

[Click Here to Print This Article](#)

January 03, 2010

Johanna Bell: We can all help to ensure the Boise River stays clean

READER'S VIEW BOISE RIVER

BY JOHANNA BELL - Idaho Statesman

READER'S VIEW BOISE RIVER

The Boise River is cleaner today than it has been in more than 100 years. Long gone are the days of dumping raw sewage, packing-plant waste and trash into the river. Thousands of us enjoy swimming, rafting, fishing or hunting along the river each year. As working rivers go, the Boise River takes the gold for water quality, and we owe thanks to everyone involved in this positive turnaround.

A few stubborn water pollution problems remain - problems that require cooperation and financial investment to solve. Over the last 15 years, the Lower Boise Watershed Council has worked closely with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality on several fronts to move us closer to solving these problems. We have collected data to assess the conditions of the river; set water quality targets that are consistent with the Clean Water Act; and prepared action plans for water quality improvement projects. As the state-designated watershed advisory group, the council represents municipal, agricultural, environmental and industrial interests working together to improve water quality in the Boise River.

The 2008 DEQ nutrient cleanup plan calls for reducing phosphorus in the river by nearly 80 percent. The plan relies on three important strategies that affect all local citizens:

- 1) Continue to reduce phosphorus that is discharged from our wastewater treatment plants.
- 2) Decrease dirt and chemicals that flow to the river from stormwater.
- 3) Help farmers reduce nutrient runoff from croplands.

First, the existing plan requires that wastewater dischargers eliminate more than 95 percent of the phosphorus that reaches the treatment plants from our homes, at a collective cost of more than \$100 million. These costs are already being seen in increased sewer user fees. These treatment levels are among the best in the nation and build on treatment improvements already put in place over the last 10 years.

Second, the plan improves water quality by reducing urban pollution like oil, pet waste and fertilizers. Keeping our communities clean and letting rain soak into our soils prevents polluted rainwater from entering the river.

Third, the council is securing critical grants for farmers to voluntarily implement water quality conservation measures and protect the Boise River. The first grant provides \$250,000 for farmers in Canyon County to install best management practices, such as sediment basins and sediment ponds, filter strips, wetlands, irrigation water management and nutrient management. The Idaho Soil Conservation Commission and the Canyon County Soil Conservation District are working in partnership with the council on this grant program, and the Ada Soil and Water Conservation District is also collaborating with landowners. More information about this grant program can be found at www.lowerboisewatershedcouncil.org/319/canyoncobmp.htm.

Together, these cleanup goals are aggressive, particularly given that the Boise River runs through the most heavily populated region in Idaho.

Last month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that these cleanup goals are not sufficient and that another cleanup plan should be developed. The council believes that local citizens and the state of Idaho should be trusted to care for our treasure. The best way to do this is to apply our limited resources to make the existing plan a reality and improve water quality, not create yet another plan.

Johanna Bell is the current chairperson of the Lower Boise Watershed Council (www.lowerboisewatershedcouncil.org), a group that reflects our common interests in the health and productivity of the Boise River.