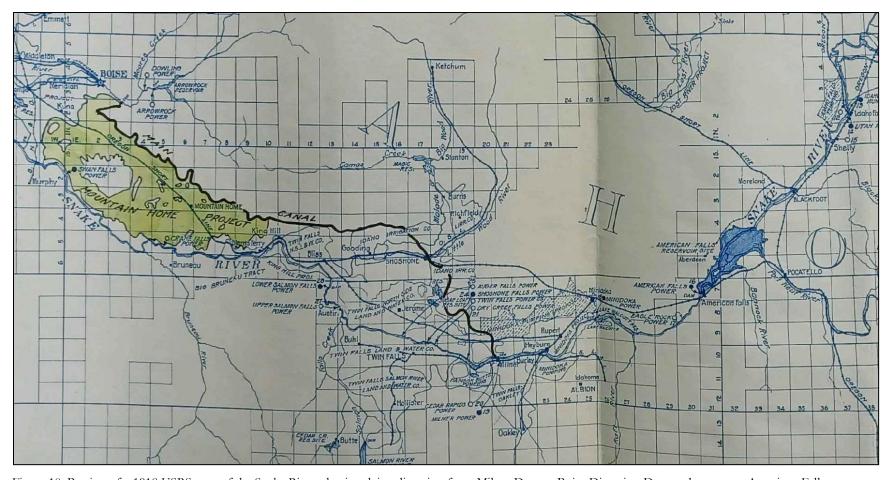


Figure 10. Portion of a 1918 USRS map of the Snake River plan involving diversion from Milner Dam to Boise Diversion Dam and storage at American Falls. Source. U.S. Reclamation Service, "Snake River Basin—Idaho. Storage and Power Sites," October 21, 1918, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Transfer Case, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

While the USRS struggled to find funding for further investigation of a Mountain Home project, the Mountain Home community again took action. In early 1920, community leaders raised funds to hire Wiley to evaluate Mountain Home irrigation plans. In April of that year, Wiley reported that it was "physically possible" to divert Boise River, Salmon River, and Snake River water onto the Mountain Home Plateau, but that the Snake River had the best supply of water. Wiley believed that the greatest hurdle to implementing a Snake River diversion would be cost, which he estimated at \$125–150 per acre (equivalent to \$1,965–2,359 per acre in 2024 dollars). Wiley concluded that the project was too large and expensive for private financing and "could best be constructed under the Federal Reclamation Act."

After Wiley released his report, in June 1920, Elmore and Ada Counties cooperated to raise \$10,000 (equivalent to \$176,000 in 2024 dollars) for a deeper investigation of the Snake River plan. On May 12, 1921, the Boise Chamber of Commerce entered into a cooperative agreement with the USRS requiring the federal government to match the \$10,000 raised by the counties. The agreement also stipulated that the USRS would direct and execute the study and prepare a report. The resultant report, "Mountain Home Secondary Project, Idaho," submitted September 10, 1923, confirmed the feasibility of reclaiming 420,000 acres of land in Ada and Elmore Counties with water from the Snake River conveyed to Mountain Home through a 210-mile-long canal starting at Milner Dam. The report projected a total plan cost of \$60 million, or \$185 per acre (equivalent to \$1.05

⁷⁸ Ernest G. Eagleson, Mayor, to Franklin K. Lane, United States Secretary of the Interior, January 31, 1920, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC160)

⁷⁹ A. J. Wiley, "Report on Mountain Home Project" (Boise: n.p., April 1, 1920), 1, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC160)

⁸⁰ Wiley, "Report on Mountain Home Project," 24, 27. (AEC160)

⁸¹ Wiley, "Report on Mountain Home Project," 26. (AEC160)

⁸² A. J. Wiley to Mr. F. E. Weymouth, Chief Engineer, U.S. Reclamation Service, January 21, 1921, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver; W. H. P. Hill, Managing Secretary, to Mr. Barry Dibble, Project Manager, May 14, 1921, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver; "[June 16, 1920, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 5, n.d., 535; "[April 1, 1922, Meeting Minutes]," Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners of Elmore County, Idaho, Book 6, n.d., 54. (AEC160, AEC212)

⁸³ "[Draft Agreement Between U.S. Reclamation Service and Boise Chamber of Commerce]," May 12, 1921, 4–5, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC160)

⁸⁴ U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), "Mountain Home Project: Location and General Description," September 10, 1923, 3, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159)

billion or \$3,205 per acre in 2024 dollars, respectively). 85 However, the federal government rejected the plan, deeming it cost prohibitive. 86

The Stanley Basin Diversion Plan of the Early 1920s

Although the USRS's rejection of the Snake River plan was a blow to the community, another community member, Boise-based attorney S. H. Hays, was hard at work investigating an alternative. From 1919 to 1921, Hays financed studies, conducted by civil engineer James B. Hays, that proposed diverting Salmon River water from Stanley Basin to the South Fork Boise River via a twenty-mile-long tunnel drilled through the Sawtooth Mountains. From there, a seven-mile-long tunnel would deliver the water to Mountain Home (Figure 11). Engineer James Hays believed that diverting from the Stanley Basin, where several dams would be constructed to impound the Salmon River and other nearby water sources, would "more fully utilize the waters of the State than in any other way and at the same time will furnish water at substantially the same or less expense than taking it from the Snake River." The engineer's study concluded that the Stanley Basin plan would provide 1.5 million acre-feet of water to 450,000 acres of land in Mountain Home for a cost of approximately \$42 million (equivalent to \$738 million in 2024 dollars).

⁸⁵ BOR, "Mountain Home Project: Location and General Description," 16; "Clears Way for Project," *Twin Falls News*, September 21, 1923, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159, AEC161)

⁸⁶ BOR, "Mountain Home Project: Location and General Description," 16; "Clears Way for Project"; "Project Turned Down; Cost More Than Is Worth," *Idaho Falls Times Register*, September 21, 1923, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159, AEC161)

⁸⁷ S. H. Hays to A. P. Davis, Director, Reclamation Service, November 9, 1921, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159)

⁸⁸ Hays to Davis, November 9, 1921; S. H. Hays to Hon. William E. Borah, Senator from Idaho, November 7, 1921, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159)

⁸⁹ Hays to Davis, November 9, 1921. (AEC159)

⁹⁰ Hays to Borah, November 7, 1921; Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 9. (AEC159)

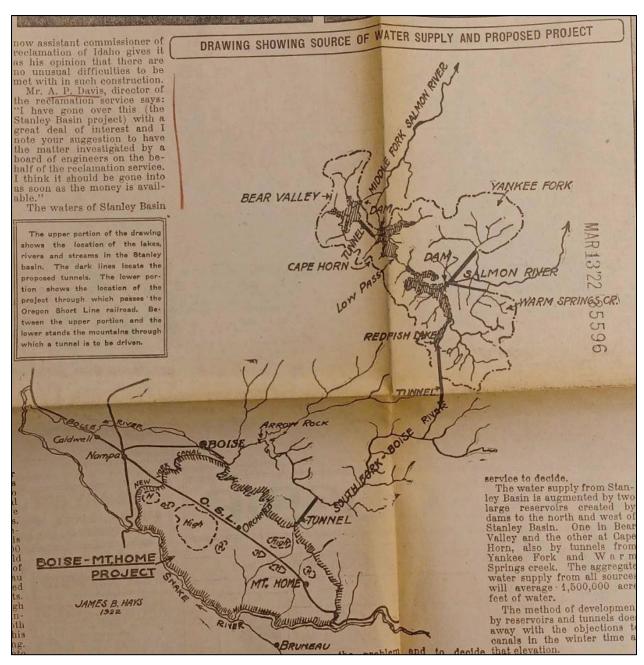


Figure 11. 1922 drawing of S. H. Hays's Stanley Basin plan, showing potential dam sites in Stanley Basin, a tunnel connecting Redfish Lake to the South Fork Boise River, and a tunnel running from South Fork Boise River to the Mountain Home tract.

Source. James B. Hays, "Drawing Showing Source of Water Supply and Proposed Project," in S. H. Hays, "Boise-Mountain Home Project Empire in Itself," *Sunday Capitol News*, March 5, 1922, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1930-1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

The Snake River and Stanley Basin plans proposed in the early 1920s each had their proponents, advantages, and drawbacks. While the Snake River plan required only one canal, the canal's length was substantial and sparked concerns about difficult and expensive construction. Additionally, the necessary water impoundment at the proposed American Falls dam site and the required

enlargement of the existing Milner Dam added to the plan's cost. Furthermore, utilizing the Snake River's water supply to irrigate the Mountain Home tract would leave no water for the nearby Bruneau area, which was in similar need of development. The Stanley Basin option demanded more complex engineering feats for Mountain Home's reclamation. However, it also offered several benefits. According to early engineering studies, Stanley Basin waters, flowing into the Salmon River, were not suitable for irrigation elsewhere. Moreover, the Stanley Basin could provide more water than the Snake River, enabling irrigation of a slightly larger area compared to the Snake River plan. Notably, the Stanley Basin plan was projected to be less expensive than its Snake River alternative.

The USRS declined to pursue an examination of the Stanley Basin plan in 1921. However, a Stanley Basin Commission comprising a University of Idaho agricultural engineer, the state commissioner of reclamation, and BOR (former USRS) consulting engineer Wiley reexamined the plan and produced a report on the project in March 1924. The plan described in the report was slightly different than the plan Hays proposed originally. It included additional dams in Stanley Basin and on the South Fork Boise River and slightly longer diversion tunnels from Stanley Basin to the South Fork Boise River and from the South Fork Boise River to the Mountain Home Plateau. The report determined that the Stanley Basin could furnish 1.5 million acre-feet of water to 300,000–400,000 acres in the Mountain Home-South Boise area. Newspaper coverage reported that the proposed Stanley Basin project was the "largest, in the world ever proposed by individuals."

Hoping to attract the BOR's interest, S. H. Hays released the study and announced that "eastern financiers" were interested in the project and were willing to fund it. ⁹⁷ However, severe water shortages in the Boise River Valley in the late 1920s redirected the BOR's attention toward supplementing the existing water supply in the valley rather than expanding the Boise Project onto new lands. When the BOR returned to its consideration of Mountain Home later in the 1920s, it began funding its own studies.

⁹¹ S. H. Hays, "Boise-Mountain Home Project Empire in Itself," *Sunday Capital News*, March 5, 1922, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC161)

⁹² S. H. Hays, "Development of Nearby Territory Boise's Hope," *Idaho Statesman*, March 5, 1922, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC161)

⁹³ A. P. Davis, Director [Reclamation], to S. H. Hays, May 29, 1922, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver; A. P. Davis, Director [Reclamation], to S. H. Hays, June 12, 1922, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 1 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC159)

⁹⁴ "Prof. M. R. Lewis Appointed on Commission," *Elk River* (ID) *News*, June 4, 1924, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC161)

^{95 &}quot;Engineer's Report Shows Available Water Supply from Stanley for 400,000 Acres," Mackay (ID) Miner, March 26, 1924, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, Mt. Home Project, Clippings, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC161)

^{96 &}quot;Engineer's Report." (AEC161)

^{97 &}quot;Engineer's Report." (AEC161)

Summary

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Elmore County residents took the initiative to develop irrigation plans for the Mountain Home Plateau, funding their own studies and advocating for federal assistance. As their proposals grew in ambition and complexity, the need for federal funding became increasingly critical. However, the government's deep involvement in reclaiming the Boise River Valley through the construction and subsequent expansion of the Boise Project diverted both resources and water away from the plateau. Despite this challenge, the prospect of Mountain Home Plateau's reclamation garnered support from neighboring communities, including those in Ada County. A notable example of this collaboration was the joint effort in the 1920s to raise significant funds for a crucial federal study of a viable water delivery proposal. During this period, the MHID came to fruition, demonstrating the community's ability to develop local irrigation infrastructure. The MHID's irrigation system, particularly its crucial storage reservoirs, provided a foundation for the broader reclamation proposals pursued. While community members displayed unwavering enthusiasm and determination for reclamation, the persistent lack of federal funding hindered progress. Although the Mountain Home Plateau's reclamation was not realized during this period, the community's advocacy succeeded in piquing the government's interest, and its studies definitively established the feasibility of irrigation in the area.

2 Federal Interest in Reclaiming Mountain Home

The federal government's involvement in irrigation development in Idaho began in 1902 with the passage of the Reclamation Act. This legislation established the USRS (which became the BOR in 1923) to oversee and implement reclamation projects in the western United States. The federal government provided capital and engineering expertise, while water users were responsible for repaying project construction costs. 98

The USRS began investigating Idaho's irrigation capabilities in 1904, when it proposed the Payette-Boise Project (now the Boise Project). The Boise Project focused on expanding existing canals and constructing storage reservoirs on the Boise River to supplement its natural flow for irrigation. This project occupied the federal government's attention in Idaho for the first decade and a half of the twentieth century.⁹⁹

In 1918, the federal government began investigating water delivery to Mountain Home. It conducted a study of the Snake River plan followed by an investigation of the Stanley Basin plan. Although the BOR ultimately found diversion of the Snake and Salmon Rivers onto the Mountain Home Plateau to be too expensive, federal plans to use Boise River water on the plateau gained traction in the 1940s and continued to be developed through the 1970s. These later plans envisioned using Boise River water that was intended for the lower Boise River Valley on Mountain Home instead. In exchange for diverting the Boise River water to Mountain Home, the plans called for directing Payette or Snake River water (and groundwater) onto the lower Boise River Valley.

Snake River Diversion Plan, 1918

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1918, Elmore County and others funded USRS consulting engineer A. J. Wiley's review of diverting water from the Snake River at Milner Dam to Mountain Home. ¹⁰⁰ Wiley concluded that Snake River waters were sufficient to irrigate Mountain Home and that it was superior to other sources, despite the expense of reclaiming it. ¹⁰¹ Wiley estimated that the Mountain Home tract, while not yet surveyed by 1918, contained 500,000 to 600,000 irrigable acres. ¹⁰² However, shortly after Wiley issued his report, federal funding for such a project dried up. Although short of money, the USRS and the Idaho governor considered a potential Mountain Home project viable enough to request that the BLM prevent settlement on the required

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⁹⁸ BOR, "The Bureau of Reclamation: A Very Brief History," last modified August 15, 2018, https://www.usbr.gov/history/borhist.html.

⁹⁹ William Joe Simonds, BOR, *The Boise Project*, (Denver: BOR, 1997; reis., Brit Storey, December 2009), 31–2, https://www.usbr.gov/projects/pdf.php?id=74. (AEC41)

¹⁰⁰ BOR, "Mountain Home Project: Location and General Description," 5; Hays, "Irrigating the Country Between Boise and Mountain Home," 2; "Guffey Plan for Watering Mountain Home Desert Wins Full Approval," *Idaho Statesman*, March 24, 1957. (AEC159, AEC25)

¹⁰¹ A. J. Wiley, "Irrigation Possibilities in Idaho" (Boise: n.p., April 12, 1918), 32, File: 932 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, 1914–June 1919, Box 306, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, Colorado–Idaho, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC205)

¹⁰² Wiley, "Irrigation Possibilities in Idaho," 32–33. (AEC205)

lands.¹⁰³ In March 1919, the BLM withdrew lands under the proposed Mountain Home project pending the results of irrigation studies.¹⁰⁴ The BOR ultimately decided that the project was too expensive, and the BLM reopened the Mountain Home Plateau to settlement in 1931.¹⁰⁵

Salmon River-Payette River Diversion Plan, 1930s

From 1924 to 1934, the Boise River Valley simultaneously experienced extreme water shortages and increased demand for water from ranchers and farmers. The clamor for more water led the BOR to investigate applying Salmon River water to the Boise River Valley, an idea originally proposed in 1921 for Mountain Home reclamation. The same statement of the Boise River Valley, and idea originally proposed in 1921 for Mountain Home reclamation.

In 1931, the BOR began searching for a route to divert Salmon River water to the North Fork Boise River above Arrowrock Dam. This plan was inspired by S. H. Hays's Stanley Basin plan for Mountain Home. In June 1932, the BOR published a report on the Salmon River diversion plan to provide supplemental water for the Boise Project. The report drew sharp criticism from Mountain Home reclamation proponents, who opposed applying Salmon River water on Boise Project lands. One Mountain Home property owner sent a telegram to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes in November 1933 protesting the BOR's intent to use Salmon River water for supplemental supply. He claimed that doing so would "rob over three hundred thousand acres of Mountain Home lands and forever condemn this fertile tract to perpetual desert." Idaho State Commissioner of Reclamation R. W. Farris also voiced opposition, asserting that the water would be better utilized in Mountain Home, as had been proposed in the early 1920s. 110

¹⁰³ F. E. Weymouth, Chief of Construction, to The Director [Reclamation], May 17, 1918, File: 932-14 Idaho— Mountain Home Project—1915–June 1919, Box 308, Entry 3: General Administrative and Project Records, 1902–1919, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC170)

¹⁰⁴ Morris Bien, Assistant to the Director, to Lindley, Pemrell, & Lindley, Attorneys at Law, July 29, 1919, File: 302.12 Idaho, Surveys and Investigations, MMT. Home Project, Thru 1929, 2 of 2, Box 252, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC160)

¹⁰⁵ "Says American Falls Water Is Not for Mt. Home," *Mountain Home Republican*, September 28, 1923; "Project Turned Down; Cost More Than Is Worth," *Idaho Falls Times Register*, September 21, 1923; U.S. Department of Interior, "Secretary Order of Withdrawal: Mountain Home Project, Idaho," January 9, 1931, The Official Federal Land Records Website, www.glorecords.blm.gov. (AEC99, AEC217)

¹⁰⁶ BOR, *The Columbia River*, vol. 1, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., H. Doc. 473 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 156; R. W. Faris, State Commissioner of Reclamation, "Supplementary Water for Boise Valley, Idaho: Twin Springs Project," February 1935, [iii], Box 58: Engineering and Research Center, Project Reports, 1910–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC67)

¹⁰⁷ Elwood Mead, Commissioner, to John Thomas, June 25, 1931, File: 301.1 Boise Project, Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, Project Correspondence 1930–1945 RG 115, NARA-Denver; BOR, "Annual Project History and Operation and Maintenance Report: Boise Project, Idaho," 1931, 29, File: Boise, Vol 23, 1931, Box 37, Entry 10: Project Histories, Feature Histories and Reports, 1902–1932, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC165, AEC171)

¹⁰⁸ Mead to Thomas, June 25, 1931; BOR, "Annual Project History and Operation and Maintenance Report: Boise Project, Idaho," 29. (AEC165)

¹⁰⁹ S. K. Atkinson to Hon. Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of Interior, Telegram, November 24, 1933, File: 301.1 Boise Project, Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, Project Correspondence 1930–1945 RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC165)

¹¹⁰ J. R. Riter and John A. Keimig, "Boise River Investigations, Idaho" (n.p.: BOR, April 1936), 128, Box 47, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1910–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC136)

By 1937, the BOR had abandoned the Salmon River diversion to the Boise River in favor of storing water at Twin Springs on the Middle Fork Boise River. However, it did not reconsider the Salmon River diversion for Mountain Home. Three years later, the BOR, with input from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, moved the location of an additional Boise storage reservoir from Twin Springs to Anderson Ranch on the South Fork Boise River because the site provided additional flood control benefits. 112

Solving the supplemental water crisis in the Boise River Valley consumed the BOR's attention in Idaho for much of the 1930s and 1940s, but expansion of projects to include Mountain Home did not disappear. In August 1935, the BOR commissioner authorized a secondary investigation of irrigation possibilities in southwestern Idaho using federal Emergency Relief Administration funds. In By 1936, the study expanded to include the Payette, Weiser, and upper Salmon River Basins and became known as the Boise-Payette-Weiser Investigation. Lead engineer John Riter argued that Mountain Home should be included as part of the expanded survey, calling the area "the key to the ultimate irrigation development in southwestern Idaho."

