

READER'S VIEW WATER QUALITY MONITORING

We can't take clean water for granted

BY SARA COHN

Cutting water quality monitoring is pound foolish.

If you think clean water is unimportant, try going a day without it.



Clean water is a precious natural resource — arguably our most precious. Of course, we all need it to sustain life,

but we also need it to irrigate our crops, sustain our industry and maintain our unique way of life.

Idaho is an arid state. It takes only one hot summer or light snowpack to remind us how precious water is. Our water belongs to all of us and no one has the right to pollute it. So why is the state taking our clean water for granted?

The state Department of Environmental Quality is gutting its water quality-monitoring budget. This is one of those shortsighted moves that will only cost taxpayers more in the future. Perhaps a lot more.

It takes work to make sure Idaho's water remains clean. The last two years of budget cuts and holdbacks have resulted in the loss of one of the most fundamental functions of the Department of Environmental Quality — water quality monitoring. DEQ has proposed to suspend all water quality monitoring for the next two years.

What does this mean to Idahoans? This is a reckless move that puts far more at risk than it saves.

Until recently, DEQ was partnering with the U.S. Geological Survey to collect information about the quality of Idaho's water. The investment from the state for this partnership was minimal, and DEQ received additional staff and technical resources in return. This partnership ended recently and likely will not be renewed for the next few years.

Until recently, DEQ had the opportunity to support local efforts to clean up water through monitoring assistance — for ex-

ample, assisting cities within the Treasure Valley to monitor and clean the Boise River. Water is the lifeblood of our communities, offering recreation, enjoyment and sources of drinking water. Without monitoring information about these precious resources, Idahoans will not be able to identify problem streams or sources of pollution.

The threats to our clean water are not going away. Even now, a large open-pit mine is proposed in the headwaters of the Boise River and many more mining projects are proposed throughout the state. Mining is the No. 1 polluter of water in the U.S. Population growth in Idaho will likely increase the need to access clean drinking water and it will be difficult to attract new industries to the state if pollution limits for Idaho's streams and rivers are unknown.

In a difficult economy, the state must make difficult decisions about budget cuts and the reduction of services. Because water touches the lives of Idahoans every day and is such a necessary component of healthy families and a healthy economy, water quality monitoring should be one of Idaho's No. 1 priorities.

It certainly is a No. 1 priority for Idahoans — consistently rising to the top as Idaho's primary environmental concern. Our decision-makers should mirror this concern and protect Idahoans and Idaho's environment by maintaining water quality monitoring.

The decision to stop water quality monitoring may be penny wise, but it is pound foolish. Keeping water clean is cheaper and easier than to clean up the water once it is polluted. Join us in urging the state not to gamble on our future and to restore full support for water quality monitoring.

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