



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**WATER RESOURCES**

# Priest Lake Dam Operations Overview

Michelle Richman  
Bill Cresse  
May 2026





## Purpose – To Discuss:

Spring 2026 Dam Operations

Dry Year / Spring Runoff

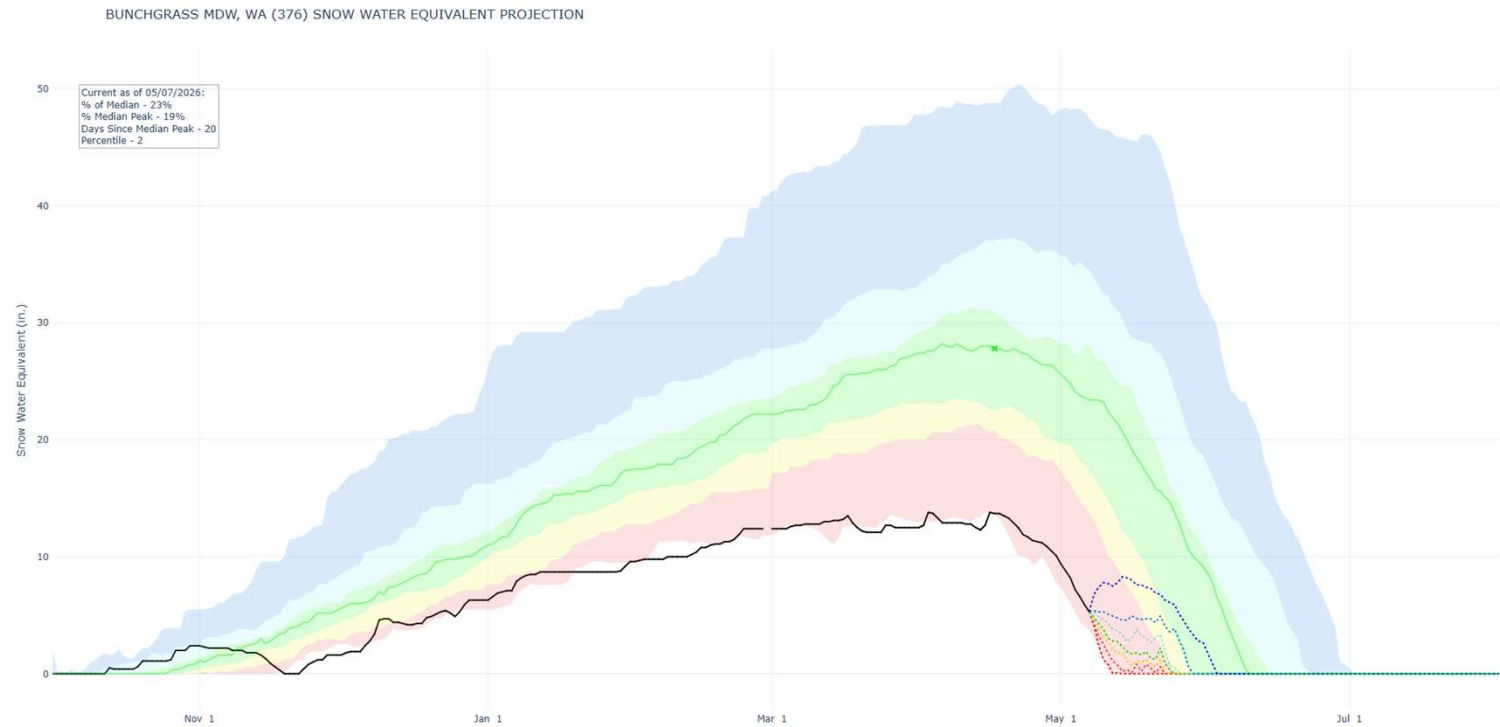
Summer 2026 Lake Level & River Flow

Fall 2026 Operations

Stakeholder Feedback

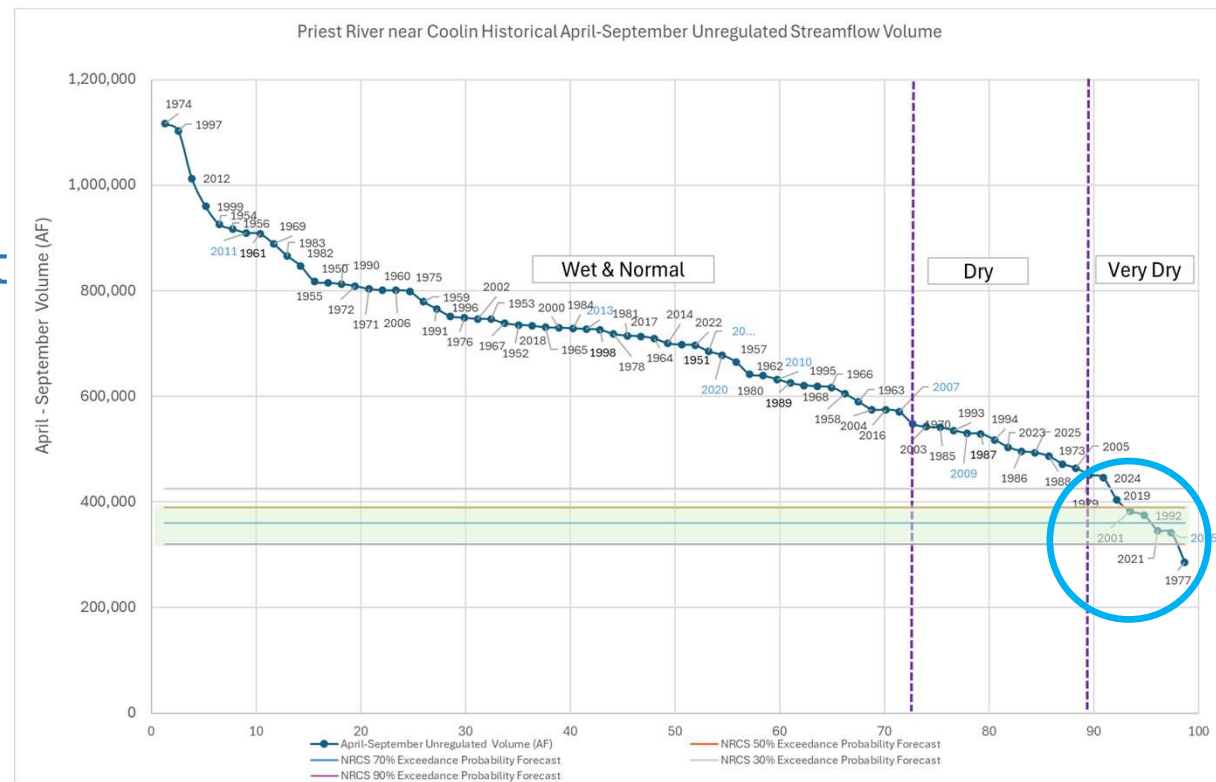
# Monitoring Information – Spring

- NRCS SNOTEL
- NRCS Water Supply Forecasts
- Drought Monitor



# Spring 2026 – Type of Year

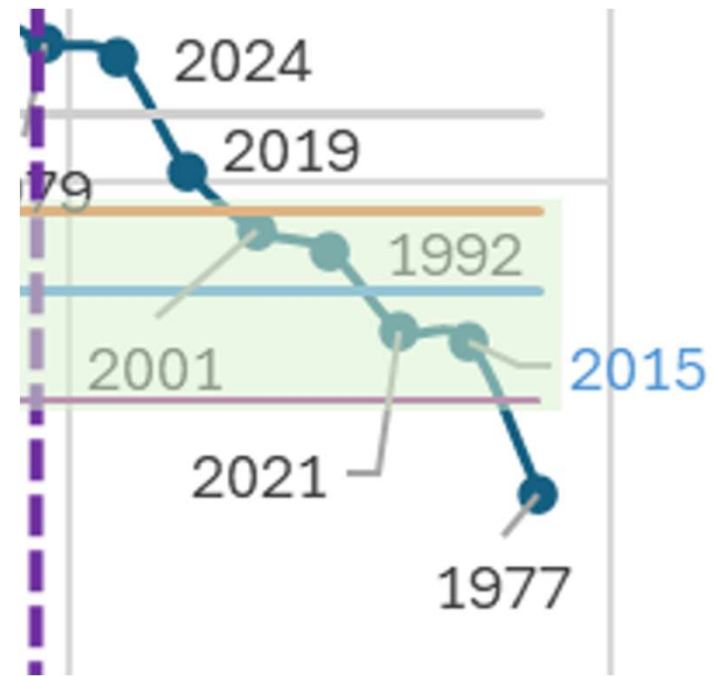
- Dry vs. Wet
- Determines lake level
  - Wet – 3.0 feet
  - Dry – 3.0 to 3.5 feet





## Spring 2026 – Type of Year

- Other very dry years
- 2015
- 4 of 7 in last 11 years



# State-wide Drought Declaration

BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES  
OF THE STATE OF IDAHO

IN THE MATTER OF A DECLARATION )  
OF DROUGHT EMERGENCY FOR )  
THE STATE OF IDAHO )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

**ORDER DECLARING  
DROUGHT EMERGENCY**


IT IS FURTHER HEREBY ORDERED that this order is effective upon approval of the Governor and expires on December 31, 2026, unless extended or terminated by order of the Director.

DATED this 13<sup>th</sup> day of April 2026.



\_\_\_\_\_  
MATHEW WEAVER  
Director

APPROVED this 13<sup>th</sup> day of April 2026.