Riter produced a report in October 1938. The Boise-Payette-Weiser Investigation report examined storage development possibilities on the Payette River as part of a larger project to develop irrigation across southwestern Idaho. This included the Mountain Home Plateau, 400,000 acres of which Riter considered irrigable. His plan involved diverting Payette River water, supplemented by upper Salmon River water, to the Boise watershed. From there, the plan proposed direct or exchange diversion from the Boise River to unirrigated areas such as Mountain Home. To facilitate Payette River diversion, Riter proposed constructing several irrigation facilities, including a reservoir at Cascade on the North Fork Payette River, a diversion dam at Smith Ferry, a five-mile-long tunnel connecting the diversion dam to the Scriver Creek (a tributary of the Middle Fork Payette River), a reservoir at Garden Valley on the South Fork Payette River, and canals to transport water from Garden Valley to the Diversion Dam on the Boise River to deliver water to Dry and Willow Creeks in the Boise watershed.

BOR construction engineer R. J. Newell expressed support for Riter's proposal.¹¹⁹ He found the Cascade Reservoir component particularly desirable, recognizing its potential benefits for both Black

^{111 &}quot;Page Speaks at Caldwell," Post-Register, September 15, 1937. (AEC86)

¹¹² Hugh Eldridge, "Site for Dam Is Considered," Idaho Statesman, March 23, 1940. (AEC92)

¹¹³ BOR, "Boise Project History," 1936, 11, File: Boise, Vol 28, 1936, Box 39, Entry 10: Project Histories, Feature Histories and Reports, 1902–1932, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC174)

¹¹⁴ John R. Riter, "Progress Report: Storage Possibilities, Payette Watershed," Boise Weiser Payette Investigations - Report No. 16, October 1938, 4, File: 301.1 Boise Project Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, 1935–1938, Transfer Case, Folder 1 of 2, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC166)

¹¹⁵ Riter, "Progress Report," 6. (AEC166)

¹¹⁶ Riter, "Progress Report," A. (AEC166)

¹¹⁷ Riter, "Progress Report," 9. (AEC166)

¹¹⁸ Riter, "Progress Report," 10. (AEC166)

¹¹⁹ R. J. Newell, Construction Engineer, to Chief Engineer, Memorandum Re: Progress Report—Payette Watershed, November 15, 1938, 1, File: 301.1 Boise Project Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, 1935–1938, Transfer Case, Folder 1 of 2, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC166)

Canyon lands and the Payette Division of the Boise Project. Newell's support notwithstanding, Emergency Relief funding ran out by November 1938, preventing Riter from completing an investigation of Mountain Home. The BOR instructed Riter to write a report excluding the Mountain Home component, much to the disappointment of Mountain Home reclamation proponents, who made their frustrations known. 121

Boise Chamber of Commerce Manager E. G. Harlan expressed his discontent in a letter to the BOR. He had hoped that the survey would finally reveal the most optimal irrigation source for Mountain Home and facilitate the "full utilization of all the waters in this section of Idaho." Harlan even offered to assist the BOR "in securing sufficient funds from next Congress" to complete the survey. Let In response, BOR Chief Engineer R. F. Walter thanked Harlan for offering financial assistance but declined, noting that such matters were under the control of congressional committees dealing with irrigation and appropriation. While Walter acknowledged that the BOR would still prepare a report on the more urgent units of the general area, he left the Mountain Home (and Bruneau) investigations "for later consideration." The BOR would not resume this investigation for another six years, as it directed its efforts to expanding the Boise Project with the construction of the Anderson Ranch Dam. When it returned to this study in the mid-1940s, the BOR had abandoned the Salmon River diversion component after studies revealed that such diversion would endanger the salmon and steelhead spawning grounds at the head of the Salmon River.

Anderson Ranch Dam Plan, 1940s-1950s

In the meantime, the BOR commenced construction of a new storage reservoir to address persistent water shortages in the Boise River Valley. It chose the Anderson Ranch Dam site on the South Fork Boise River for the flood control benefits that this location offered. Although the BOR's goals for Anderson Ranch primarily focused on irrigating the land between Boise and the Snake River, the potential for irrigating the Mountain Home Plateau was also part of the conversation and planning. Early BOR statements on Anderson Ranch Dam's purpose included broad references to Mountain Home. As construction progressed, the BOR articulated a more defined connection between the new storage facility and Mountain Home reclamation.

In April 1940, as the project awaited federal authorization, the BOR stated that in addition to best addressing irrigation and flooding issues in the Boise River Valley, Anderson Ranch would "better fit in with plans for the ultimate development of the Mountain Home area" than the

¹²⁰ Newell to Chief Engineer, Memorandum, November 15, 1938, 1. (AEC166)

¹²¹ E. G. Harlan, Manager, to Mr. R. F. Walter, Chief Engineer, BOR, November 14, 1938, File: 301.1 Boise Project Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, 1935–1938, Transfer Case, Folder 1 of 2, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC166)

¹²² Harlan to Walter, November 14, 1938. (AEC166)

¹²³ R. F. Walter to E. G. Harlan, November 16, 1938, File: 301.1 Boise Project Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, 1935–1938, Transfer Case, Folder 1 of 2, Box 58, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC166)

¹²⁴ H. W. Bashore, Commissioner, BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho: Appended Substantiating Material, Project Planning Report No. 1-5, 5-5" (n.p.: BOR, n.d. [1944]), 2, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC123)

alternative location at Twin Springs. ¹²⁵ News outlets echoed this sentiment and alluded to an Anderson Ranch Dam–Mountain Home link. After Anderson Ranch Dam received federal approval in summer 1940, one newspaper publication reported that Anderson Ranch "is planned to provide power and flood control and to assure a plentiful supply of water for irrigation for thousands of acres of land in the Mountain Home district and for the Boise project." ¹²⁶ In a 1945 press release, the BOR explained that the purpose of the dam was to "bring a supplemental supply of water to 340,000 acres of highly-developed farm land in the fertile Boise Valley," but noted that, "ultimately, the dam will be able to provide irrigation water for a large tract of arid land between Boise and Mountain Home, through exchange of storage from the Payette to the Boise Basin." ¹²⁷

The BOR completed Anderson Ranch Dam in 1950, following years of construction delays due to World War II. ¹²⁸ Shortly after the dam became fully operational, the BOR acknowledged that the facility would eventually serve as a source of irrigation water for the Mountain Home area. As a 1954 BOR publication elaborated,

Plans for development of the Boise Project call for Anderson Ranch dam initially to provide supplemental storage to prevent a shortage of irrigation water in those project lands lying for the most part between the Boise and Snake Rivers. Later development contemplates diversion of water from the Payette River to that area and Anderson Ranch Reservoir will then serve as a source of supply for irrigation of the 400,000-acre Mountain Home area.¹²⁹

Two years later, when the BOR produced a report examining the construction of Anderson Ranch Dam, it explained that the "initial purpose" of the facility was to provide "supplemental storage to prevent serious shortages of irrigation water on the Boise project lands lying principally between the Boise and Snake Rivers." However, on the same page, the BOR claimed that the "primary purpose" was to "serve as a source of irrigation water for the proposed 400,000-acre Mountain Home project in Idaho."¹³⁰

While some of the BOR's earlier statements on Anderson Ranch Dam lacked specificity regarding its intended role in the Mountain Home area, later correspondence, press releases, and official publications presented a clearer picture. These statements reiterated that the dam's immediate purpose was to supply the Boise River Valley with supplemental water, but also conveyed

¹²⁵ BOR, "Report on Twin Springs and Anderson Ranch Reservoir Sites, Boise Project," Project Investigations Report No. 35A, April 1940, B, 2, Box 58, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1910–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC145)

¹²⁶ Shortly after news outlets reported that Anderson Ranch was tied to Mountain Home, J. Lynn Driscoll, the vice president of the Southwestern Idaho Water Conservation Project, a nonprofit water conservation organization deeply involved in Boise Project developments, clarified that "the current program [for Anderson Ranch] does not include reclamation of the desert between Boise and Mountain Home," calling the idea a "general misunderstanding. "J. L. Driscoll Clarifies Intent of Anderson Ranch Reservoir," *Idaho Statesman*, August 6, 1940, 5; "Idaho Project Fund Approved," *Twin Falls News* (Twin Falls, ID), August 2, 1940, 5. (AEC77)

¹²⁷ BOR, "[Press Release]," U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Information Service, Region No. 1, Boise, Idaho, January 26, 1945, File: 023.6. Boise, Press Releases, 1930 Thru, Box 37, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1919–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC199)

¹²⁸ Simonds, *The Boise Project*, 31–32. (AEC41)

¹²⁹ BOR, Dams and Control Works (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), 103. (AEC97)

¹³⁰ BOR, Region 1, Technical Record of Design and Construction: Anderson Ranch Dam and Powerplant, Constructed 1941–1951, Arrowrock Division, Boise Project (Denver: BOR, 1956), 6. (AEC82)

that Payette River water diversion could enable the future use of Anderson Ranch water on Mountain Home lands.

Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project (Payette River Exchange Agreement), 1940s

The BOR's plans for delivering water to Mountain Home did not end after the construction of Anderson Ranch Dam. Following the dam's completion, the BOR, state officials, and irrigation experts continued to discuss how best to use Anderson Ranch water. One of the key considerations was the potential of the dam to provide water to Mountain Home, fitting with the BOR's intention to reclaim new land in southwestern Idaho. The BOR hoped that this additional reclaimed land would provide viable farming lands for veterans, war workers, and farmers affected by recent droughts. The BOR's acting director, W. E. Blomgren, intended to construct the Mountain Home Project to address the need for more farmland but recognized that the BOR needed more detailed engineering plans to determine how best to do so. 132

Studies conducted by the BOR in the 1940s worked out the engineering required for the Mountain Home Project. This project involved applying Payette River water to the lower Boise River Valley, allowing Boise River water, including Anderson Ranch storage water, to be diverted to two individual Mountain Home units, Long Tom and Hillcrest. This plan revitalized part of BOR Engineer John Riter's 1938 proposal. The BOR estimated that the Payette River exchange plan would reclaim 183,000 acres in Mountain Home and create over 2,000 new farms in both Mountain Home and Willow Creek (closer to the Payette River). 134

This proposal became known as the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project. The BOR envisioned the Payette Unit as the first phase of Mountain Home development. A second phase, only briefly considered during this time, proposed using Snake River waters to irrigate an additional 150,000 acres in Mountain Home. The Payette Unit involved several components, including construction of multiple dams, tunnels, canals, and power plants on the Payette River to divert water into the lower Boise River Valley in exchange for using Boise River water on the Mountain Home Plateau (Figure 12 and Figure 13). 137

¹³¹ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho," Substantiating Materials of Project Planning Report No. 1-5.5-6 (Boise: n.p., December 1946), v, 5–6, Box 791, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1910–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC149)

¹³² W. E. Blomgren, Acting Director, to Regional Director, Boise, Idaho, Memorandum Re: Mountain Home Project, Idaho - Comments of the Corps of Engineers on Report for Initial Unit and Alternate Proposal for Salmon River Diversion, September 15, 1944, File: 144002 Other Agency Projects and Proposed Projects Army Corps of Engineers [6 of 6], Box 3, NRG-115-00-265, General Correspondence 1933–1989, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC209)

¹³³ Although the BOR considered the Hillcrest Unit as part of the Mountain Home Project, Hillcrest was south of Boise, unlike Long Tom, which was in the Mountain Home area. BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho" (1946), 3. (AEC149)

¹³⁴ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho" (1946), v. (AEC149)

¹³⁵ BOR, "Boise Project History, 1947" (Boise: n.p., 1947), 14, File: Boise Project History, 1947, Box 252, 8NN-115-90-039, BOR Project History Index, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC206)

¹³⁶ BOR, The Columbia River, 1:157. (AEC67)

¹³⁷ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho" (1946), 3. (AEC149)

To irrigate Mountain Home, the BOR proposed diverting South Fork Boise River water at Anderson Ranch Dam through a 7.2-mile-long tunnel at Long Tom Creek. The BOR explained that the "Regulation of South Fork of Boise River by Anderson Ranch reservoir . . . will enable a firm supply of 540,000 acre-feet to be diverted by gravity through the Long Tom tunnel." Water diverted through the Long Tom Tunnel would then flow into Canyon Creek, and a canal system would facilitate final delivery to the Long Tom Unit. 140

The plan proposed diverting Payette River water to replace the water taken out of the Boise River system and used on the Mountain Home Plateau. The Cascade Reservoir initiated the complex operation by regulating the flow of the North Fork Payette River, diverting it into other reservoirs in the Payette River Basin. A proposed reservoir at Garden Valley on the Middle and South Forks of the Payette River would connect to a fifty-mile-long Payette-Boise aqueduct, transporting Payette River waters to the Boise Diversion Dam.

¹³⁸ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho" (1946), 7. (AEC149)

¹³⁹ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho" (1946), 4. (AEC149)

¹⁴⁰ Southwestern Idaho Water Conservation Project, Inc., "Mountain Home Project, Payette Unit—Idaho," August 1948, 3, Box 1146, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC125)

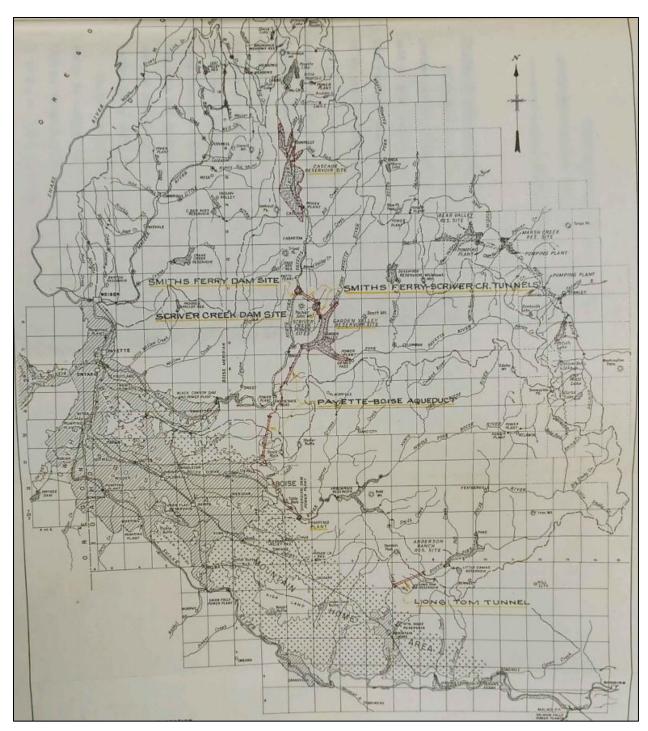


Figure 12. 1941 map of the Mountain Home Project's Payette Unit, showing diversion of Payette River water to the Boise River Valley in exchange for delivery of Boise River water to Mountain Home.

Source. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Mountain Home Project, Idaho, General Map," September 24, 1941, File: 301.1 Boise Project Engineering Correspondence Re: Dams, 1935-1938, Transfer Case, Folder 1 of 2, Box 60, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1930-1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

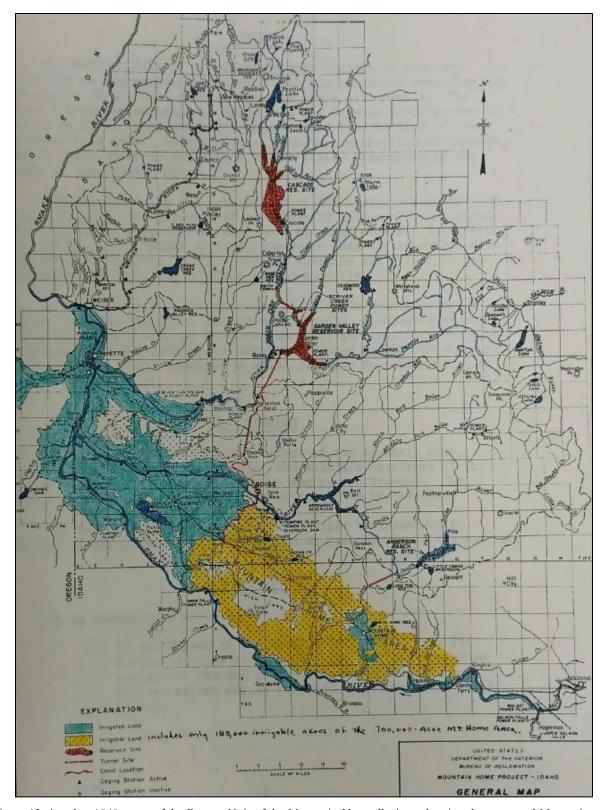


Figure 13. Another 1940s map of the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project, showing the proposed Mountain Home and Hillcrest Units in yellow (183,000 acres total).

Source. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Mountain Home Project, Idaho, General Map," September 24, 1941, IDWP 7/5, Box 7, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

According to the BOR, by May 1943, plans for the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project had become "rather well crystallized," leading Chief Engineer R. J. Newell to request a storage filing permit for irrigation purposes on the Garden Valley dam site. The BOR completed the Payette Unit proposal in April 1944 and submitted it to other federal agencies for review. The plan, estimated at \$96 million (equivalent to \$1.7 billion in 2024 dollars), received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Federal Power Commission (FPC), key federal review agencies. Agriculture and the Federal Power Commission (FPC), key federal review agencies.

