

Idaho water managers finalize deal to avoid shutoffs

TWIN FALLS, Idaho (AP) — Idaho groundwater users have agreed to cut more than 10 percent of their water claims in a monumental deal designed to stave off crippling water shutoffs along the southern half of the state.

Junior groundwater users in southern Idaho had failed to provide 89,000 acre-feet of water to senior surface irrigators by May 1, The Times-News (<http://bit.ly/1F9ZC9z>) reported. In Idaho, senior water-rights holders get a priority in the delivery of water. An acre foot is enough water to cover an acre one foot deep.

However, the two parties came to an agreement on Thursday without requiring the state to intervene.

"This is a both a short- and long-term plan," said Tim Deeg, president of Idaho Ground Water Appropriators. "It involves not only a one-year deal, but it moves it farther down the road."

Twin Falls Canal Co. Brian Olmstead said details of the agreement are still being fleshed out, but he's optimistic the deal will be signed.

"We came to an agreement that can keep people in business," Olmstead said Friday. "But it won't be business as usual."

House Speaker Scott Bedke of Oakley helped bring both sides together, Olmstead added. Prior attempts to address the issue have failed.

"We met all day," Olmstead said. "I have to give Scott a lot of credit. Both sides have been fairly far apart. But he saw that the two sides had some common ground."

Information from: The Times-News, <http://www.magicvalley.com>