

 Virtual **H<sub>2</sub>O** Breakfast**Wednesday March 31, 2021**

## Spokane County Addressing Rural Water Needs

Growth happens, especially in appealing rural areas near urban amenities. Well water is the life blood supporting this development.

The Little Spokane Watershed is embarking on a new approach to support growth by proactively balancing ecological needs with providing water for homes.

Join Mike Hermanson, Water Resources Manager for Spokane County, at the Virtual H<sub>2</sub>O Breakfast as he highlights the collaborative effort and water savings projects identified to make this happen.

**Register now.** [Click here](#) for details and agenda with speakers and topics.

In 2016, the Washington State Supreme Court put a water-based guard rail on rural development by limiting a landowner's ability to get a building permit for a new home when the proposed source of water is a permit-exempt well. Commonly referred to as the "Hirst Decision," counties are now required to independently determine if water is legally available before issuing a building permit.

In 2018, Washington State enacted the streamflow restoration law, also known as the "Hirst Fix." Counties were directed to update watershed plans to, over a twenty-year horizon, offset impacts from new domestic permit-exempt wells by achieving a net ecological benefit. Backing up this directive was an appropriation

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of \$300 million dollars for development of plans and implementation of projects over a 15-year period.

The Little Spokane watershed, which covers parts of Spokane, Pend Oreille, and Stevens counties, was a priority to address because lagging instream flows in the summer already curtail water right availability.

Under Mike's leadership a planning group with tribal, agency and community representatives were convened to create the Little Spokane watershed plan update. Said Mike, "The original watershed planning process started back in 2000. So we were fortunate the group already had a lot of background and experience when they came to the table."

The plan identifies 18 projects which, if fully implemented, will add 4,085 acre-feet of water per year back into streams. "When you factor in projected increases in water demand," commented Mike, "we project a net gain of 1,908 acre-feet of water per year after twenty years." The plan also identified non-water off set projects that will yield a net ecological benefit. Said Mike, "These are particularly important for the two subbasins in the watershed where we project a net water loss."

Spokane County, Spokane Conservation District, the Lands Council, and others are among those who identified projects such as water right acquisitions, managed aquifer recharge, surface water storage, and riparian habitat improvement projects. Three projects have already received grant funding, and through future rounds of the Streamflow Restoration Competitive Grant program more can be brought to fruition.

At the H2O Breakfast, Mike will also highlight water right acquisitions that are placed in the state's Trust Water Rights Program to benefit streamflows or used in the county's water bank. Although the particulars of each are different, both support stream flows and groundwater recharge while providing flexibility to meet the needs of water for homes.

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events and activities that promote sustaining a healthy river system while meeting the needs of a growing population.