In fall 1945, the BOR produced an updated report titled "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho: Project Planning Report No. 1-5.5-5." It submitted the report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes and requested "immediate authorization by the Congress to construct the Payette unit of the Mountain Home project." The report emphasized the BOR's intention to begin construction immediately after receiving federal approval, aiming to open "a 50,000-acre block of irrigable land . . . at the earliest practicable date." ¹⁴⁵

In 1946, the Department of the Interior (DOI) authorized construction of the Payette Unit, but the Bureau of the Budget sought "additional information on agricultural economics." ¹⁴⁶ From 1946 to 1947, the BOR conducted land classification studies of the proposed project area to comply with the Budget Bureau's request. ¹⁴⁷ Continued research led to an alternate plan in 1948, proposing a more direct route for water delivery through a thirty-mile-long tunnel from Garden Valley at Alder Creek to Mores Creek instead of the fifty-mile-long Payette-Boise aqueduct (Figure 14 through Figure 16). ¹⁴⁸ Geological studies found the alternate tunnel route not only feasible but also "geologically preferable to the presently considered canal-aqueduct system" from the Garden Valley

¹⁴¹ R. J. Newell, Construction Engineer, to Chief Engineer, BOR, May 29, 1943, File: 031. Boise. General Corres. Re Appropriation of Water, Jan. 1941 Thru, Box 37, Entry 7: General Administrative and Project Records, 1930–1945, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC200)

¹⁴² E. Reybold, Chief of Engineers, to H. W. Bashore, Commissioner, BOR, October 28, 1944, 1, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC123)

¹⁴³ Basil Manly, Chairman, Federal Power Commission, to H. W. Bashore, Commissioner, BOR, October 23, 1944, 2, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver; E. H. Wiecking, Land Use Coordinator, U.S. Department of Agriculture, to H. W. Bashore, Commissioner, BOR, October 27, 1944, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC123)

¹⁴⁴ BOR, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho," Project Planning Report No. 1-5.5-5 (Boise: n.p., September 1945), 1, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC123)

¹⁴⁵ Bashore, "Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project, Idaho: Appended Substantiating Material, Project Planning Report No. 1-5, 5-5," B. (AEC123)

¹⁴⁶ Rudolph Dieffenbach, Coordinator, River Basin Studies, "A Report on Fish and Wildlife Resources in Relation to the Water Development Plan for the Mountain Home Project" (Portland, OR: n.p., December 1946), n.p., IDWP 7/5, Box 7, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC121)

¹⁴⁷ Mark R. Kulp, State Reclamation Engineer, Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Reclamation, State of Idaho, 1945–46 (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, 1946), 106. (AEC46)

¹⁴⁸ E. Koessner, Regional Engineer, "Memorandum on Comparative Cost Estimates and Supporting Computations of the Payette-Boise Aqueduct and Alternate Route Via Mores Creek Tunnel" (Boise: n.p., November 9, 1948), 2, IDWP 7/5, Box 7, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG115, NARA-Denver. (AEC121)

Reservoir to the Boise River at the Boise Diversion Dam. 149 However, a cost comparison revealed that the Payette-Boise aqueduct was cheaper than the Alder Creek-Mores Creek tunnel. 150

In 1949, the Mountain Home Project was "in the final planning stages," and the BLM once again withdrew lands within the boundaries of the project from settlement. 151 A 1952 BOR report estimated the total project cost at nearly \$267 million (equivalent to \$3.17 billion in 2024 dollars). 152 Ultimately, the projected cost of the Payette Unit proved too steep, and neither the Budget Bureau nor Congress granted final approval to the plan. 153

¹⁴⁹ L. D. Jarrard, "Reconnaissance Geologic Report of the Alder Creek-Mores Creek Tunnel, Mountain Home Project, Idaho," July 1949, Summary and Conclusions IDWP 7/4, Box 7, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC122)

¹⁵⁰ Koessner, "Memorandum on Comparative Cost," 4. (AEC121)

¹⁵¹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Definite Project Report on Lucky Peak Dam and Reservoir, Boise River, Idaho," October 3, 1949, 12, Box 792, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver; Bureau of Land Management, "Mountain Home Project, Idaho: First Form Reclamation Withdrawal," Federal Register 17, no. 44 (March 4, 1952): 1907. (AEC152, AEC215)

¹⁵² Regional Engineer to Regional Planning Engineer, BOR, "Supporting Cost Estimate Data for the Mountain Home Division—Snake River Project," 1952, Box 787, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC128)

¹⁵³ Regional Planning Engineer to Regional Engineer, Memorandum Re: Cost Estimate, Jan. 1952 Price Level, Mt. Home Division, Snake River Project—Idaho, March 5, 1952, File: 213.SN 8-8-52 Supporting Cost Estimate Data for the Mountain Home Division—Snake River Project, Box 787, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver: W. G. Sloan, "An Alternate Plan for the Development of Mountain Home Project, Idaho," March 17, 1953, 4, File: IDWP 6/10, Box 6, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC128, AEC119)

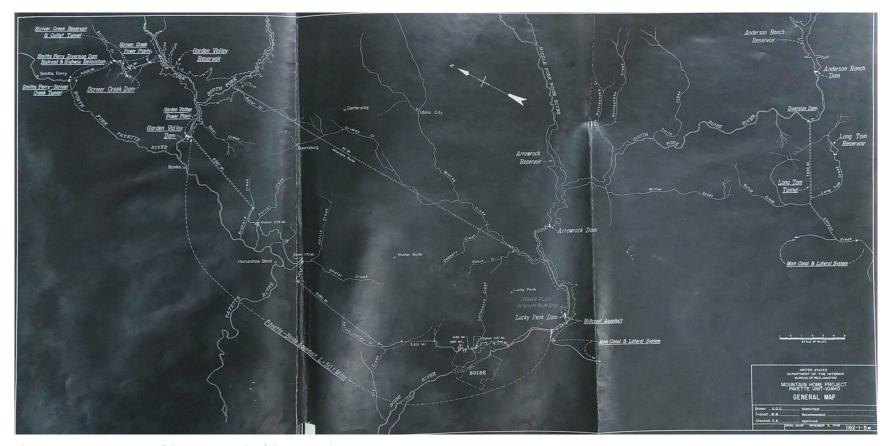


Figure 14. 1948 BOR map of the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Mountain Home Project, Payette Unit-Idaho, General Map," November 5, 1948, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

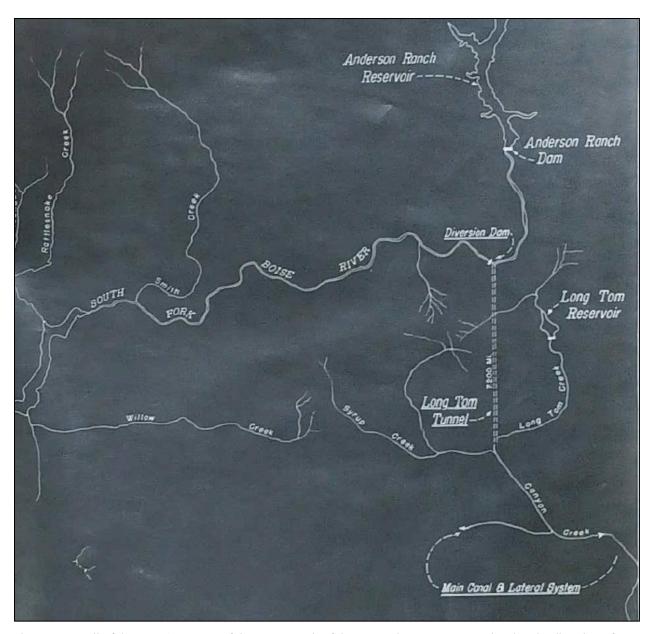


Figure 15. Detail of the 1948 BOR map of the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project showing the diversion of Anderson Ranch water at Long Tom.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Mountain Home Project, Payette Unit-Idaho, General Map," November 5, 1948, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver.



Figure 16. Detail of the 1948 BOR map of the Payette Unit of the Mountain Home Project showing the Payette exchange feature and alternate tunnel from Garden Valley to Mores Creek. A proposed dam at Lucky Peak was intended to provide limited water to the Hillcrest Unit.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Mountain Home Project, Payette Unit-Idaho, General Map," November 5, 1948, IDWP 8/1, Box 8, 8NS-115-93-001, Proposed Reclamation Project Reports, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

Sloan's Boise River Valley Pumping Exchange Plan, 1950s

In 1952, following the BOR's failure to secure federal approval for the Payette Unit, BOR Engineer W. G. Sloan proposed an alternate plan for reclaiming Mountain Home. Sloan envisioned drilling hundreds of wells in the water-logged Boise River Valley fields and pumping that water and water from the Snake River onto the lower Boise River Valley, eliminating the need for water delivery from the Payette River (Figure 17). Groundwater pumping would free up approximately 540,000 acre-feet of water stored at Anderson Ranch for delivery to the 110,000-acre Long Tom

¹⁵⁴ Sloan estimated that groundwater pumping of the Boise River Valley could provide between 200,000 and 300,000 acre-feet of water. He projected 150,000 acre-feet of water could be pumped from the Snake River. Sloan, "An Alternate Plan," 1. (AEC119)

Unit of Mountain Home through a tunnel at Long Tom Creek.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, a system of canals and laterals running from a proposed diversion dam or pumping station below Lucky Peak Reservoir would supply 60,000 acre-feet of water to the 12,000-acre Hillcrest Unit south of Boise.¹⁵⁶

In March 1953, Sloan produced a detailed report on the plan, noting that Anderson Ranch Dam had provided such an overabundance of water in the Boise River Valley that it was used injudiciously. Drainage facilities had become overburdened, and waterlogging had "reached dangerous proportions." Because Sloan's plan did not involve diversion from the Payette River watershed, it came in at \$54 million gross cost (equivalent to \$636 million in 2024 dollars), a fraction of the estimated cost of the Payette Unit. 158

Due to "[m]uch local and congressional interest" in Sloan's plan, Idaho Congressman Hamer H. Budge commissioned James K. Carr, an engineering consultant for the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to review the plan's feasibility from an engineering and economic standpoint. Carr's May 1953 report concluded that Sloan's plan was "economically justified" and "financially feasible. He also believed that the "drainage benefits would be very great and, in themselves, would probably justify further study of this proposal. Ultimately, Carr suggested that the BOR conduct a study and prepare a report on the plan "as soon as possible."

The BOR evaluated Sloan's plan in 1954. The associated report, produced in November 1954, projected a revised total cost of \$77 million (equivalent to \$900 million in 2024 dollars). The BOR acknowledged the benefits to be gained from pumping out the Boise River Valley and concluded that the project had "economic justification." However, the BOR worried that the groundwater exchange program would not be fully developed before the costly construction of the Long Tom Unit.

¹⁵⁵ James Carr, Memorandum Report on an Alternate Plan Mountain Home Irrigation and Drainage Project, Idaho, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, 83rd Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1, 1953), v; R. L. Nace, S. W. West, and R. W. Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features of the Alternate Plan for the Mountain Home Project, Idaho, Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 1376 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957), 1; John Corlett, "Politically Speaking," Idaho Statesman, August 30, 1957; Letter from Congressman Budge to Chairman Miller, Enclosing Report and Letter to Secretary of the Interior McKay, in Carr, Memorandum Report, v. (AEC69, AEC70, AEC25)

¹⁵⁶ This plan contemplated only partial reclamation of the Hillcrest Unit. The entire unit encompassed 83,300 acres. Reports indicated that reclamation of the entire Hillcrest Unit necessitated development of additional water resources not feasible at that time. Nace, West, and Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features, 11. (AEC70)

¹⁵⁷ Sloan, "An Alternate Plan," 1. (AEC119)

¹⁵⁸ According to Sloan, the Boise River Valley water table started increasing in or around 1912, as irrigation intensified. Sloan argued that the valley's groundwater storage capacity had reached its peak in the mid- to late 1930s. Sloan, "An Alternate Plan," 2; Nace, West, and Mower, *Feasibility of Ground-Water Features*, 10. (AEC119, AEC70)

¹⁵⁹ BOR, "Special Report: Alternate Plan for Mountain Home Irrigation and Drainage Project, Idaho" (Boise: n.p., November 1954), 1, 500.SN 11-54, Box 787, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver; Carr, Memorandum Report, vi–1. (AEC127, AEC69)

¹⁶⁰ Carr, Memorandum Report, v. (AEC69)

¹⁶¹ Carr, Memorandum Report, 3. (AEC69)

¹⁶² BOR, "Special Report," 79. (AEC127)

¹⁶³ BOR, "Special Report," 76, 6. (AEC127)

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) also reviewed the plan. Its report emphasized the plan's contribution, in principle, to the "total water management" of the Boise River Valley. He But the USGS report also identified significant issues warranting further study. While it acknowledged the worsening Boise River Valley "drainage situation," the report cautioned against implementing a "crash' program" without adequate data and assurance of the plan's feasibility. The USGS also questioned Sloan's groundwater pumping estimates, suggesting that they were lower than what the area actually required. It also recommended that the BOR conduct detailed studies to determine the most advantageous well installation locations, noting that Sloan had "overlook[ed] natural geographic and topographic features" in his arbitrary selection of well sites. These features could affect pumping ability and, by extension, the long-term viability of the plan itself.

The USGS also observed that the proposed plan would alter the chemical composition of the pumped water, as groundwater had a higher mineral content than surface water. While surface water would dilute "most places" receiving groundwater, the report explained that "some lands might receive a preponderance of ground water." As a result, the USGS predicted "difficult negotiations" with Boise River Valley irrigators "to arrange for shifting points of diversion and to gain acceptance of substitute water supplies." The report elaborated: "Obviously it would be necessary to assure present water users of a supply that is adequate in quantity, suitable in quality, economically accessible, and capable of efficient delivery where it is needed." The USGS concluded that Sloan's plan "does not provide such assurance." These key concerns remained outstanding, as concurrent investigations of another potential storage site on the Snake River led the BOR to incorporate Sloan's plan into a new, more comprehensive reclamation proposal for southwestern Idaho.

¹⁶⁴ According to the *Idaho Statesman*, Melba resident Rex Jennings first urged construction of the Guffey Dam.
"Guffey Plan . . . Wins Full Approval"; Nace, West, and Mower, *Feasibility of Ground-Water Features*, 108, 113. (AEC25, AEC70)

¹⁶⁵ Nace, West, and Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features, 113. (AEC70)

¹⁶⁶ Nace, West, and Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features, 113. (AEC70)

¹⁶⁷ Nace, West, and Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features, 70. (AEC70)

¹⁶⁸ Nace, West, and Mower, Feasibility of Ground-Water Features, 113–14. (AEC70)

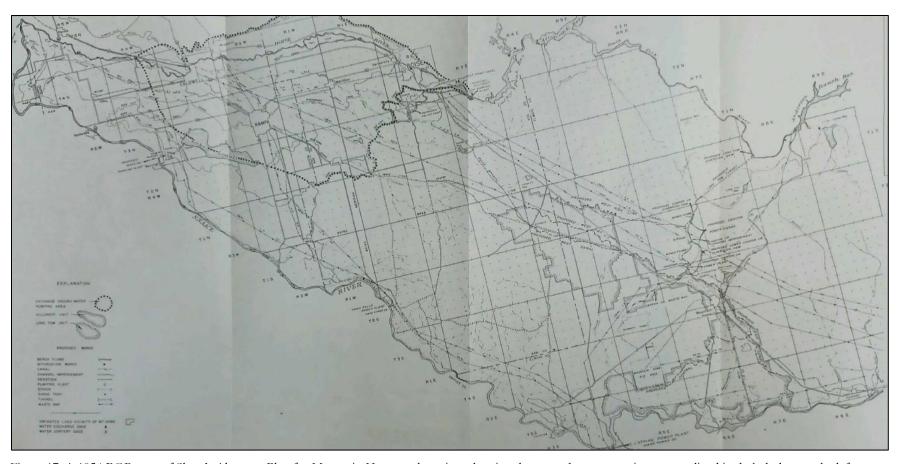


Figure 17. A 1954 BOR map of Sloan's Alternate Plan for Mountain Home reclamation, showing the groundwater pumping area outlined in dark dashes on the left and the Mountain Home Unit on the right. Canals and tunnels traverse the area.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Snake River Project, Mountain Home Division, Idaho–Oregon, General Map, Showing the Proposed Works for Hillcrest and Long Tom Units, and Marsing Pumping Plant," September 1954, 500.SN 11-54, Box 787, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver.

Guffey Unit Exchange Proposal, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, 1950s-1960s

In 1953, Hamer Budge, the same representative who commissioned a study of Sloan's plan, secured funds for a geological reconnaissance of a potential dam site on the Snake River, five miles south of Melba, known as Guffey. The resultant 1954 report by geologist Glen D. Lasson identified the most suitable location for a Guffey dam. Lasson's study built upon previous investigations conducted by the USGS and the Idaho Power Company. The USGS initially explored the Guffey area in 1914 while conducting profile surveys of the Snake River, while Idaho Power conducted surveys in 1948 but could not locate a fitting site for its project. ¹⁷⁰

In 1955, the BOR produced a report outlining a plan for what became known as the "Guffey Unit." The BOR sought to integrate the new unit into its broader plan of development for the Mountain Home Division, which was itself a component of a more comprehensive Snake River Project. The Guffey Unit proposal aimed to irrigate new land south of Nampa and on the Mountain Home Plateau, the latter as part of an exchange agreement for Snake River water on Boise River Valley lands. The plan combined elements of the Sloan proposal with other existing plans (Figure 18).

The Guffey Unit plan involved the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Snake River three miles upstream from Walters Butte Bridge and facilities to irrigate 27,000 acres at or near the Reynolds and Opaline Irrigation Districts south of the Snake River. This included the 20,400-acre Dry Lake area south of Lake Lowell and a 6,600-acre Guffey South Side area below the Guffey Dam (Figure 19). The proposed 100-foot-high Guffey Dam would raise the water surface of the Snake River and back up water to Grandview forty miles upstream of the dam. Hydroelectricity produced by the dam would power irrigation pumping, with any surplus power sold to help offset construction costs. The plan also included diversion of Snake River water to the lower Boise River Valley, supplemented by groundwater pumping. Guffey Dam storage would reduce the number of wells needed for groundwater pumping.

¹⁶⁹ "Budge Plans to Offer Bill on Guffey Dam," *Idaho Statesman*, February 28, 1957; Mark, Kulp, State Reclamation Engineer, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Reclamation, State of Idaho, 1953–1954* (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, 1954), 65. (AEC24, AEC58)

¹⁷⁰ Glen D. Lasson, "Reconnaissance Geologic Report: Guffey Dam Site, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project Area," June 1954, 510.SN GD, 6-54, Box 792, 8NN-115-85-019, Project Reports 1903–1955, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC151)

¹⁷¹ This report examined two potential Guffey developments—Guffey Unit "Plan A" and Guffey Unit "Plan B." Plan A did not include the exchange component and was not meant to immediately aid in Mountain Home reclamation efforts. Plan B incorporated Plan A but also included a water exchange program. The BOR ultimately chose to proceed with Plan B (Guffey Unit with Exchange Features) over Plan A, favoring inclusion of Mountain Home reclamation. This report refers to this development simply as the Guffey Unit, since the entire unit incorporated both Plan A and Plan B. BOR, Region 1, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho—Oregon: Reconnaissance Report* (Boise: BOR, November 1955), 2, 5, IDFG Documents Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), Boise. (AEC305)

¹⁷² The Guffey Dam would inundate Idaho Power Company's Swan Falls Dam ten miles upstream. Idaho Power had accepted the BOR's offer to compensate the company "either in energy or in money." See John Corlett, "Power Firm Plan Termed 'Hazard' to Idaho Project," *Idaho Statesman*, July 29, 1967. (AEC269)

¹⁷³ BOR, Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, 3, 5. (AEC305)

In exchange, Boise River water stored in Anderson Ranch Reservoir would be delivered to 103,800 acres in the Long Tom Unit of the Mountain Home Division via a tunnel at Long Tom Creek (Figure 20).¹⁷⁴ A smaller, 5,000-acre Hillcrest Unit south of Boise would also receive Boise River water from Lucky Peak Reservoir (Figure 21). The BOR estimated that the Guffey Plan would support the development of 1,300 farms at a cost of \$117 million (equivalent to \$1.3 billion in 2024 dollars).¹⁷⁵ The BOR anticipated that construction would take ten to twenty years, proceeding in stages.¹⁷⁶ The Long Tom Tunnel, crucial for diverting water from the South Fork Boise River to Mountain Home, was the highest priority, followed by the construction of the Guffey Dam itself.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ The remaining 98,000 acre-feet of Boise River water would replace part of the requirements for the Mora and Deer Flat highline canals. John Corlett, "Politically Speaking," *Idaho Statesman*, August 30, 1957; "Guffey Plan for Irrigation Said Feasible," *Idaho Statesman*, December 3, 1955; BOR, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division*, 28. (AEC28, AEC13, AEC305)

¹⁷⁵ BOR, Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, 3; "Budge Will Push Guffey Unit Plan," Idaho Statesman, February 14, 1957; "Budge Plans to Offer Bill on Guffey Dam." (AEC305, AEC22, AEC23)

¹⁷⁶ "Guffey B Group Studies Details of Irrigation Plan," *Idaho Statesman*, April 29, 1957. (AEC27)

¹⁷⁷ John Corlett, "Politically Speaking," *Idaho Statesman*, January 5, 1956. (AEC17)

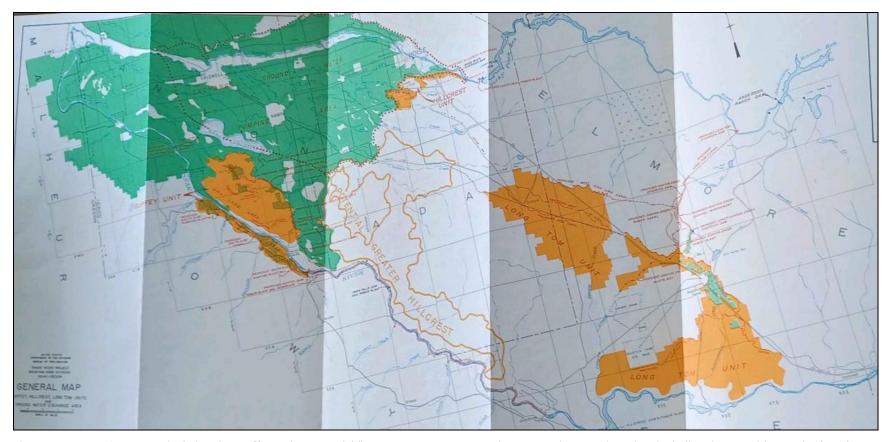


Figure 18. A 1955 BOR map depicting the Guffey Unit proposal. The orange areas represent the proposed new reclamation, including the Long Tom Unit (far right), Hillcrest Unit (upper center), and Guffey Unit (left).

