



Big Wood Canal Company
American Falls Reservoir District #2
409 N. Apple St., Shoshone, Id 83352
P: (208) 886-2331 * F: (208) 886-2010



To: All Water Users and Agricultural Partners

From: **Big Wood Canal Company**

Date: March 11, 2026

Subject: URGENT DROUGHT NOTICE – WATER SUPPLY SHORTAGE FOR 2026 SEASON

Based on our analysis of the current water year and decades of experience managing runoff in this basin, we are issuing formal notice of a severe water shortage. It is our professional assessment that the available water supply for the 2026 irrigation season will be insufficient to support a full-term corn crop.

The Discrepancy in Official Forecasts and Calculation of Supply The official March 1 reports from the NRCS and NOAA (NWRFC) provide streamflow forecasts for the Big Wood River Basin and Magic Reservoir (MAGI1). While official median reports often highlight the 50% exceedance level, we strongly advise all users to base their planning on the more conservative **90% exceedance forecast**.

For the Big Wood River Basin, the 90% "drier" scenario provides a combined storage and runoff volume of **147 KAF** (thousand acre-feet). When we account for the fact that we cannot access the bottom **6 KAF** of the reservoir, our total usable water drops to **141 KAF**.

If you perform the standard mathematical calculation based on our daily demand:

- **141 KAF (Usable Water) ÷ 1.8 KAF (Daily Consumption) = 78.3 Days**

While a paper calculation suggests a 78-day run, our historical experience with how the water runs off tells a different story.

The Reality of Runoff: Why the Math is Misleading Historically, the filling and maintenance of the dam relies on a specific sequence:

1. **Lower elevation snow** (typically below ~7,500 ft) provides the initial volume to fill the dam early in the spring.
2. **Higher elevation snow** acts as a buffer to maintain the level for as long as possible until natural flow disappears.



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This year, Idaho is experiencing a "warm snow drought." The snowpack at elevations below 7,500 ft is virtually non-existent. Without that early-season "fill" from the lower elevations, the high-elevation snow is forced to fill the reservoir's base capacity rather than extending the season. Consequently, the natural flow will taper off much sooner than the 90% exceedance model suggests.

Operational Impact: 40-45 Day Run Window Based on our knowledge of past years with similar "high-only" snow distributions, **we believe we will only end up with enough water in the dam to run for approximately 40 to 45 days.** Because corn requires a significantly longer irrigation window to reach maturity, and with a spring forecast to be warmer and drier than normal, we strongly advise all users to reconsider their planting strategies immediately. The current water outlook will not sustain high-water-demand crops through to harvest.

Sincerely,

Tyson Scott General Manager **Big Wood Canal Company**