

READER'S VIEW**Cleaner river benefits all of us**

The lower Boise River, in Boise, is beautiful. People admire the river from the Greenbelt, catch trout from a healthy put-and-take fishery, and look through the clear water to the gravel bottom while floating it in the summer.

All of that changes by the time the Boise enters the Snake River. Past Caldwell, the river is cloudy and turbid, and the water quality exceeds Environmental Protection Agency limits for sediment, bacteria, and nutrients. While it would be easier for Boise residents to point fingers at Canyon County, or at agriculture in particular, for causing the water quality problems, the fact is that we all contribute to the same river. Urban runoff, wastewater treatment facilities, and resident wildlife in upstream urban areas compound problems downstream.

Cleaning up the river will require mindfulness from all of us. This is described in the Total Maximum Daily Load for the low-



**TOM
DUPUIS**

er Boise River. A TMDL is a document approved by the EPA that allocates the quantity of pollutants allowed to enter the river from various sources.

The TMDL for the lower Boise River governs both point sources — like sewer treatment plant outfalls — and non-point sources, such as agricultural ditch returns. The plan group, a coalition of municipal and agricultural interests, is writing a TMDL Implementation Plan to outline how all pollution sources will meet their TMDL goals. Success will need to include Canyon County, which has the bulk of water quality problems in its section of the river, and Ada County, which contributes to those pollutants.

A two-county approach to solving problems is not a new idea. The old Ada Planning Association combined with Canyon County to make COMPASS, the regional planning group. In a recent election, voters decided to establish a

regional transportation authority for mass transit.

We need a two-county vision for making the Boise River beautiful and clean from Lucky Peak Dam to Parma. Making a personal commitment to a cleaner river is easy. Bring a bag for your dog's droppings next time you're on the Greenbelt. Don't over-fertilize your lawn. Don't rinse soaps, oil, or other chemicals into storm drains that feed the river (drains marked with a fish throughout town). Learn about the TMDL process and even get involved.

Imagine a healthy river system across two counties, and the richness it would bring to our region now and for our children's future. Through regional cooperation, we can make the TMDL implementation reality and improve water quality for everyone.

Tom Dupuis is interim facilitator of the Lower Boise River Water Quality Plan group, after the passing of Tom Krumsick, who originally prepared this piece.