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho-Oregon: Reconnaissance Report (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, November 1955), IDFG Documents Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

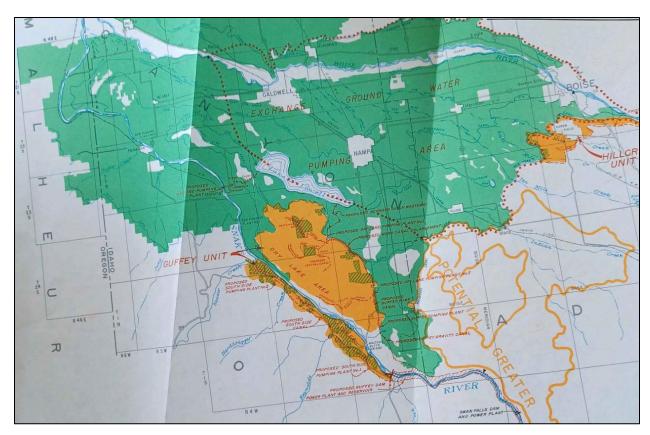


Figure 19. Detail of the 1955 BOR Guffey Unit proposal map showing the Guffey Dry Lake and South Side areas (orange) and the groundwater pumping area (green).

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho–Oregon: Reconnaissance Report* (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, November 1955), IDFG Documents Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

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Figure 20. Detail of the 1955 BOR Guffey Unit proposal map showing the Long Tom Unit of the Mountain Home Division and the proposed diversion and delivery of Boise River water.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho–Oregon:* Reconnaissance Report (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, November 1955), IDFG Documents Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

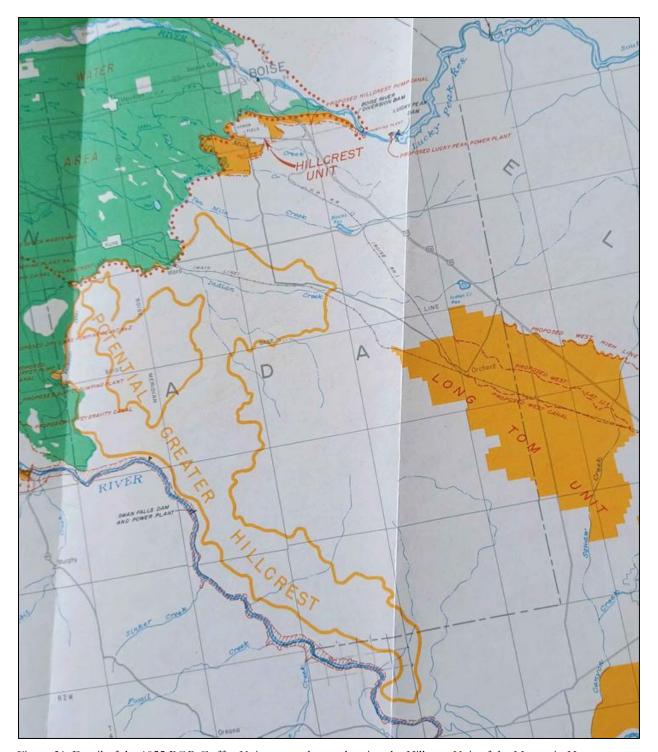


Figure 21. Detail of the 1955 BOR Guffey Unit proposal map showing the Hillcrest Unit of the Mountain Home Division, as well as a potential expansion of the Hillcrest Unit south of Ten Mile Creek.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho–Oregon:* Reconnaissance Report (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, November 1955), IDFG Documents Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

Although the BOR found the Guffey Unit plan financially feasible and physically viable, it acknowledged potential conflicts with "fish and wildlife values associated with the Snake River." In its 1955 review of the plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) expressed concerns about the impact on salmon and steelhead spawning grounds downstream of Swan Falls Dam. The USFWS maintained that "consideration must be given to the continued future utilization by salmon and steelhead of the Snake River in the reaches which would be affected by a dam at Guffey." The BOR recognized the need to resolve this conflict before proceeding with the Guffey Unit's construction and began an investigation in 1956. ¹⁸⁰

Although the BOR's investigation was proceeding, 1956 saw little progress on the Guffey Unit plan. However, in spring 1957, a Guffey Association formed to manage the project's long-range progress. In October 1957, the association drafted a bill to authorize Guffey construction, which earned the support of Idaho's congressional delegation. The delegation had independently written to the BOR commissioner in support of the plan earlier that year. In turn, the commissioner informed the delegation that studies were ongoing but significant work remained. The commissioner projected completion of a report by November 1958, which the BOR later pushed to 1959. Despite the lack of progress, the plan had gained general public support by the late 1950s due to its potential benefits. It would keep rivers within their watersheds while avoiding crosswatershed disputes and harm to Salmon River fish. However, the plan's potential impact on Snake River salmon spawning grounds quickly became a contentious issue that threatened the plan's viability.

¹⁷⁸ Lasson, "Reconnaissance Geological Report," n.p.; "Guffey Plan for Irrigation Said Feasible"; Mark R. Kulp, State Reclamation Engineer, *Nineteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Reclamation, State of Idaho, 1955–1956* (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, 1956), 81; BOR, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division*, 33. (AEC151, AEC13, AEC51, AEC305)

¹⁷⁹ Leo L. Laythe, Regional Director, and Ben A. Hundtly, Acting Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey, to H. T. Nelson, Regional Director, BOR, June 14, 1955, 1, in BOR, *Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division*; Kulp, *Nineteenth Biennial Report*, 81. (AEC305, AEC51)

¹⁸⁰ BOR, Guffey Unit, Mountain Home Division, 33. (AEC305)

¹⁸¹ "Guffey B Group"; "U.S. to Spend \$15 Million on Gem Projects in 1957," *Idaho Statesman*, September 12, 1956. (AEC27, AEC19)

¹⁸² "Guffey B Group." (AEC27)

¹⁸³ "Guffey Board Okehs Draft of World Bill," *Idaho Statesman*, October 20, 1957; Frank Church, Henry Dworshak, Gracie Pfost, and Hamer Budge, to Wilbur A. Drexheimer, Commissioner, BOR, February 26, 1957, Folder 13: Dept of Interior-Bureau of Reclamation 1957–1959, Box 128, Federal Government, 1958–1980, 3.3 Executive Branch, Department of Interior, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, Boise State University (hereafter BSU), Boise, ID. (AEC29, AEC25, AEC244)

¹⁸⁴ E. G. Nielsen, Assistant Commissioner, BOR, to Senator Frank Church, March 13, 1957, Folder 13: Dept of Interior-Bureau of Reclamation 1957–1959, Box 128, Federal Government, 1958–1980, 3.3 Executive Branch, Department of Interior, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC244)

¹⁸⁵ "Reclamation Plan Conference Held," *Times-News* (Twin Falls, ID), September 9, 1958; Geo N. Carter, State Reclamation Engineer, *Twentieth Biennial Report of the Department of Reclamation, State of Idaho, 1957–1958* (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, 1958), 63. (AEC30, AEC52)

¹⁸⁶ "Guffey Plan Wins Full Approval"; John D. Glasby, President, Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce, Before Senate Select Committee on Water Resources, n.d. [October 13, 1959], 1, Folder 9: Natural Resources—Water Resources, General, 1959 July—Dec, Box 106, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, 1.1 Natural Resources, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC25, AEC245)

While the BOR prepared its report on the Guffey Unit plan in 1959, the USFWS demanded that the plan include construction of a \$5 million fish ladder at Guffey to facilitate salmon migration. They argued that the Guffey Dam, which would flood twelve miles of the Snake River, would further harm the already-limited local salmon population there. The *Idaho Statesman* reported in August 1959 that the fish ladder "just about makes the dam infeasible." The *Idaho Statesman* reported in

Meanwhile, Mountain Home residents defended the plan. At a 1959 Senate Select Committee on National Water Resources hearing, Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce President John Glasby passionately explained the project's significance for the region. According to Glasby, the Guffey Unit proposal had given "new hope" to residents "who have long dreamed of seeing the Mountain Home desert irrigated." He also stressed that the project had gained widespread support from Idahoans, unlike previous plans. The Nampa and Boise Chambers of Commerce presidents and Idaho's governor also enthusiastically endorsed the project, although the Boise Chamber of Commerce acknowledged the delicate nature of securing agreements with Boise River Valley irrigators for the water exchange. ¹⁹¹

In September 1959, the BLM withdrew lands in the Guffey area from settlement, adding more acres to the previously withdrawn Mountain Home land. Soon after, in February 1960, the BOR completed a comprehensive draft report on the Guffey Unit proposal, incorporating findings from engineering, hydraulic, and economic studies. The 1960 plan retained most elements of the 1955 proposal but reduced the irrigable area of the Long Tom Unit from 103,800 acres to around 90,000 acres. The total cost of the plan was \$156 million in 1958 dollars (equivalent to \$1.7 billion in 2024 dollars). Notably, the project cost included \$224,000 for wildlife mitigation purposes, primarily for purchasing four Snake River islands downstream of Guffey that would be inundated. However, the "fish conflict" at the Guffey dam site remained unresolved.

Throughout 1960, anticipation for the new project grew. At the October 1960 meeting of the Idaho Reclamation Association, BOR Regional Director H. T. Nelson called Guffey "undoubtedly

¹⁸⁷ John Corlett, "Politically Speaking," Idaho Statesman, April 16, 1959. (AEC32)

¹⁸⁸ "Wildlife Service Opposes Guffey Dam Construction as Blocking Run of Fish," *Idaho Statesman*, July 24, 1959. (AEC33)

¹⁸⁹ Corlett, "Politically Speaking," April 16, 1959. (AEC32)

¹⁹⁰ Glasby, Before Senate Select Committee, 1. (AEC245)

^{191 &}quot;Report by Boise Chamber of Commerce to Senate Select Committee on Idaho Water Resources," n.d. [October 13, 1959], 4, Folder 9: Natural Resources—Water Resources, General, 1959 July–Dec, Box 106, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, 1.1 Natural Resources, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC245)

 ^{192 &}quot;Reclamation: Withdrawn Public Lands, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project," May 1970, 1, Folder 1:
 Southwest Idaho Water Project 1968–1972, Box 43, Series 2: Committees; 1972 Insular and Interior Affairs, MSS 006
 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC253)

¹⁹³ BOR, Region 1, Snake River Project, Idaho-Oregon, Mountain Home Division, Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units (Boise: BOR, February 1960), i–ii, 84, IDFG Documents Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC253)

¹⁹⁴ BOR, Snake River Project, ii. (AEC253)

¹⁹⁵ BOR, Region 1, and Corps of Engineers, *Upper Snake River Basin: Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon*, Volume IV: Project Plans, Studies and Data, Part II King Hill to Power River (Boise and Walla Walla, WA: BOR and U.S. Army Engineer District, 1961), 7-128. (AEC73, AEC204)

the most significant irrigation development available to Idaho for decades."¹⁹⁶ Over the course of the early 1960s, the BOR worked with the Mountain Home, Nampa, and Boise Chambers of Commerce to increase awareness of the project and to gain buy-in from Boise River Valley irrigators who would eventually need to participate in the water exchange.¹⁹⁷ The BOR repeatedly assured them that the exchange was one of water, not water rights.¹⁹⁸

Despite persistent efforts, obtaining the necessary exchange agreements ultimately proved unsuccessful. As a result, the BOR issued a revised Guffey report in summer 1965 that excluded Boise River Valley groundwater pumping.¹⁹⁹ The updated plan, whose project cost hovered at \$156 million (equivalent to \$1.53 billion in 2024 dollars), proposed Snake River pumping supplemented by surplus Lucky Peak Reservoir storage water when available (Figure 22).²⁰⁰ It also included a provision guaranteeing minimum streamflow to "preserve the value of the Snake River for steelhead and salmon if runs are ever restored," satisfying the USFWS's conditions for project approval.²⁰¹ The USFWS changed its requirement from a fish ladder to a guaranteed minimum streamflow after Idaho Power built the Oxbow-Brownlee Dam. This dam's insufficient fish passage facilities hindered upstream migration, contributing to a significant decline in fish populations and a near absence of salmon and steelhead trout spawning beds in the project area.²⁰²

With these necessary considerations resolved, the BOR touted the benefits of the proposed project. Bringing Mountain Home under irrigation would stimulate agricultural growth and job

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¹⁹⁶ William Rebout, "Water Problems Stressed at Reclamation Meeting," *Idaho Statesman*, October 25, 1960. (AEC34)

¹⁹⁷ H. T. Nelson, Regional Director, to Commissioner, BOR, November 1, 1961, Folder 11: Natural Resources-Water Resources, 1961, Box 106, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Natural Resources, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC246)

¹⁹⁸ [H. T. Nelson], "Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units, Mountain Home Division, Snake River Project, Idaho," n.d. [1961?], 1, Folder 11: Natural Resources-Water Resources, 1961, Box 106, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Natural Resources, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID; Southwestern Idaho Resource Development Committee, Brochure, "Facts and Figures: Snake River Project, Mountain Home Division, Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units," n.d., Folder 11: Guffey Dam Project 1964, Box 49, Series 3: Public Works, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC246, AEC254)

¹⁹⁹ "New Plans for Guffey Set by U.S.," *Idaho Statesman*, July 21, 1964; John Corlett, "Hickel Solicits Support for Veto of HEW Budget," *Idaho Statesman*, January 1, 1970; Dal Whiffin to Senator Len B. Jordan, April 2, 1963, Folder 12: Guffey Dam Project 1963, Box 49, Series 3: Public Works, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC36, AEC40)

²⁰⁰ "New Water Exchange Plan for Guffey B Project Told to Boise C of C Directors," n.p., n.d., Folder 12: Guffey Dam Project 1963, Box 49, Series 3: Public Works, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC255)

²⁰¹ BOR, Snake River Project, Idaho–Oregon, Composed of Mountain Home Division and Garden Valley Division: Report Summary, Mountain Home Division Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units (Boise: BOR, May 1965), 3–4, Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC313)

²⁰² John D. Findlay, Acting Regional Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and Samuel J. Hutchinson, Regional Director, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, to Regional Director, BOR, May 3, 1965, 2, 4, in BOR, Region 1, *Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, Idaho* (Boise: BOR, June 1966), 3-16, Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC310)

opportunities, leading to general economic development.²⁰³ Following the revised plan's release, the Idaho State Legislature memorialized Congress for its early authorization.²⁰⁴

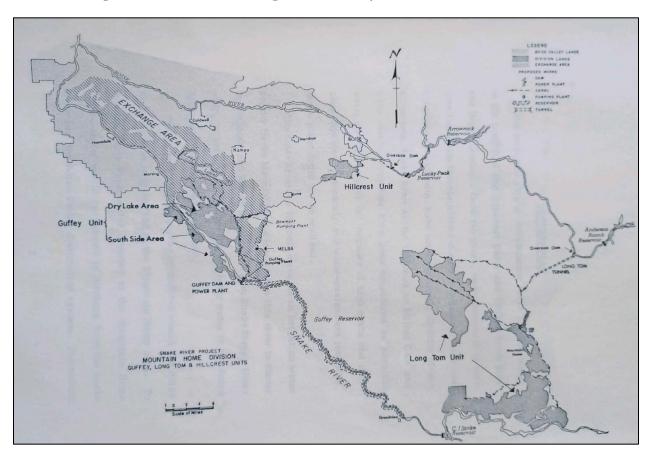


Figure 22. Map of the BOR's 1965 revised Mountain Home Division plan, which eliminated Boise River Valley groundwater pumping after area irrigators declined to participate.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Snake River Project, Idaho—Oregon, Composed of Mountain Home Division and Garden Valley Division: Report Summary, Mountain Home Division Guffey, Long Tom, and Hillcrest Units (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, May 1965), n.p., Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

Mountain Home Division, Southwestern Idaho Water Development Project, 1960s

In June 1966, the BOR expanded its Snake River Project, and the associated Mountain Home Division, Long Tom Unit, and Guffey Unit, to include the multipurpose development of the Weiser and Bruneau River subbasins. Project expansion was driven by increased local interest in

²⁰³ BOR, Snake River Project: Report Summary, 16. (AEC313)

²⁰⁴ BOR, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, 3-16; Legislature of the State of Idaho, "A Joint Memorial," n.d. [ca. 1966], Folder 1: Southwest Idaho Water Project Mar–Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, 1.1 Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC310, AEC247)

coordinating water resource development across all of southwestern Idaho. ²⁰⁵ Encompassing over 500,000 acres, the Southwestern Idaho Water Development Project comprised four divisions: Garden Valley (included in the Snake River Project), Mountain Home (included in the Snake River Project), Weiser River, and Bruneau (Figure 23). Each division was further subdivided into units. The Mountain Home Division retained the same components as in previous iterations, including the same provisions for fish and wildlife mitigation as the BOR had pursued earlier (Figure 24 through Figure 26). The projected cost of the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project was \$710 million (equivalent to \$6.9 billion in 2024 dollars), and the Mountain Home Division amounted to \$154 million (equivalent to \$1.5 billion in 2024 dollars) of the total cost. ²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ BOR, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, i. (AEC310)

²⁰⁶ BOR, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, 3-b. (AEC310)

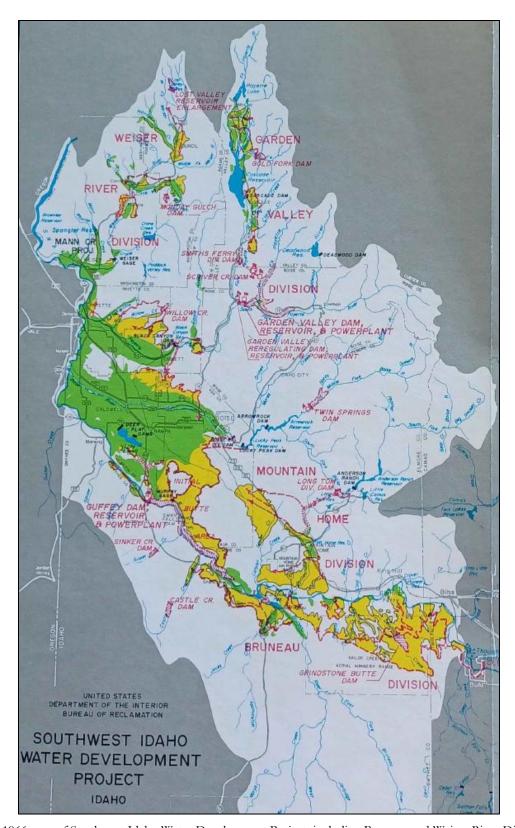


Figure 23. 1966 map of Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, including Bruneau and Weiser River Divisions. Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, Idaho* (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, June 1966), n.p., Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

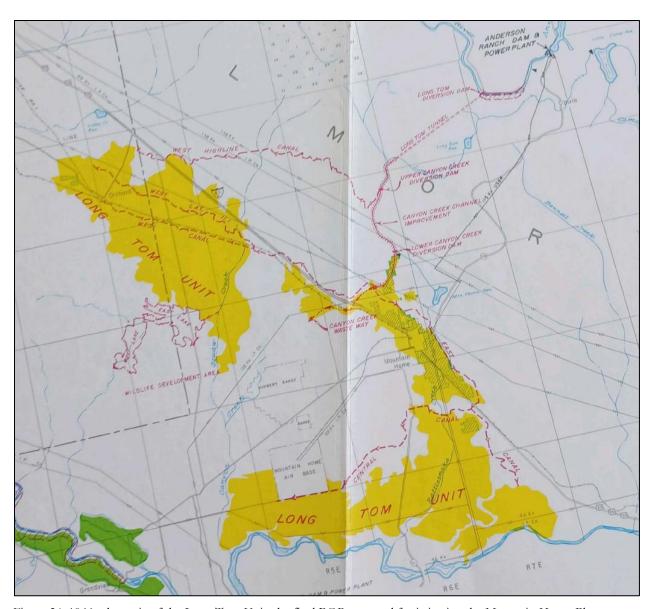


Figure 24. 1966 schematic of the Long Tom Unit, the final BOR proposal for irrigating the Mountain Home Plateau. Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, Idaho* (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, June 1966), n.p., Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

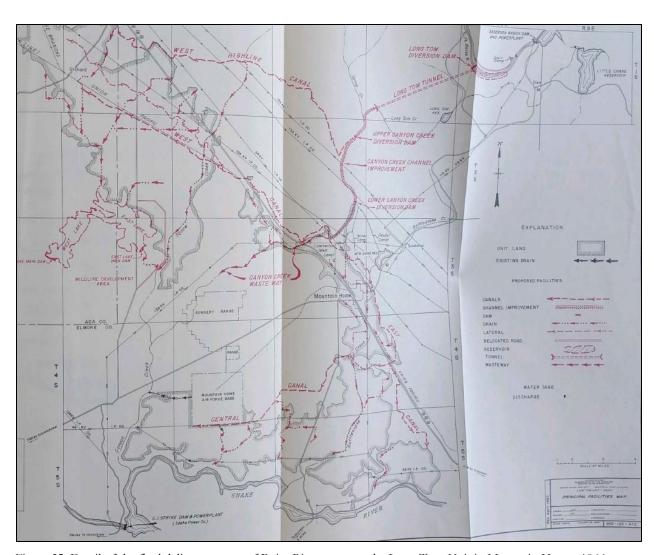


Figure 25. Detail of the final delivery system of Boise River water to the Long Tom Unit in Mountain Home, 1966. Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, *Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, Idaho* (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, June 1966), n.p., Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.



Figure 26. 1966 schematic of the Guffey Unit to irrigate lands south of Nampa and provide exchange water to the Boise River Valley as part of the BOR's final proposal to irrigate the Mountain Home Plateau.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Region 1, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project, Idaho (Boise: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, June 1966), n.p., Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Boise.

From late 1966 through mid-1967, the proposal navigated the necessary political channels. In early September 1966, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall approved the project.²⁰⁷ The Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB), the State's water planning agency, authorized the plan a week later.²⁰⁸ In January 1967, Senators Frank Church and Len Jordan introduced Senate Bill 697, the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project Act of 1967, to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.²⁰⁹ Three months later, the Idaho congressional delegation requested a Senate hearing on the bill.²¹⁰

The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs held hearings on the entire project in August 1967. In a pre-hearing statement, BOR Regional Director H. T. Nelson called the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project "the best plan that has been evolved over the years," noting that it had achieved "unanimous approval of water groups in the valley."²¹¹

One of issues debated during the hearing was whether to give "blanket authorization" to parts of the project that had not yet undergone feasibility studies, such as the Weiser River and Bruneau Divisions. ²¹² Robert R. Lee, IWRB director, urged the Committee to maintain the project's integrity by including the entire project in the bill. He emphasized the close interconnectivity of its divisions and the importance of considering the project as a whole to maintain unanimous local support for each individual division. ²¹³ Lee's strong feelings toward comprehensive project approval meant that the BOR would need to pursue the required feasibility studies in order to obtain congressional authorization.

Following the hearing, in September 1967, the Bureau of the Budget, DOI, and the Department of Agriculture recommended deferring action until the feasibility report on the entire project could be completed. Idaho's political officials wrote to the secretary of the Interior, urging the BOR to

²⁰⁷ Floyd E. Dominy, Commissioner, BOR, to Secretary of the Interior, September 2, 1966, Folder 1: Southwest Idaho Water Project Mar–Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1. Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID; BOR, "Interior Approves Feasibility Report on Reclamation's Southwest Idaho Water Development Project," September 8, 1966, Folder 1: Southwest Idaho Water Project Mar–Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1. Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC247)

²⁰⁸ The state legislature created the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB) in 1964 to conduct state water planning, which the Idaho Department of Reclamation—later renamed the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR)—was tasked with implementing, see IDWR, "About Us: History," last modified September 29, 2023, https://idwr.idaho.gov/about-idwr/; Robert R. Lee, Director, IWRB, to John Magel, Deputy Attorney General, April 20, 1971, 1, Folder 2: Water Resources Board III 1971, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC230)

²⁰⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Southwest Idaho Water Development Project Act of 1967*, S. Bill 697, 90th Cong., 1st Sess. (January 26, 1967), Folder 1: Southwest Idaho Water Project 1968–1972, Box 43, Series 2: Committees; 1972 Insular and Interior Affairs, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC253)

²¹⁰ "For Immediate Release," n.d., Folder 2: Southwest Idaho Water Project Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC248)

²¹¹ Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²¹² Robert R. Lee, Director, IWRB, to Henry M. Jackson, Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, August 31, 1967, Folder 2: Southwest Idaho Water Project Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC248)

²¹³ Lee to Jackson, August 31, 1967. (AEC248)

expedite the report's progress through the necessary federal review boards. 214 They also reintroduced the bill in 1969, but it did not receive a hearing.²¹⁵

The BOR's Southwest Idaho Water Development Project remained stalled after 1969.²¹⁶ Although the BOR never formally announced its withdrawal from the project, the lack of federal funding and global events such as the Vietnam War indefinitely postponed congressional approval of the reclamation project. In November 1969, Senator Frank Church informed the IWRB that "the outlook for expeditious federal construction of Mt. Home Division is poor" and encouraged exploring a potential State or joint-venture development approach. However, Church seemed to maintain hope that the federal government would eventually pursue the full Southwest Idaho Water Development Project. Church suggested maintaining close cooperation with the BOR "to insure [sii] the compatibility of any plan with ultimate development of the Southwest Idaho Project."²¹⁷

Summary

Despite decades of persistent efforts and numerous proposals, the federal government ultimately failed to bring irrigation to the Mountain Home Plateau. While the Boise Project expanded and brought significant benefits to the surrounding region, Mountain Home remained a dry, sparsely populated area. A complex interplay of factors, including economic constraints, environmental concerns, international conflicts, and bureaucratic hurdles, hindered the BOR's ability to bring the plans to fruition.

Although the federal government demonstrated a willingness to invest in irrigation development in southwestern Idaho, the scale and cost of the Mountain Home Project presented significant challenges. From 1918 to the late 1960s, the government's plan to irrigate the Mountain Home Plateau remained relatively consistent: divert Boise River water through a canal connecting Anderson Ranch Dam to Long Tom Creek and deliver it to a portion of the plateau that became known as the Long Tom Unit. However, Mountain Home's reclamation depended on a reciprocal water exchange with the Boise River Valley. The government spent much of its effort investigating potential water sources to divert or pump into Boise River Valley lands, freeing up Boise River water for Mountain Home. Over the course of a half-century, the BOR considered Snake, Salmon, or Payette River diversion, as well as a groundwater pumping option. Implementing a water exchange added costs and complexity to Mountain Home proposals, requiring infrastructure such as largescale dams, lengthy tunnels, and groundwater pumping wells. The complex nature of the proposed projects, involving multiple water sources and intricate engineering, presented significant challenges.

²¹⁴ Senator Frank Church to Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior, September 14, 1967, Folder 2: Southwest Idaho Water Project Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC248)

²¹⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Southwest Idaho Water Development Project Act of 1968, S. Bill 944, 91st Cong., 1st Sess. (February 7, 1969), Folder 1: Southwest Idaho Water Project 1968-1972, Box 43, Series 2: Committees; 1972 Insular and Înterior Áffairs, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC253)

²¹⁶ J. Schifferdecker, "Water Board to Seek \$175,000 to Study Joint Power Project," *Idaho Statesman*, November 21, 1969, 31. (AEC268)

²¹⁷ Senator Frank Church to Robert R. Lee, Director, IWRB, November 18, 1969, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971—Congressional Delegation, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File Box 1-Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC290)

The federal government's limited resources and competing priorities made it difficult to allocate sufficient funds and attention to the Mountain Home Project. Coordinating the various components of the project proved to be a daunting task.

The changing political, economic, and environmental landscape contributed to the federal government falling short of realizing Mountain Home's reclamation. The BOR's priorities shifted over time in response to political events. World War II, for example, extended the Anderson Ranch Dam's construction by a decade, diverting resources and time away from the Mountain Home Project. Additionally, economic constraints made it difficult to justify the substantial investment required for the Mountain Home Project. On more than one occasion, the BOR had to explain to enthusiastic Mountain Home reclamation proponents that the Boise Project had taken up much of the State's reclamation budget. Local opposition to certain aspects of later proposals, such as the need for water exchanges with other areas, further hindered the progress of a Mountain Home plan. Finally, environmental concerns became increasingly important factors in project viability. The BOR ruled out Salmon River diversion as part of its Payette Unit because studies pointed to a potential impact on fish, while Guffey Unit proposals faced objections from the USFWS.

Although Mountain Home did not become a federally irrigated area, the government's efforts left a lasting legacy. The extensive studies and investigations conducted during this fifty-year period provided valuable insights into the region's water resources, environmental conditions, and economic potential. These findings inspired future attempts and new players, namely the State of Idaho and the Idaho Power Company, to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by Mountain Home's reclamation.

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3 Joint-Venture Plan of Development: The Swan Falls-Guffey Project

In the late 1960s, as progress on the BOR's Southwest Idaho Water Development Project stalled, a new proposal for Mountain Home reclamation unexpectedly took shape. In 1966, the Idaho Power Company requested approval from the FPC to enlarge its dam at Swan Falls once its power license expired in 1970.²¹⁸ As part of its redevelopment plan, the utility also sought to erect a forty-foot-tall "low" dam at Guffey to enhance Swan Falls's operation.²¹⁹ The company's goal with this project was to expand its power-production capacity to meet increasing demand in southwestern Idaho. As such, it explained that it could not "sit idly by and see a generating facility taken away from us or see a generating potential not being properly used."

The IWRB and the BOR opposed Idaho Power's plan, contending that the proposed low dam at Guffey amounted to throwing "a monkey wrench" into the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project. ²²¹ Both agencies considered the Guffey Unit, which included a 100-foot-tall "high" dam at Guffey for storing Snake River water, crucial for Mountain Home's reclamation. In 1967, Idaho Power met with the IWRB and BOR to discuss its plan. The utility emphasized that its hydroelectric development would not prevent the BOR from eventually building its Mountain Home reclamation project. ²²² According to Idaho Power, the Guffey Dam itself was not the key to Mountain Home's reclamation; rather, the proposed pumping plant at Guffey was, since it was the structure that would deliver the exchange water to the Boise River Valley. Idaho Power believed that the BOR could simply build a sixty-foot-high lift for the pumping plant. It also pointed out that the BOR's own studies had once suggested that the site could not support a high dam, which the BOR rebuked, stating that it had already engineered a solution to the issue. The BOR firmly objected to reworking its plan to fit Idaho Power's plan. ²²³

Attempting to compromise, Idaho Power offered to expand its plan to include a Mountain Home reclamation component, demonstrating its commitment to "assisting in the irrigation development of southern Idaho."²²⁴ The company proposed a joint-venture cooperative plan with

²¹⁸ "Remarks made by Mr. O'Connor at a meeting of the Idaho Water Resource Board held in Idaho Falls on July 21, 1969," 1, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971, Idaho Power Co., Box 1, Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC287)

²¹⁹ Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²²⁰ Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²²¹ "Firm Offers Guffey Dam Alternative," *Idaho Statesman*, October 1, 1966, Folder 2: Southwest Idaho Water Project Sept 1966, Box 123, Legislation Files, 1956–1980, Series 1.1 Public Works, MSS 056 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC248)

²²² Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²²³ Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²²⁴ Idaho Power had worked with the BOR on several reclamation projects prior to this proposal. The company acknowledged that agricultural development was intricately tied to its success, as power was required to support the agricultural economy. R. A. Hogg, Idaho Power Company, "A Plan for Irrigation Development Thru Joint-Venture Participation," September 1969, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971, Idaho Power Co., Box 1, Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC287)

the State of Idaho (acting through the IWRB).²²⁵ The IWRB was intrigued but noted that its participation would depend on feasibility studies of Idaho Power's proposal.²²⁶

In September 1969, Idaho Power proposed a \$113-million joint-venture development plan to the IWRB (equivalent to \$968 million in 2024 dollars). The Swan Falls-Guffey Project consisted of a two-dam hydropower development on the Grandview-Guffey reach of the Snake River and a modified version of the BOR's Long Tom Unit. Idaho Power proposed irrigating Mountain Home with Boise River water conveyed through a tunnel-pipeline at Long Tom Creek. Its plan involved constructing a closed-pipe and sprinkler water application system on the Mountain Home Plateau. According to Idaho Power, the sprinkler system was more cost-effective and efficient than the traditional method of gravity irrigation favored by the BOR.²²⁷ A pumping plant at the Guffey Dam would bring Snake River exchange water to the Boise River Valley to replace that taken at Long Tom (Figure 27).²²⁸

Idaho Power outlined a financing arrangement wherein the IWRB would build the two dams and acquire the necessary land and land rights for the hydropower development, funding this effort through tax-free securities such as revenue bonds. Meanwhile, Idaho Power would install the generation and power facilities and pay the IWRB for using the dam facilities.²²⁹ The IWRB would use the company's annual payment to both pay off the revenue bonds and ultimately fund the Mountain Home irrigation component.

²²⁵ Corlett, "Power Firm Plan." (AEC269)

²²⁶ State participation in water resource development was a relatively novel concept in the 1960s. John Corlett, "Idaho Power Firm Suggests Three Separate Plans for Future Development of Swan Falls Dam," *Idaho Statesman*, June 26, 1969; Robert R. Lee to George Ramspeck, September 24, 1970, 2, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971, Idaho Power Co., Box 1, Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC270, AEC286)

²²⁷ The IDWR produced a report the following year confirming the rising popularity of sprinkler systems in irrigation. Although gravity irrigation accounted for 82 percent of all irrigation in Idaho in 1970, the report noted that sprinkler irrigation "has increased rapidly in the state in recent years." According to the report, sprinkler irrigation allowed for easier reclamation of "rolling topography," which comprised most of the new lands being placed under irrigation by 1970. Sprinkler irrigation eliminated the necessity of land leveling and use of drainage ditches and canals, allowing farmers to "develop rectangular shaped fields that lend themselves to more efficient farming operations." See IDWR, *Potentially Irrigable Lands in Idaho, Summary Report Number One* (Boise: IDWR, July 1970), 2, Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise; "Idaho Power Plan for Desert Reclamation Shown," *Idaho Statesman*, September 29, 1969, 29. (AEC312)

²²⁸ John Corlett, "Idaho Power Offers Partnership with State for Irrigation Project," *Idaho Statesman*, September 13, 1969, 1; "Idaho Power Plan: 'Swan-Guffey' Impact Related," October 23, 1969, File 22: Lands and Water Development 1968, Box 19, Series 2: 2: Committees; 1968 Government Operations, MSS 006 Len B. Jordan Papers, 1962–1972, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC271, AEC251)

²²⁹ Hogg, "A Plan for Irrigation Development," 7; IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting No. 6-69," September 12, 1969, 2, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise. (AEC287, AEC322)

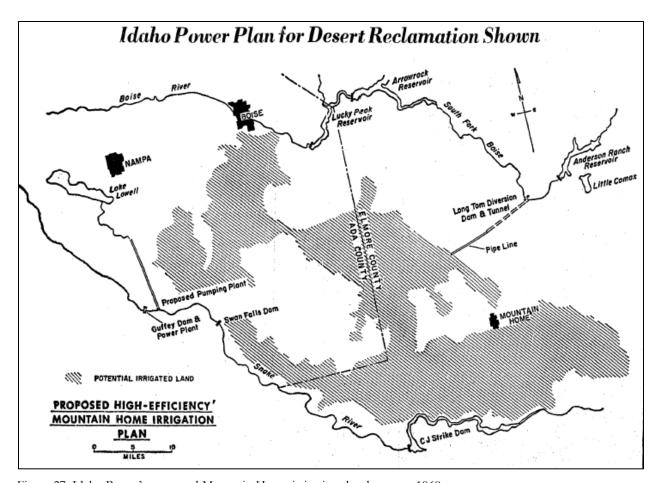


Figure 27. Idaho Power's proposed Mountain Home irrigation development, 1969. Source: "Idaho Power Plan for Desert Reclamation Show," *Idaho Statesman*, September 29, 1969.

The joint-venture proposal drew almost instant concern from community members such as former IWRB Chairman George Crookham. Although he viewed Idaho Power's proposal as a "sincere attempt at . . . cooperation," Crookham believed that it was a mere "redefinition of priorities of the Guffey-Grandview reach of the Snake River—from reclamation to peaking [power production]." He also warned that the IWRB would be taking on most of the work and the risk for "none of the profit from the sale of power." Crookham suggested that the State should build the project itself instead.

Members of the IWRB also doubted whether the State could legally issue tax-free revenue bonds to fund a project that might benefit a private party. The IWRB promptly requested a ruling from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on the tax-exempt status of the potential revenue bonds, but this ruling would not come for several years.²³² Fearing that "an unfavorable ruling would result in loss

²³⁰ "Idaho Power's 'Partnership Plan' to Develop the Southwest Desert," *Intermountain Observer*, September 27, 1969. (AEC287)

²³¹ "Idaho Power's 'Partnership Plan'" (emphasis in original). (AEC287)

²³² IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting No. 2-73," February 2, 5, 1973, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; Philip E. Peterson to Verl King, February 18, 1973, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise. (AEC322)

of the funds expended for studies," some board members suggested exploring "alternative financial arrangements," such as full state sponsorship.²³³

Despite these initial concerns, the IWRB continued to pursue the joint venture because it increasingly recognized that federal funding for the BOR's Southwest Idaho Water Development Project was unlikely. For its part, the BOR endorsed the joint venture, noting that limited funding prevented its active involvement in the project.²³⁴ In 1970, the BOR's funding situation had created a "\$2 billion backlog of federal projects."²³⁵ While lacking the capacity for immediate financing, the BOR hoped to contribute to Mountain Home's reclamation by reevaluating the Mountain Home Division in 1972 and 1973. The BOR intended this reevaluation to update "project economics" and ensure that all stakeholders "will be aware of the program for developing the irrigation features of the Mountain Home Division."²³⁶ While the IWRB acknowledged that federal funding was not available, it believed that getting at least a portion of the project funded with State or private money could help make the Mountain Home Division more appealing to Congress and potentially influence the BOR to plan and fund the irrigation features of the project down the line.²³⁷

The IWRB petitioned Governor Don Samuelson to authorize a feasibility study of Idaho Power's proposal. In April 1970, Samuelson approved \$175,000 (equivalent to \$1.4 million in 2024 dollars) for the study.²³⁸ In his funding approval, Samuelson described the proposed project as an "innovative and bold' joint private-federal-state financing of the initial phase of the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project." He emphasized that due to "a low national priority and tremendous backlog of unfunded projects, federal money alone cannot realistically be counted on to move our reclamation project forward."²³⁹ The approved funds also supported the IWRB's effort to draft legislation allowing it to issue revenue bonds to finance the joint venture.²⁴⁰

²³³ Idaho Water Resource Board, "Minutes of Meeting No. 3-70," April 10, 1970, 6, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; John Corlett, "Resource Board Told Authority Needed to Issue Bonds on Snake River Project," *Idaho Statesman*, April 11, 1970, 19. (AEC227, AEC277)

²³⁴ Ellis L. Armstrong to Robert R. Lee, November 21, 1969; Ellis L. Armstrong to Robert R. Lee, December 11, 1969; H. T. Nelson to Robert R. Lee, January 7, 1970; all in File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971—USBR, Box 2, Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC295)

²³⁵ "Guffey Proposal Feared Stalled by Funds Lack," *Idaho Statesman*, February 5, 1970, 37. (AEC267)

²³⁶ Robert R. Lee to Harold T. Nelson, April 9, 1971, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971—USBR, Box 2, Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC230)

²³⁷ "Guffey Proposal Feared Stalled"; John Corlett, "Reclamation Goal Seen as Resolving Problems Involving Environment," *Idaho Statesman*, January 14, 1970, 12; Robert R. Lee to IWRB Members, February 23, 1971, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971—Other, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File Box 2-Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise; Robert R. Lee to Robb Brady, April 2, 1971, File: Swan Falls-Guffey Proj. 1971—Other, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File Box 2-Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC267, AEC266, AEC296)

²³⁸ John Corlett, "Resource Board Told Authority Needed to Issue Bonds on Snake River Project," *Idaho Statesman*, April 11, 1970, 19. (AEC277)

²³⁹ Samuelson's description of the project and reference to federal financing reflected the ultimate hope for federal funding. In 1970, it was clear that the federal government was not able to finance the project. "Water Plan Study Funds Asked," *Idaho Statesman*, January 13, 1970, 10. (AEC267)

²⁴⁰ Lee to Ramspeck, September 24, 1970, 2. (AEC286)

In October 1970, International Engineering Company produced a feasibility report. Its investigation focused on comparing joint-venture and State financing and analyzing alternative development options. International Engineering concluded that State ownership would maximize available surplus funds for "investment in water resource development."²⁴¹ However, the IWRB was skeptical about finding a power purchaser under the State ownership option. Informal discussions with public power groups and the Bonneville Power Administration were discouraging. Public power groups could not afford to pay the high proposed power cost while the Bonneville Power Administration was not interested in the State's proposed payment arrangement. ²⁴² This left Idaho Power as the only viable purchaser. IWRB's financial advisers encouraged the joint venture, arguing that it would help IWRB "expedite" its goal of reclaiming Mountain Home compared to developing the project independently. ²⁴³ These factors swayed the board toward the joint-venture financing option.

International Engineering's study also determined that a sole "high dam" development at Guffey (as proposed in the BOR's Guffey Unit) offered "the greatest economic benefits" but posed the greatest environmental risk to fish and wildlife.²⁴⁴ The engineering firm confirmed that Idaho Power's two-dam plan, comprising a high dam at Swan Falls and a low dam at Guffey, was the next best course of development for the Grandview-Guffey reach of the Snake River (Figure 28).

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission further influenced the IWRB's decision to pursue a two-dam option. In January 1971, the Commission issued a statement opposing a high dam at Guffey, noting that it would "essentially eliminate all fish, wildlife and other recreational uses." According to the Commission, "Meaningful mitigation of such a loss is not possible." While the Commission was not opposed to the two-dam plan, it warned that any development on the Grandview-Guffey

²⁴¹ International Engineering Company, Inc., *Southwest Idaho Joint-Venture Project: Evaluation Report* (San Francisco: n.p., October 1970), I-6, Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC303)

²⁴² Phil Peterson to Robert R. Lee, December 30, 1970, 2–3, File 144002, Other Agency Projects and Proposed Projects Army Corps of Engineers [6 of 6], Box 3, NRG-115-00-265, General Correspondence 1933–1989, RG 115, NARA-Denver. (AEC223)

²⁴³ M. J. Moore, White, Weld & Co., to Philip E. Peterson, n.d., Folder 5: Water Resource Board VI 1971, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC232)

²⁴⁴ International Engineering, Southwest Idaho Joint-Venture, I-5. (AEC303)

²⁴⁵ [Idaho Fish and Game Commission], "Position of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission on Hydroelectric Development of the Grandview-Guffey Reach of the Snake River," January 5, 1971, File: Hearings-IWRB-SWIDP Joint Venture, IWRB Joint Venture—Testimony 1970, Box 1: Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise; John R. Woodworth, "Statement of the Idaho Fish and Game Department on Hydroelectric Development of the Grandview-Guffey Reach of the Snake River Presented at Idaho Water Resource Board Hearing," February 18, 1971, File: Hearings-IWRB-SWIDP Joint Venture, IWRB Joint Venture—Testimony 1970, Box 1: Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC288)

²⁴⁶ [Idaho Fish and Game Commission], "Position of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission." (AEC288)



The History of Reclamation Efforts on the Mountain Home Plateau

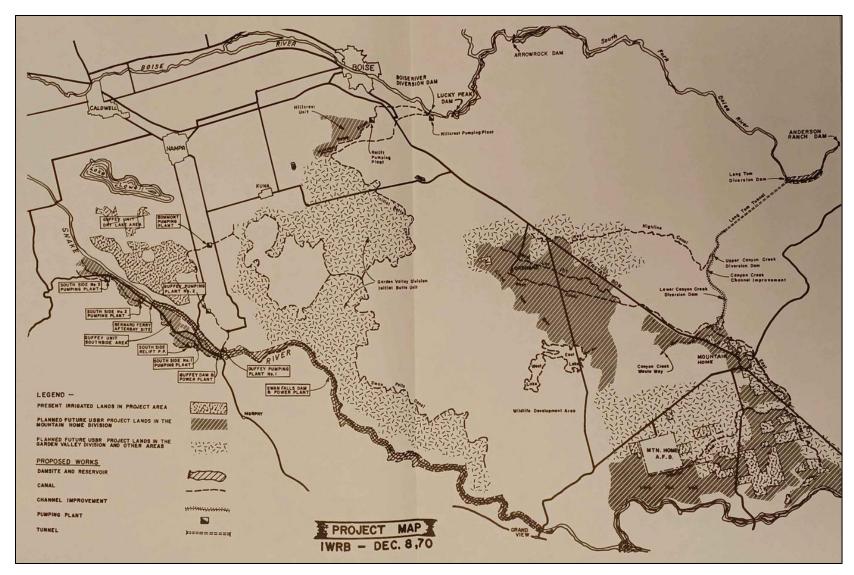


Figure 28. Detailed map of the Swan Falls-Guffey Project produced by the IWRB, 1970.

Source: Idaho Water Resource Board, "Project Map," December 8, 1970, Folder 6: Water Resource Board VII 1971, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID.

In March 1971, the Idaho State Legislature passed Senate Bills 1212 and 1254 and House Concurrent Resolution 20, approving the Swan Falls-Guffey Project and authorizing the IWRB to issue revenue bonds for its construction.²⁴⁸ The authorized project was strictly a hydroelectric development and did not include a reclamation component. This reduced its estimated cost to \$55 million (equivalent to \$427 million in 2024 dollars), half of Idaho Power's original projected cost. The absence of a provision for irrigation development led some representatives to oppose the bill. Additionally, the Mountain Home and Elmore Chambers of Commerce rescinded their support due to ambiguities surrounding the plan's long-term reclamation goals.²⁴⁹ They sought assurance "that all revenue derived from the venture will be applied to the Mountain Home project (reclamation of desert land)."²⁵⁰ Those who approved of the project saw it as a positive step toward a larger project. The idea was that "the water will be utilized some day for irrigation of those desert lands."²⁵¹

Challenges to the Swan Falls-Guffey Project

In February 1972, the IWRB and Idaho Power signed a joint-venture financing, construction, and operation agreement for the Swan Falls-Guffey Project.²⁵² Soon after, concerns about the environmental consequences of the joint venture proliferated.²⁵³ Boise River Valley residents wrote letters to the editor of the *Idaho Statesman* and government officials expressing anxieties about the project's effect on the wildlife near Swan Falls and Guffey, particularly the predatory bird habitat on

²⁴⁸ IWRB, "An Act Relating to the Development of Water Resources in Idaho; Authorizing the Idaho Water Resource Board to Plan, Finance, Construct, Acquire, Operate, Own, and Maintain a Water Project in the Grandview-Guffey Reach of the Snake River, to Issue Revenue Bonds Therefore, and to Enter into Joint Ventures under Certain Conditions with Privately Owned Electric Utilities Providing for the Construction and Installation as Part of such Water Project of Electric Power Facilities . . .," Legislature of the State of Idaho, 41st Legislature, 1st Sess. (January 18, 1971); Phil Peterson, Memorandum to Idaho Water Resource Board Members, March 24, 1971, 1–2, Folder 9: Water Resource Board: Board Minutes III 1971, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC236)

²⁴⁹ Howard K. Fleming, Chairman of Reclamation Committee, Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce, Statement presented at IWRB Hearing, "Joint-Venture Construction of Guffy [sii] Dam & Power Plant, by Idaho Water Resources Board and Idaho Power," February 21, 1971, File: Hearings-IWRB-SWIDP Joint Venture, IWRB Joint Venture— Testimony 1970, Box 1: Swan Falls Guffey (Box 1 of 2) 1971, 20070842 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC288)

²⁵⁰ Steve Ahrens, "C of C in Elmore Ends Support of Swan-Guffey," *Idaho Statesman*, February 23, 1971, 31. (AEC275)

²⁵¹ Jerry Gilliland, "House Approves State Construction of Swan Falls-Guffey Dam Project," *Idaho Statesman*, March 18, 1971, 1. (AEC273)

²⁵² IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting No. 2-72," February 21, 1972, 4, Folder 7: Water Resource Board: Minutes 1972, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID; IWRB, "A Resolution authorizing the execution of an Agreement for the Financing, Construction, Ownership and Operation of the Swan Falls-Guffey Project, dated February 21, 1972, by and between Idaho Water Resource Board and Idaho Power Company, and directing submission of said agreement to the interim committee of the Forty-First Legislature of the State of Idaho for approval," February 21, 1972, Folder 7: Water Resource Board: Minutes 1972, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC234)

²⁵³ Robert R. Lee, Director, IWRB, "Progress Report—Swan Falls-Guffey Project Legislation," February 12, 1972, 5, Folder 5: Water Resource Board VI 1971, Box 25: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC232)

the Snake River.²⁵⁴ One Boise couple's March 1972 letter explained that the wildlife area was special because it was "one of the largest remaining concentrations of birds of prey left in America today."²⁵⁵

The IWRB commissioned Utah State University's ecology department to conduct a preliminary impact and mitigation assessment of the project's effect on wildlife in 1972. The November 1972 report described several potential environmental and ecological effects, including loss of waterfowl nesting grounds, sturgeon habitat, and riparian vegetation on islands in the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, construction activity would disturb the predatory birds' habitat. While the report authors suggested various mitigation measures, they concluded that "If the Guffey Dam, which would back water to the tailwaters of the Swan Falls Dam, were built, we believe that there could be no mitigation in the real sense of the word."

By the mid-1970s, the project faced additional challenges. A depressed national economy and an IRS ruling enforcing taxes on the revenue bonds that the IWRB planned to issue to fund the project cast uncertainty over the project's future. ²⁵⁹ As the IWRB and Idaho Power navigated these hurdles, another proposal emerged.

In 1974, Howard K. Fleming, a Mountain Home resident, proposed a reclamation plan involving a seasonal aquifer recharge component. Fleming suggested diverting 1.5 million acres of Snake River floodwater stored in American Falls Dam through a 150- to 200-foot-long canal running from Milner Dam to Mountain Home. During the winter, the water would be stored in an underground aquifer and used in the summer in Mountain Home. Fleming had conducted an independent engineering assessment of the plan and estimated the total cost at \$20 million (equivalent to \$128 million in 2024 dollars). Fleming sent the proposal to the IWRB, Idaho Power, and the BOR. The IWRB and Idaho Power were focused on the Swan Falls-Guffey Project, and the BOR rejected the

²⁵⁴ Fred A. Christensen to Cecil D. Andrus, Governor, March 9, 1972, Folder 47: Swan Falls-Guffey Dam II 1972, Box 13: State Files, MSS 141.1 Governor Cecil D. Andrus Papers, 1970–1995, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC241)

²⁵⁵ R. B. Froehlich, "Letters to the Statesman Editor: Boise Couple Feels Dam Project Perils Gem Wildlife, Artifacts," *Idaho Statesman*, March 14, 1972, 5. (AEC278)

²⁵⁶ William F. Sigler, et al., "The Potential Impact and Assessment of Mitigation of Swan Falls and Guffey Dams on the Snake River Ecosystem" (n.p.: n.p., November 1, 1972), 24–26, 29, 30, 33–34, Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC315)

²⁵⁷ Sigler, et al., "The Potential Impact and Assessment of Mitigation," 33. (AEC315)

²⁵⁸ Sigler, et al., "The Potential Impact and Assessment of Mitigation," 39. (AEC315)

²⁵⁹ Jerry Gilliland, "Snake River Dams Win High Court OK," *Idaho Statesman*, March 11, 1976, 1; W. Anthony Park, Meuleman & Poole, to Philip E. Peterson, May 23, 1975, 1, Folder: Swan Falls-Guffey 1975, Box 2: Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise; Philip E. Peterson to W. Anthony Park, May 30, 1975, Folder: Swan Falls-Guffey 1975, Box 2: Swan Falls Guffey (Box 2 of 2) 1971, 20070843 Idaho Water Resource Board Planning Project File, AR 53: Department of Water Administration, Idaho State Archives and Research Center, Boise. (AEC279, AEC297)

²⁶⁰ Lou Babb, "Fleming Advances New Irrigation Proposal," Mountain Home News, June 20, 1974, Folder 10: Department of Interior-Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1975 May—Dec, Box 128, Federal Government, 1958–1980, 3.3 Executive Branch, Department of Interior, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC243)

plan, citing concerns about canal length, associated cost, right-of-way acquisition, and the small repayment base.²⁶¹

In the late 1970s, the Swan Falls-Guffey Project remained the primary hope for Mountain Home's ultimate reclamation. While the Idaho State Legislature had approved the Swan Falls-Guffey Project in the early 1970s, it had never appropriated funds due to ongoing environmental concerns. As a result, the IWRB and Idaho Power created the Swan Falls-Guffey Administrative Committee in 1978, comprising two members from each entity, to conduct an environmental study on the project's potential effects on the predatory birds' habitat and the nearby white sturgeon spawning ground. ²⁶³

The Committee tasked environmental consulting firm EDAW Inc. with researching "the environmental issues associated with the development of the Swan Falls-Guffey project" to determine if potential environmental impacts would jeopardize obtaining a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license.²⁶⁴

EDAW evaluated concerns raised by environmental organizations, conservation groups, and government agencies. These concerns included potential flooding of the riparian zone and its wildlife habitat, destruction of the white sturgeon habitat, disruption of predatory birds' habitats and archaeological resources, and the loss of floating recreation. While EDAW's conclusions regarding fish, wildlife, and archaeological losses were somewhat less severe than those presented in reports by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, USFWS, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, and various conservation groups, its ultimate finding proved decisive.²⁶⁵

EDAW determined that the Swan Falls-Guffey Project would likely fail the environmental review required for a FERC license. The firm explained that even extensive technical data or mitigation measures were unlikely to sway those fundamentally opposed to the project.²⁶⁶ EDAW further noted that:

Regardless of attempts to quantify and minimize adverse effects, many groups feel that absolutely no development is compatible with the existing environmental setting and therefore, no amount of technical analysis will appreciably limit the opposition. In light of the unresolvable issues, pursuing [a] FERC license on the Swan Falls-

²⁶¹ Howard K. Fleming to Frank Church, Senator, October 14, 1975, Folder 10: Department of Interior-Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1975 May–Dec, Box 128, Federal Government, 1958–1980, 3.3 Executive Branch, Department of Interior, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID; Frank Church, Senator, to Howard K. Fleming, October 28, 1975; G. G. Stamm, Commissioner, BOR, to Frank Church, Senator, November 24, 1975, Folder 10: Department of Interior-Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 1975 May–Dec, Box 128, Federal Government, 1958–1980, 3.3 Executive Branch, Department of Interior, MSS 56 Frank Church Papers, 1941–1984, Albertsons Library Special Collections, BSU, Boise, ID. (AEC243)

²⁶² "Water Tax would Fund Two Dams," *Idaho Statesman*, December 9, 1978, 4. (AEC281)

²⁶³ Rod Gramer, "Swan Falls-Guffey Board: Dams Environmental Study OK'd," *Idaho Statesman*, April 14, 1978, 1; IDWR, "Minutes of Administrative Committee Meeting, Swan Falls-Guffey Project," May 31, 1978, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise. (AEC280, AEC322)

²⁶⁴ EDAW, Inc., "Technical Services Agreement," n.d. [June 1978], Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; EDAW Inc., Swan Falls-Guffey Hydroelectric Project: Preliminary Environmental Assessment (n.p.: n.p., December 1978), Alphabetized Project Report Bookshelves, IDWR, Boise. (AEC322, AEC319)

²⁶⁵ EDAW, Inc., Swan Falls-Guffey Hydroelectric Project, 20. (AEC319)

²⁶⁶ EDAW, Inc., Swan Falls-Guffey Hydroelectric Project, 20. (AEC319)

Guffey Project is likely to be an extremely lengthy and costly process with significant public relations risks, and with no assurance that a license is even obtainable from this effort.²⁶⁷

Consequently, the IWRB drafted a resolution to terminate the joint venture in 1978. The resolution cited "the overwhelming impacts that would result" from construction as the primary reason for abandoning the project. ²⁶⁸ Idaho Power formally requested termination of the joint venture on August 17, 1979, with a desired effective date of September 1. ²⁶⁹ The IDWR finally approved Idaho Power's termination request in June 1984, though it is unclear why IDWR waited five years to do so. ²⁷⁰

Post-Joint Venture Fallout and Groundwater Development, 1980s-1990s

By the early 1980s, irrigation development in states like Idaho, Oregon, and Washington faced challenges due to a declining farm economy driven by agricultural surpluses, high interest rates, and increasing pumping costs. Compared to the decade between the 1960s and 1970s, when an average of 55,000 acres were put under irrigation annually, new irrigation developments from the early 1970s to the 1980s involved only "small parcels on the Snake River Plain."²⁷¹ Conservationists used the depressed agricultural market to argue against the need for additional reclamation, citing government subsidies to keep farmlands idle.²⁷² New irrigation development in Idaho, particularly on the Snake River, was further hindered by polarizing debates pitting power development against irrigation.

After withdrawing from the Swan Falls-Guffey Project, Idaho Power doubled down on its plan to develop more power at Swan Falls.²⁷³ The company legally affirmed its water rights there, preventing the IWRB from purchasing the dam for reclamation purposes.²⁷⁴ This led Idaho residents

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²⁶⁷ EDAW, Inc., Swan Falls-Guffey Hydroelectric Project, 22–23. (AEC319)

²⁶⁸ [IDWR], "Resolution to Authorize Payment and to Terminate the February 21, 1971, Agreement, as Amended, for the Financing, Construction, Ownership and Operation of the Swan Falls-Guffey Project," n.d. [1984?], Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; Rod Gramer, "Panel Expected to Urge Delay of Dams," *Idaho Statesman*, April 12, 1979, 1, 5. (AEC322, AEC283)

²⁶⁹ Jamea E. Bruce, President, Idaho Power, to C. Stephen Allred, IWRB, August 17, 1979, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; Wayne P. Haas to James E. Bruce, June 4, 1984, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise. (AEC322)

²⁷⁰A June 4, 1984, letter from IDWR administrator Wayne P. Haas to Idaho Power CEO James E. Bruce stated that IDWR did not act on the request "for a variety of reasons" and did not provide additional information. See Haas to Bruce, June 4, 1984. (AEC322)

²⁷¹ Ron Zellar, "Complex Water-Rights Pact Leaves Questions Unanswered," *Idaho Statesman*, November 25, 1984, 1, 10A. (AEC265)

²⁷² Zellar, "Complex Water-Rights Pact"; "Birds of Prey Area," *Idaho Statesman*, April 4, 1981, 6. (AEC265, AEC258)

²⁷³ IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting No. 4-82," July 8–9, 1982, 6, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; "Issue Paper on the Dredge of the Snake River to Increase Power Production," n.d., Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise; Ron Zellar, "Development Group Backs Water-Rights Pact," *Idaho Statesman*, February 7, 1995, 5C. (AEC322, AEC264)

²⁷⁴ Ron Zellar, "Farm Growth Slows," *Idaho Statesman*, December 18, 1983, 78; Ron Zellar, "Board Takes Steps to Buy Swan Falls," *Idaho Statesman*, April 16, 1983, 1; *Idaho Power Company v. State of Idaho*, 104 Idaho 575 (1983), 14–15; "Swan Falls Statement by Robert R. Lee," August 20, 1983, 1–2, Minutes of the House Resources & Conservation Committee Hearing on 2006 House Bill 800, March 15, 2006. (AEC257, AEC359, AEC323, AEC324)

to view irrigation and power development as mutually exclusive, furthering the perception that Snake River water could either be used for "cheap food or cheap lights."²⁷⁵

Further complicating the discussions was the question of who would bear the cost of increased power rates if the new hydropower project diverted some water for irrigation. If the cost of irrigating new land was spread equally across all power consumers, both irrigators' and power consumers' rates would increase. However, if irrigators were required to pay the entire cost for adapting the hydropower infrastructure, their rates would increase significantly, while other customers' rates would increase marginally.²⁷⁶ Southern Idaho farmers were not united on this issue. Downstream irrigators who were not affected by the potential Swan Falls development would face rate increases without any benefit.²⁷⁷

In spite of all the controversy, Mountain Home residents continued to fight for reclamation, as well as for the preservation of limited existing water supply sources such as groundwater. In the absence of largescale reclamation or access to surface water, Mountain Home residents had developed groundwater in the late 1940s and early 1950s for irrigation and domestic purposes. Groundwater pumped from wells helped bring new parcels of land under cultivation in the 1960s, particularly near the Mountain Home Air Force Base (Figure 29). However, this development was limited to the southern and eastern portions of the plateau, where aquifers were more extensive. ²⁷⁸ By the late 1970s, groundwater supplied 40,000 acres with water. ²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Zellar, "Farm Growth Slows." (AEC257)

²⁷⁶ Zellar, "Farm Growth Slows." (AEC257)

²⁷⁷ Zellar, "Farm Growth Slows." (AEC257)

²⁷⁸ Much of the groundwater supplying the Mountain Home Plateau comes from the Bruneau and Glenns Ferry Formations. A small amount of groundwater also comes from perched aquifers near Mountain Home. Dale R. Ralston and Sherl L. Chapman, *Ground-Water Resource of the Mountain Home Area, Elmore County, Idaho*, Water Information Bulletin No. 4 (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, July 1968), 58; SPF Water Engineering, LLC, *Elmore County Water Supply Alternatives* (Boise, n.p., February 28, 2017), ii. (AEC335, AEC338)

²⁷⁹ Another 30,000 acres were irrigated with surface water from sources such as the Little Camas Reservoir, located twenty miles northeast of Mountain Home, and the Mountain Home Reservoir. The Little Camas Reservoir received discharges from Boise River tributaries. H. W. Young, "Reconnaissance of Ground-Water Resources in the Mountain Home Plateau Area, Southwest Idaho," Water Resources Investigations 77-108, Open File Report (Boise: U.S. Geological Survey [USGS], IDWR, December 1977), 2. (AEC339)

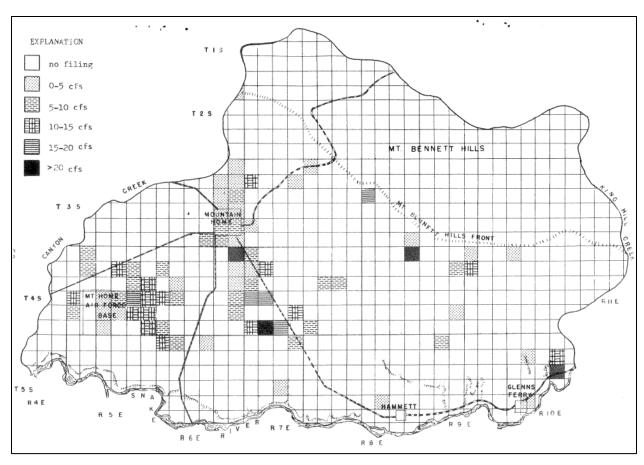


Figure 29. Location of groundwater filings in the southern and eastern portion of the Mountain Home Plateau, 1960s. Source: Dale R. Ralston and Sherl L. Chapman, *Ground-Water Resource of the Mountain Home Area, Elmore County, Idaho*, Water Information Bulletin No. 4 (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, July 1968), 59.

Mountain Home's reliance on groundwater withdrawals led to notable water level declines by the 1970s. Aquifer recharge through precipitation, runoff, and seepage from canals, tunnels, and the Lucky Peak and Barber Dams was insufficient to curb these declines. While some wells dried out, pumping lifts allowed for access to additional water, but they quickly became expensive and less productive. ²⁸¹

Concerned about declining water levels, Mountain Home residents began focusing on groundwater monitoring and maintenance in the early 1980s. Their efforts led the IDWR and USGS to conduct multiple studies and to declare the Cinder Cone Butte Area in the eastern Mountain Home Plateau as a Critical Groundwater Area (CGWA) in 1981, closing the area to new groundwater appropriations.²⁸² A year later, the IDWR declared a larger area surrounding Cinder Cone Butte as a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA), indicating that it was approaching

²⁸⁰ Water levels dropped more than twenty feet from 1971 to 1977 south of Mountain Home, where wells were concentrated. Young, "Reconnaissance of Ground-Water Resources," 2. (AEC339)

²⁸¹ Young, "Reconnaissance of Ground-Water Resources," 36; Dale R. Ralston and Sherl L. Chapman, *Ground-Water Resource of Southern Ada and Western Elmore Counties, Idaho*, Water Information Bulletin No. 15 (Boise: IDWR, February 1970), viii. (AEC339, AEC340)

²⁸² A. Kenneth Dunn, Director, IDWR, "Order Establishing Critical Groundwater Area," May 7, 1981. (AEC331)

CGWA status (Figure 30).²⁸³ The IDWR later established the Mountain Home Ground Water Area Advisory Committee to investigate and propose a groundwater recharge program.²⁸⁴

In 1998, the Committee completed a draft plan but stopped short of finalizing it.²⁸⁵ In 2004, the Mountain Home Working Group of the Idaho Legislative Council's Natural Resources Interim Committee produced a report on groundwater recharge prospects. The working group proposed some temporary solutions for aquifer stabilization and urged the Mountain Home Ground Water Area Advisory Committee to complete its plan by 2005.²⁸⁶ However, further progress would not be made until the late 2010s and early 2020s.

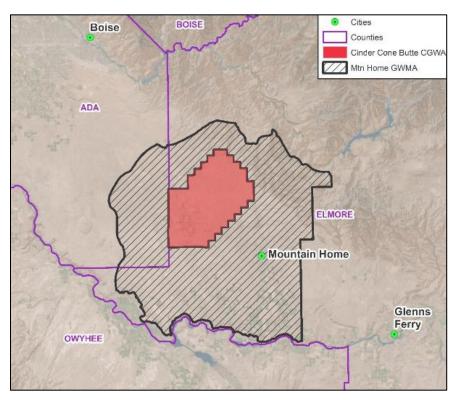


Figure 30. Location of the Cinder Cone Butte CGWA and the Mountain Home GWMA. Source: Elmore County, "Elmore County Water Resources," accessed September 13, 2024,

https://elmorecounty.org/elmore-county-water-resources/.

²⁸³ For more on CGWA and GWMAs, see IDWR, "Critical Groundwater Areas," accessed September 13, 2024, https://idwr.idaho.gov/water-rights/critical-groundwater-areas/; A. Kenneth Dunn, Director, IDWR, "Order Establishing Ground Water Management Area," November 9, 1982. (AEC332)

²⁸⁴ The committee comprised one representative each from Mountain Home, the Mountain Home Irrigation District, Elmore County, and the Mountain Home Air Force Base, along with one well driller, three farmers, and two domestic/industrial water users. Karl J. Dreher, Director, IDWR, "Order Establishing Advisory Committee," June 6, 1996. (AEC333)

²⁸⁵ Idaho Legislative Council, Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee, Mountain Home Working Group, "Final Report and Recommendations," adopted December 6, 2004, 3. (AEC334)

²⁸⁶ The Mountain Home Working Group conducted its own study of the groundwater situation affecting the plateau. They recommended relining canals to reduce seepage in order to stabilize aquifer levels. They also proposed a voluntary land set-aside program called the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to compensate landowners not to farm. Mountain Home Working Group, "Final Report," 3–8. (AEC334)

Potential Revitalization of Swan Falls-Guffey Proposal, 2000s

In 1993, the U.S. Congress established the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, effectively ending largescale reclamation efforts for Mountain Home.²⁸⁷ The DOI reopened the lands within the Mountain Home project area to settlement in 2001, but this did not stop a variation of the Swan Falls-Guffey Project from resurfacing in the early 2000s.²⁸⁸ Driven by concerns about future water availability, in 2007 and 2008, a coalition of southwestern Idaho farmers known as the Snake River Farmers Association (SRFA) proposed raising the Swan Falls Dam to increase water storage capacity. The SRFA's proposal was one of many suggested during the early 2000s aimed at increasing water storage in southwestern Idaho. Other proposals included raising the Minidoka Dam, rebuilding the Teton Dam, erecting a new dam at Twin Springs on the Middle Fork of the Boise River and one on the Weiser River, and constructing "offsite storage areas near rivers and creeks that would serve as minireservoirs [sii] where water is diverted during high water times." These proposals sought to address the growing pressure on existing water resources.

These resources were crucial for supporting the agricultural industry, which had faced significant challenges due to droughts in the early 2000s, as well as for meeting federally mandated water flow requirements for fish migration. This surge in interest followed the period in which the BOR had largely halted new dam construction for environmental and financial reasons.²⁹⁰ However, climate change and regional growth reignited discussions about the necessity of additional water storage.

In March 2008, Matt Yost, executive director of the SRFA, presented a proposal to the IWRB that involved raising the existing Swan Falls Dam by fifty feet. Yost contended that raising the dam was a more practical and environmentally sound solution compared to constructing a new storage facility. His background as an "advocate for both farmers and fish" (having previously worked for conservation groups like Idaho Rivers United and Idaho Steelhead and Salmon United) lent a certain credibility to the proposal, potentially distinguishing it from past water resource development initiatives. 292

The concept had originated with Yost's uncle, George Grant, a farmer from Rupert, Idaho, who owned extensive land holdings upstream from the Swan Falls Dam. Prior to his passing in 2007, Grant reportedly funded preliminary engineering studies and held meetings with the BOR, Idaho

²⁸⁷ Streeter, "Protect our Land, Water," *Idaho Statesman*, March 7, 1992, 11; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *An Act to Establish the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area in the State of Idaho, and for Other Purposes*, H.R. 236, 103rd Cong., 1st Sess. (January 5, 1993), https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/236/text/rs; Stowell B. Dudley, Jr., "Idaho Power's Nest Egg," *Idaho Statesman*, December 12, 1995, 10. (AEC262, AEC263)

²⁸⁸ Bureau of Land Management, "Public Land Order No. 7484; Revocation of a Bureau of Land Management Order Dated January 28, 1952; Idaho," Federal Register 66, no. 86 (May 3, 2001): 22244. (AEC216)

²⁸⁹ Sean Ellis, "Idaho Seeks to Add More Water Storage," *Idaho State Journal*, June 20, 2008. (AEC330)

²⁹⁰ Rocky Barker, "Lawmakers Have their Eye on New Dams, Higher Dams," *Idaho Statesman*, March 20, 2008, 1. (AEC328)

²⁹¹ Rocky Barker, "Farmer, Fish Advocate Proposes New Water Project," *Idaho Statesman*, March 4, 2008, 1. (AEC327)

²⁹² Barker, "Farmer, Fish Advocate." (AEC327)

Power, and even environmental groups to discuss the feasibility of the project. Yost and Grant believed that the upcoming expiration of the Swan Falls Dam license presented an opportune moment to enhance the dam's functionality for both water management and power generation. Yost projected that raising the dam would increase reservoir capacity by up to 340,000 acre-feet and significantly boost Idaho Power's electricity production. Additionally, the SRFA proposal envisioned utilizing increased water storage to address downstream demands, such as the critical "salmon flush" to aid fish migration. Yost further explained that raising the dam could potentially alleviate pressure on upstream reservoirs. 294

News coverage of the proposal pointed out the funding challenges associated with such largescale water storage projects. The federal government, historically the primary source of funding for these initiatives, was unlikely to provide the substantial financial backing it had in the past. Any future project would likely require contributions from a diverse range of project proponents, potentially including the State, local municipalities, irrigation districts, utility companies, and other large water users.²⁹⁵

While the IWRB ultimately took no action on Yost's proposal in March 2008, the Board acknowledged the need for additional sources of water. Yost returned to the IWRB in May 2008, requesting a grant of \$50,000–100,000 to conduct feasibility studies on the proposal to raise Swan Falls Dam "or rebuild at the Guffey Site." Although the IWRB declined to award the grant, considering the request "premature" at the time, they expressed appreciation to Yost for raising the critical issue of water storage. The IWRB stated that it would instead create a subcommittee "for storage to create priorities," and then reconsider Yost's proposal. Current research did not provide insight into what became of the subcommittee or of Yost's proposal.

Summary

From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, the State of Idaho and Idaho Power collaborated on the Swan Falls-Guffey Project. Although this project was a hydroelectric development, power sales were earmarked to fund reclamation in Mountain Home. Through negotiations and feasibility studies, the project gained momentum. The Idaho State Legislature authorized the Swan Falls-Guffey Project in 1971, but environmental challenges ultimately prevented its development. Concerns about the dams' impact on fish and wildlife populations, as well as the potential for negative ecological impacts, led to opposition from various organizations such as the Idaho Fish and Game Commission and state and national conservation groups. These environmental concerns ultimately proved to be insurmountable obstacles for the project, leading to its collapse in 1979.

²⁹³ Barker, "Farmer, Fish Advocate." (AEC327)

²⁹⁴ Barker, "Farmer, Fish Advocate." (AEC327)

²⁹⁵ Ellis, "Idaho Seeks." (AEC330)

²⁹⁶ Barker, "Lawmakers." (AEC328)

²⁹⁷ Nate Poppino, "Water Users Should Dodge Curtailment," *Prairie Star*, May 12, 2008; IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting No. 08-08," May 9, 2008, Idaho Water Resource Board Meeting Minutes, Agendas, and Attachments, IDWR, Boise. (AEC329, AEC322)

²⁹⁸ Poppino, "Water Users"; IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting," May 9, 2008. (AEC329, AEC322)

²⁹⁹ IWRB, "Minutes of Meeting," May 9, 2008. (AEC322)

From the 1980s to the 1990s, reclamation fell from the development agendas of many western states. Crop overproduction, high interest rates, and declining farm incomes made it difficult for farmers to continue operations. This led to debates about the necessity of additional reclamation. Additionally, hydropower was seen as a competing water use. Many in Idaho believed that the Snake River could support either irrigation or hydroelectric development, not both. These shifting priorities painted a bleak picture for the prospect of Mountain Home's reclamation. The federal government dealt the final blow when it authorized the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area in 1992, removing land that would have been part of the Guffey reclamation plan.

Mountain Home reclamation proposals resurfaced occasionally in the early 2000s, motivated by concerns about ensuring Snake River water supply. Some, like Matt Yost, a farmer and environmental advocate, suggested raising the Swan Falls Dam or building a dam at Guffey to increase storage capacity. However, neither proposal gained traction due to a lack of State funding for the necessary investigations. Mountain Home residents also became increasingly preoccupied with preserving and recharging existing water supplies such as groundwater. Their concerns led the IDWR to conduct multiple investigations on the groundwater system, ultimately placing a large area of the Mountain Home Plateau out of consideration for additional water appropriations. Nevertheless, increasing water supply to Mountain Home is an ongoing challenge. More contemporary efforts have relied on collaboration with the State to move the needle.

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Conclusion

The long and arduous pursuit of reclamation on the Mountain Home Plateau spans over a century. Community members, from nineteenth-century homesteaders to contemporary residents, share a steadfast belief in the region's potential. Their efforts and proposals over the decades have kept the goal of reclamation alive and empowered present-day initiatives.

From the late 1800s onwards, community members advocated for irrigation projects, envisioning a thriving and green Mountain Home Plateau. They explored various options in collaboration with neighboring counties, state agencies, and the federal government. While they succeeded in forming an irrigation district that now operates three reservoirs and miles of canals and tunnels to bring water to the plateau, they faced numerous setbacks, including national and international events and economic constraints, in their efforts to bring water to the plateau writ large. Yet, they persisted in their pursuit, turning to alternative water resources such as groundwater when other options proved untenable.

The federal government's involvement, while limited compared to its work in the Boise River Valley, demonstrated the feasibility and value of Mountain Home's reclamation. State and private figures similarly believed that reclamation of Mountain Home was worthwhile, as evidenced by over a decade of partnership to bring the Swan Falls-Guffey Project to life.

While the Mountain Home Plateau has not yet realized its irrigation potential, the extensive studies and investigations conducted over the decades have laid a solid foundation for future reclamation efforts. The knowledge gained from these endeavors has informed contemporary strategies and approaches to addressing ongoing water resource concerns such as aquifer recharge and additional surface water development.

Current Reclamation Prospects

More recent proposals for enhanced water delivery on the plateau are not as largescale as they were in the past. Earlier efforts focused on enlarging reclamation acreage. Current projects are primarily designed to support sustaining water delivery to the area's residential population. In recent years, Elmore County has gone to great lengths to address the region's water scarcity challenges as groundwater resources continue to decline. In doing so, the county commissioners have set an actionable plan for water resource development on the Mountain Home Plateau. In 2017, the county commissioners applied for a permit to pump South Fork Boise River water from Anderson Ranch Dam into the Little Camas Reservoir, the uppermost storage facility in the MHID system. The IDWR issued the permit in 2019, allocating half of the diversions to the irrigation district for supplemental irrigation supply and half to Elmore County's four aquifer recharge sites. The county

³⁰⁰ According to the IDWR, aquifers have declined 150 feet over forty years in some areas of the plateau. IDWR, "Idaho Water Resource Board Tours Elmore County Water Projects, Provides Briefing on Status of Major Projects," press release, July 26, 2022. (AEC76)

³⁰¹ Gary Spackman, Director, IDWR, "Permit to Appropriate Water No. 63-34348," August 13, 2019, 1, 4–5. (AEC336)

is currently in the design phase of building a water pump station at Anderson Ranch to pump water uphill into the Little Camas Reservoir.³⁰²

While working to bring more surface water to Mountain Home, the commissioners also aim to enhance knowledge about local groundwater resources. They are collaborating with the IDWR to extend an existing groundwater modeling initiative to the Mountain Home area. This State-funded effort, begun in 2016, sought to improve water resource management and planning by creating a model of groundwater flows in Boise River Valley aquifers to "better understand how changes in precipitation, water use, and water flows can affect the aquifers with relative precision." In May 2021, the County formally requested the IWRB to expand the modeling effort to include the Mountain Home area, which the IWRB granted. In a July 2022 press release, the IWRB stated that the Elmore County modeling "will take several years to develop before results are known in late 2025 or 2026."

Another plan advanced by the commissioners involves pumping water from the Snake River to the Mountain Home area for supplemental irrigation, aquifer recharge, and municipal use within Mountain Home's system.³⁰⁷ While the IWRB and Air Force are currently collaborating on a surface supply project at the Mountain Home Air Force Base, that project is too far south to improve aquifer conditions in the greater Mountain Home area. Because the base is "a significant economic driver for both the county and the state" and needs a robust community nearby for providing housing and other essential services, it is critical to ensure that the Mountain Home area has a reliable water supply.³⁰⁸

Finally, the commissioners have sought to acquire new storage water from the proposed raising of Anderson Ranch Dam. In 2019, the IWRB filed a water right permit application for 29,000 acrefeet of storage water, which would be developed from a six-foot-high raise of the Anderson Ranch

³⁰² IDWR, "Idaho Water Resource Board Tours Elmore County," 1. (AEC76)

 $^{^{303}}$ IDWR and USGS, "USGS, IDWR Complete New Treasure Valley Groundwater Flow Model," information brief, May 4, 2023. (AEC341)

³⁰⁴ IDWR and USGS, "Treasure Valley Groundwater Flow Model," 2. (AEC341)

³⁰⁵ Elmore County Board of Commissioners to IWRB, March 10, 2021; Terry Scanlan, SPF Water Engineering, LLC, "Elmore County Request to Expand the Treasure Valley Groundwater Model to the Mountain Home Plateau," presentation to the IWRB, May 21, 2021; Jeff Raybould, IDWR, "Resolution No. 04-2022: In the Matter of the Mountain Home Plateau: Resolution to Authorize Funding for the Mountain Home Hy[d]rologic Investigation," January 21, 2022. (AEC494, AEC493)

³⁰⁶ The state completed the Treasure Valley modeling in January 2023. IDWR and USGS, "Treasure Valley Groundwater Flow Model," 2; IDWR, "Idaho Water Resource Board Tours Elmore County," 2. (AEC341, AEC76)

³⁰⁷ Elmore County Board of Commissioners, "SF-299 Application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands," April 3, 2019; Elmore County Board of County Commissioners, "Application for Permit to Appropriate the Public Waters of the State of Idaho," Ident. No. 2-10535, March 3, 2017. (AEC495, AEC497)

³⁰⁸ Sarah Jacobsen, "As Mountain Home Plateau Aquifer Declines, Officials Search for Water Resource Solutions," *Idaho News*, July 7, 2021, https://idahonews.com/news/local/as-mountain-home-plateau-aquifer-declines-officials-search-for-water-resource-solutions.

Dam.³⁰⁹ In 2020, Elmore County commissioners filed a protest to the IWRB's application, seeking that "at least 10,000 acre-feet of the water appropriated under any permit is designated for beneficial uses in Elmore County."³¹⁰ The commissioners' protest asserts that the dam raise is not in the public interest unless Elmore County receives some of the storage space from the Anderson Ranch Dam, as all of the water stored in the dam originates in the county. Access to this storage water would allow the county to downsize the costly pumping and pipeline infrastructure for its South Fork Boise River project as previously described. As of early 2025, the dam-raise project is in the final design stages and has been declared feasible by the secretary of the Interior.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ The dam currently stores 413,000 acre-feet of water. The dam raise is a response to increasing water demand. IDWR, "Idaho Water Resource Board Takes Key Steps Toward Raising Anderson Ranch Dam to Create Additional Storage Water," news release, January 25, 2021, 1; IDWR, "Boise River Basin Dam Raise Feasibility Study," updated March 1, 2022, https://idwr.idaho.gov/iwrb/projects/boise-river-basin-dam-raise-feasibility-study/; BOR, "Boise River Basin Feasibility Study, Draft Environmental Impact Statement," updated September 10, 2021, https://www.usbr.gov/pn/studies/boisefeasibility/bkgrnd.html. (AEC342)

³¹⁰ Scott L. Campbell and Dylan B. Lawrence, Attorneys for Protestant Elmore County, Board of Commissioners, Amended Notice of Protest in the Matter of Application for Permit No. 63-34753, March 13, 2020; Chris Keith, Project Manager, to Jeff Raybould, IDWR, and Bryan Horsburgh, Deputy Area Manager, Snake River Office, n.d. [prepared in preparation for IWRB meeting on January 17, 2025], 1, 4; Justin Ferguson and Cynthia Bridge Clark to IWRB, January 9, 2025. (AEC337, AEC496)

^{311 &}quot;IDWR, Boise River Basin Dam Raise Feasibility Study."

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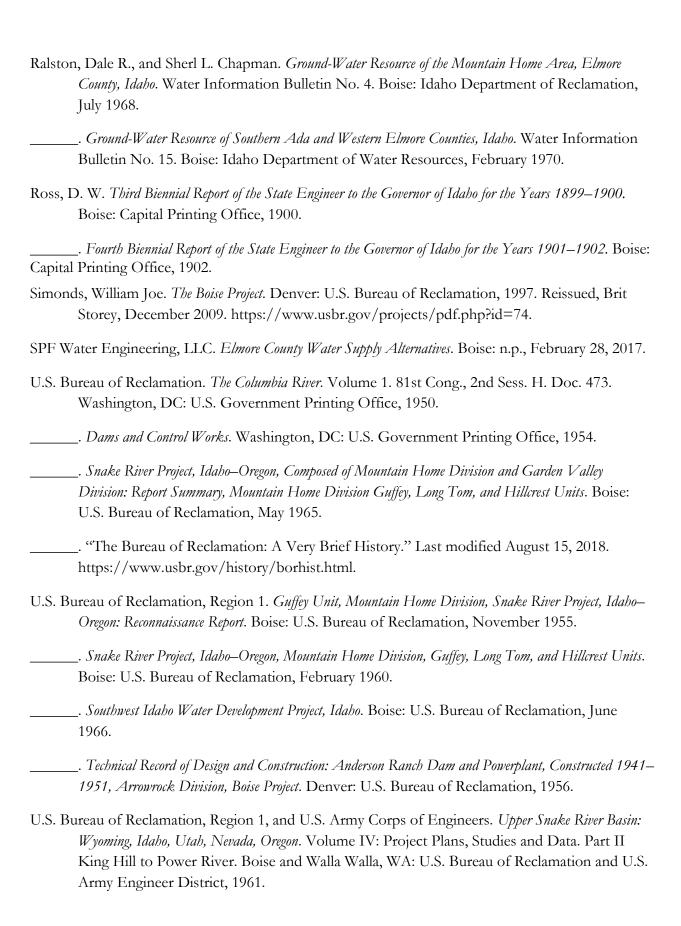
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Appendix A: Mountain Home Reclamation Proposals, 1888-Present

Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
				cost)		ow P P s = s		
1888	Engineer Arthur D. Foote	NA	Divert Snake River water at either the present-day location of Minidoka Dam or Thousand Springs.	NA	No	None	Studies proved the plan infeasible from an engineering perspective.	AEC159
1905	Engineer William Kimmel	NA	Divert South Fork Boise River water to Mountain Home by tunnel.	NA	No	None	Idea was modified by later plans.	AEC159
1906– 1918	Ira Burton Perrine	Franklin K. Lane Project	Reclaim 1 million acres encompassing the Mountain Home and Bruneau tracts by diverting Snake River water at Milner Dam with storage at American Falls and sites along Salmon Falls Creek. Supplement Snake River water supply with South Fork Boise River water diversion. Replace diverted South Fork Boise River water with Salmon River water diverted to Boise River and into Arrowrock Dam.	\$60 per acre. ³¹²	Suggested by proposal	None	Idea was incorporated into and modified by later plans.	AEC170
1908	Kuhn Irrigation and Cattle Company	NA	Divert Snake River water at Milner Dam via canal.	NA	No	None	Investigated by the federal government in 1918.	AEC159

³¹² \$60 per acre in 1918, when the plan was submitted to the USRS, is the equivalent of \$1,250 per acre in 2024.

N	ON-FEDERAL/	COMMUNITY	Y RECOMMENDATIONS AN	D PROPOSALS	FOR MOUNTA	IN HOME W	ATER DEVELOPM	IENT
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1914	Elmore County Development League	NA	Extend the Boise Project into Mountain Home through diversion of either the Salmon, Payette, Boise, or Snake River water.	NA	Some	Limited support in the form of a preliminary study using extant data.	BOR consulting engineer A. J. Wiley reviewed the plan and suggested reconnaissance studies of the Salmon and Payette River diversion plan and the Snake River diversion plan. The DOI decided not to take on any Mountain Home studies in 1915.	AEC169
1916	Elmore County Development League	Arrowrock Storage Proposal	Use stored water in Arrowrock Reservoir on Mountain Home lands.	NA	No	None	The BOR rejected the league's proposal.	AEC109, AEC99
1917	Elmore County Development League	Snake River Diversion Proposal	Divert Snake River water to Mountain Home through a canal running from a diversion dam at American Falls.	NA	Some	Limited support in the form of a preliminary feasibility investigation.	The BOR conducted a preliminary feasibility investigation of the Snake River plan but lacked funds to pursue it further.	AEC99, AEC170
1919– 1921	S. H. Hays	Stanley Basin Diversion Plan	Divert Stanley Basin waters through a tunnel drilled through the Sawtooth Mountains to the Mountain Home area and deliver water by tunnel to the 450,000-acre tract.	\$85–135 per acre or \$43 million total cost. ³¹³	No	None	The BOR declined to pursue the Stanley Basin plan in 1921.	AEC159, AEC161

³¹³ \$85–135 per acre in 1920 is the equivalent of \$1,337–2,123 per acre in 2024. \$43 million in 1920 equates to \$676.2 million in 2024.

N	ION-FEDERAL/	COMMUNIT	Y RECOMMENDATIONS AN	D PROPOSALS	FOR MOUNTA	AIN HOME W	ATER DEVELOPM	IENT
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1920– 1923	Boise Chamber of Commerce, Ada and Elmore Counties	Snake River Proposal	BOR consulting engineer A. J. Wiley, hired by the community to evaluate the viability of the Mountain Home Project, advised reclamation of Mountain Home lands through diversion of Snake River water. Water would be delivered to 325,000 acres in Mountain Home by a 210-mile canal running from Milner Dam.	\$125–150 per acre, preliminary figure. After investigation, \$184.75 per acre or a total cost of \$60 million. ³¹⁴	Some	Limited support in the form of an investigation.	Elmore and Ada Counties raised \$10,000 in 1921 for a BOR investigation of the Snake River proposal. The BOR took on a study of the proposal, ultimately rejecting it due to cost.	AEC160, AEC212, AEC159, AEC161
1924	Stanley Basin Commission	Stanley Basin Diversion Plan (re- examination of S. H. Hays's plan)	Two dams, one at Stanley and one at Cape Horn; a tunnel from Redfish Lake to South Fork Boise River; two additional dams on South Fork Boise River; and a tunnel to deliver the water to Mountain Home.	NA	No	None	Abandoned due to severe water shortages in Boise River Valley, which shifted the federal government's attention toward developing supplemental water on the Boise Project.	AEC159, AEC161
1969– 1979	State of Idaho, Idaho Water Resource Board-Idaho Power Company	Swan Falls- Guffey Joint- Venture Project	Primarily a power development proposal involving two hydroelectric dams, one at Guffey and one at Swan Falls, with eventual use of power revenue for Mountain Home reclamation.	\$113 million total cost, \$55 million for hydropower development only. ³¹⁵	Eventual federal participation desired for long-range irrigation goals.	BOR offered to help conduct studies, but this did not occur.	Joint venture terminated in response to fish and wildlife concerns. Guffey Dam not constructed.	AEC295, AEC296, AEC319, AEC322

³¹⁴ \$184.75 per acre in 1920 is the equivalent of \$2,905 per acre in 2024. \$60 million in 1920 equates to \$943.6 million in 2024.

³¹⁵ \$113 million in 1969, when Idaho Power proposed the project, is the equivalent of \$968 million in 2024. \$55 million in 1971, when the plan was finalized as a hydropower development only, is the equivalent of \$427 million in 2024.

N	ON-FEDERAL/	COMMUNITY	Y RECOMMENDATIONS AN	ND PROPOSALS	FOR MOUNT	AIN HOME V	WATER DEVELOPM	MENT
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1974	Howard Fleming, Mountain Home resident	Aquifer Recharge of Mountain Home	In the winter, divert 1.5 million acres of Snake River water stored in American Falls Dam through 150- to 200-foot-long canal running from Milner Dam to Mountain Home. Store the water in an underground aquifer for summer use in Mountain Home.	\$20 million. ³¹⁶	Plan sought federal support.	None	Independent engineering study conducted. BOR declined to pursue a study of the plan, citing canal length considerations, associated cost, right-of-way acquisition concerns, and small repayment base.	AEC243
1980s- 1990s	Elmore County Commissioners and Mountain Home residents	Groundwater level management and preservation	Protect from additional aquifer decline by restricting new groundwater pumping in specific areas within the plateau.	NA	No	None	IDWR established the Cinder Cone Butte Critical Groundwater Area and the Mountain Home Groundwater Maintenance Area in 1980s and 1990s.	AEC331– 335, AEC338– 340
Early 2000s	Snake River Farmers Association (SFRA)	Swan Falls Dam Raise	Raise Swan Falls Dam to increase water storage capacity.	NA	Plan sought federal support.	None	The BOR did not pursue proposal due to environmental and financial reasons.	AEC322

 $^{^{316}}$ \$20 million in 1974 is the equivalent of \$128 million in 2024.

N	ON-FEDERAL/	COMMUNITY	Y RECOMMENDATIONS AN	ND PROPOSALS	FOR MOUNTA	AIN HOME W	ATER DEVELOPM	MENT
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
2007– 2008	George Grant and Matt Yost (SFRA)	NA	Raise Swan Falls Dam or build a dam at Guffey to increase storage.	NA	No	None	Grant conducted preliminary engineering studies. Yost presented the plan to the IWRB and requested \$50,000–100,000 for feasibility studies. IWRB declined to issue the grant.	AEC322, AEC327– 329
2017– present	Elmore County Commissioners	Anderson Ranch Dam pumping	Build a water pump station at Anderson Ranch to pump storage water into Little Camas Reservoir, the uppermost facility in the Mountain Home Irrigation District system. Water will be pumped to Elmore County's four aquifer recharge sites.	NA	No	None	IDWR issued a permit for the development in 2019.	AEC76, AEC336
2020	Elmore County Commissioners	Anderson Ranch Dam Raise	Obtain 10,000 acre-feet of storage water from Anderson Ranch Dam raise project.	NA	No	None (though the BOR is involved in the project generally).	Elmore County Commissioners filed a protest to IWRB's permit application for 29,000 acre-feet of new storage water.	AEC337, AEC342
2022– present	Elmore County Commissioners	Treasure Valley Groundwater Flow Modeling Expansion	Improve water resource management and planning by creating a model of groundwater flows on Mountain Home Plateau.	NA	No	Some. USGS conducting groundwater studies.	IDWR approved modeling expansion to Mountain Home Plateau. Completion expected in 2025 or 2026.	AEC76, AEC341

N	NON-FEDERAL/COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR MOUNTAIN HOME WATER DEVELOPMENT									
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per-acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source		
2022– present	Elmore County Commissioners	Snake River Diversion	Divert Snake River water to the Mountain Home area.	NA	No	None	Plan in progress; estimated completion by January 2026.	AEC76		

			FEDERAL PROPOSALS	TO RECLAIM M	OUNTAIN HO	ME		
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1918– 1923	BOR	Snake River Diversion Plan	Divert Snake River water at Milner Dam, deliver water either to the Mountain Home or Bruneau tract through a 215-mile-long canal.	\$185 per acre or \$60 million total cost. ³¹⁷	Yes	Limited to a preliminary investigation.	BOR completed an initial investigation in 1918. A shortage of funds abruptly halted Mountain Home investigations until 1921. Abandoned in 1923 due to cost.	AEC159, AEC205, AEC170, AEC160, AEC99
1935— 1938	BOR	Boise- Payette- Weiser Survey	Develop storage on Payette River, augment Payette River surplus waters by transmountain diversion from the Salmon River.	NA	Yes—funding provided by Emergency Relief Administration	Detailed preliminary investigation.	Shortage of Emergency Relief funds curtailed the Mountain Home portion of the study. The resultant report published without the Mountain Home component. Salmon River diversion dropped after subsequent studies revealed impacts to fish and wildlife.	AEC174, AEC166
1940– 1954	BOR	Anderson Ranch Reservoir	Use water stored in Anderson Ranch Reservoir on 400,000 acres in Mountain Home. Diverted Payette River waters would replace storage waters used on Mountain Home.	NA	Yes	Extent of investigation unknown.	NA	AEC199, AEC97, AEC145

³¹⁷ \$185 per acre in 1923 is the equivalent of \$3,402 per acre in 2024. \$60 million in 1923 equates to \$1.1 billion in 2024.

			FEDERAL PROPOSALS T	TO RECLAIM MO	OUNTAIN HO	ME		
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1944— 1952	BOR	Payette River Exchange Agreement Plan (Payette Unit, Mountain Home Project)	Import Boise River water and apply to 200,000 acres in Mountain Home, replace Boise River water used in Mountain Home with surplus Payette River water. A second phase, only briefly mentioned, envisioned using Snake River waters to irrigate an additional 150,000 acres in Mountain Home.	\$267 million total cost. ³¹⁸	Yes	Detailed investigation.	Both the Bureau of the Budget and U.S. Congress rejected the plan due to cost.	AEC209, AEC123, AEC149, AEC67, AEC121, AEC152, AEC128, AEC69
1952– 1957	W. G. Sloan/BOR	Boise River Valley Pumping Plan (Alternate Plan for Irrigation of Mountain Home)	Drill wells in the water-logged Boise River Valley, pump the groundwater, and use it to replace Boise River water diverted to 123,000 acres in Mountain Home (divided among the Long Tom and Hillcrest Units).	\$54 million total cost initially reported, \$77 million total cost reported following subsequent investigations. ³¹⁹	Yes	Detailed investigations.	BOR and USGS conducted studies of this plan and suggested modifications. Plan incorporated into Guffey Unit proposal.	AEC70, AEC119, AEC127, AEC69
1953– 1965	BOR	Snake River Project, Mountain Home Division	Boise River water diverted to approximately 100,000 acres in Mountain Home via the Long Tom Tunnel; Snake River water, stored in proposed Guffey Dam, pumped to Boise River Valley in exchange. Initially included a Boise River Valley groundwater pumping component but removed in 1965 after Boise River Valley irrigators objected.	Total cost for Mountain Home Division only: \$117 million when first proposed and \$156 million when last considered. ³²⁰	Yes	Detailed investigations.	BOR last found project feasible in 1965, plan suspended in late 1960s due to lack of federal funding for reclamation and global events (Vietnam War). BOR did not return to this plan.	AEC22–25, AEC13–14, AEC17, AEC19–20, AEC27–30, AEC32–33, AEC36, AEC40, AEC50, AEC151, AEC187, AEC288

³¹⁸ \$267 million in 1952 is the equivalent of \$3.17 billion in 2024.

³¹⁹ \$77 million in 1957 is the equivalent of \$862 million in 2024.

³²⁰ \$117 million in 1953 is the equivalent of \$1.37 billion in 2024. \$156 million in 1958 is the equivalent of \$1.7 billion in 2024.

			FEDERAL PROPOSALS T	O RECLAIM M	OUNTAIN HO	ME		
Year	Proposed by	Proposal name	Plan details	Estimated cost (total cost or per acre cost)	Federal support?	Extent of federal support	Outcome	Source
1966— late 1960s	BOR	Southwestern Idaho Water Development Project, Mountain Home Division (expansion of Snake River Project)	Long Tom Unit: Boise River water diverted to approximately 100,000 acres in Mountain Home via the Long Tom Tunnel. Guffey Unit: Snake River water, stored in proposed Guffey Dam, pumped to Boise River Valley in exchange for Boise River water delivered to Mountain Home.	Total project cost (all four divisions): \$710 million. ³²¹ Total cost for Mountain Home Division only: \$154 million. ³²²	Yes	Detailed investigations.	BOR last found this project feasible in 1966 but lacked funds to implement it. The State of Idaho and the Idaho Power Company took over water resource planning for the Guffey area in the late 1960s.	AEC309, AEC310

 $^{^{321}}$ \$710 million in 1966 is the equivalent of \$6.9 billion in 2024.

^{322 \$154} million in 1966 is the equivalent of \$1.5 billion in 2024.