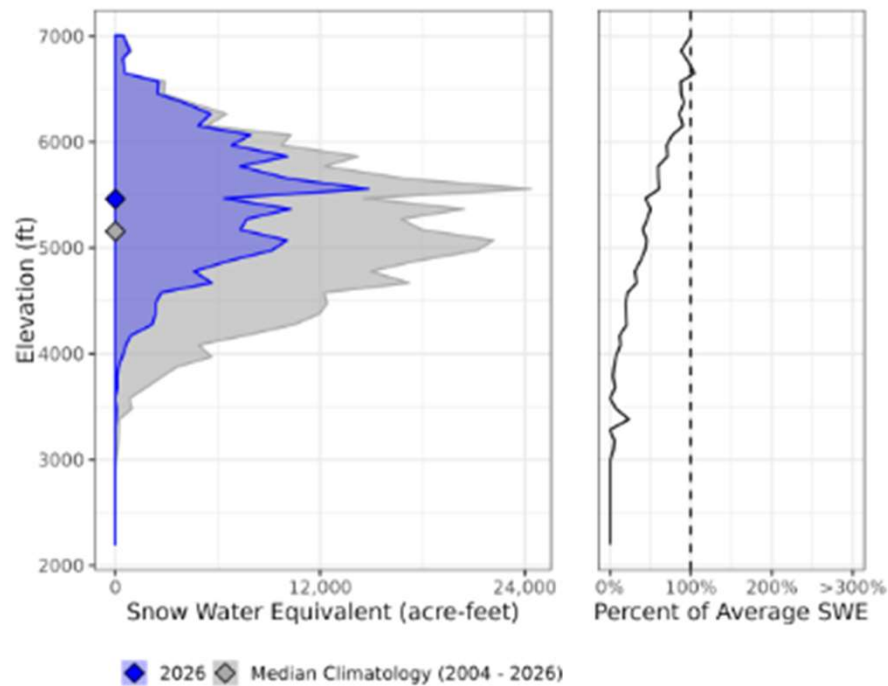


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BRAD LITTLE  
Governor



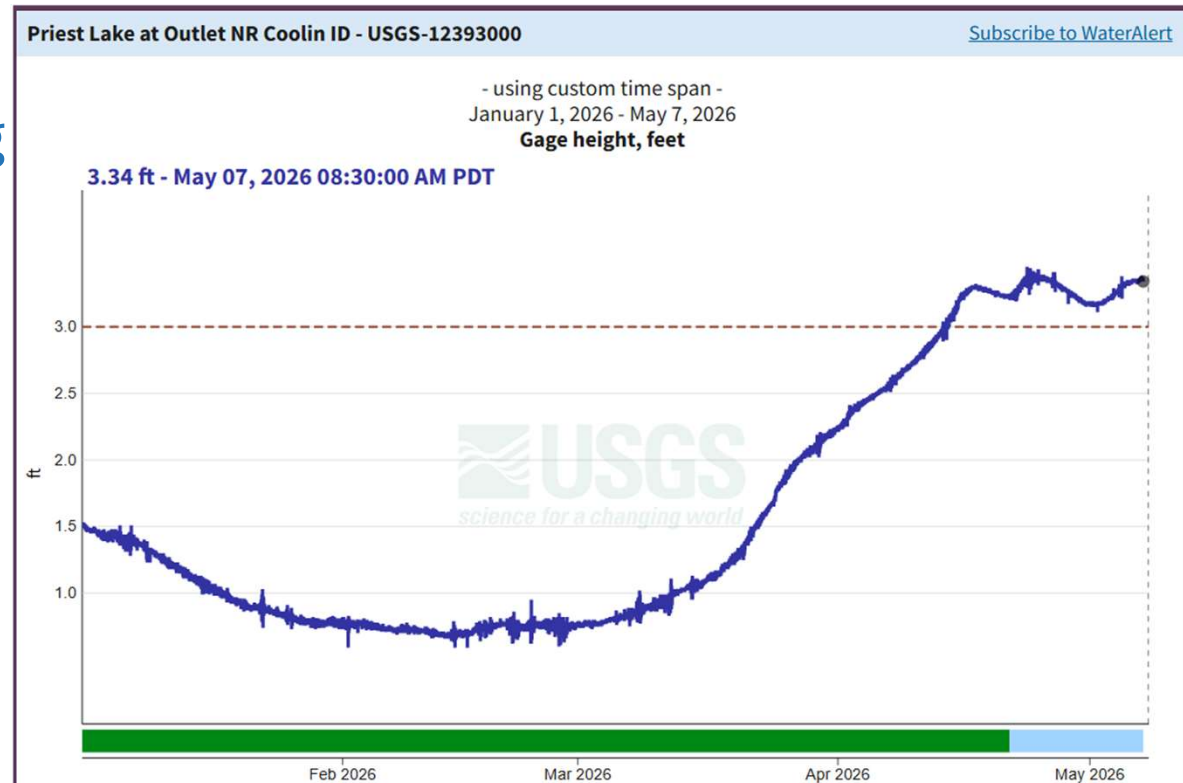
# High-Elevation Snow Diagram

Hypsometric-SWE for Priest (HUC8: 17010215)  
2026-05-07 (45% of Normal)



# Lake Level – Year to Date

- Early lake level increase
- Caution Peak Runoff Timing
  - Velocity in Outlet Channel
  - Peak Lake Level
  - Docks



## Operations - Lake Level 2026

- Lake Level
  - 2.5' or more - Mother's Day
  - 3.0' or more - Memorial Day
- Manage Runoff
- Stabilize pool 3.0'-3.5'
  - Idaho Code §70-507
  - Main recreational season
  - "Very Dry" year

Photo courtesy of Greg Throop



# Operations – Summer Outflow 2026

- Maintain Priest River flows
  - 300 cfs 97-7380 water right
  - Target flow in Priest River



# Operations – Fall Drawdown 2026

- Capped outflow
- Start on Oct. 1
- Done by Nov. 1
- Winter lake level



# Operations – Best Practices

- Tributary inflow
  - Add staff gages
  - Continue flow measurements
  - Cooperation with DEQ
  - More data = less reactive operations

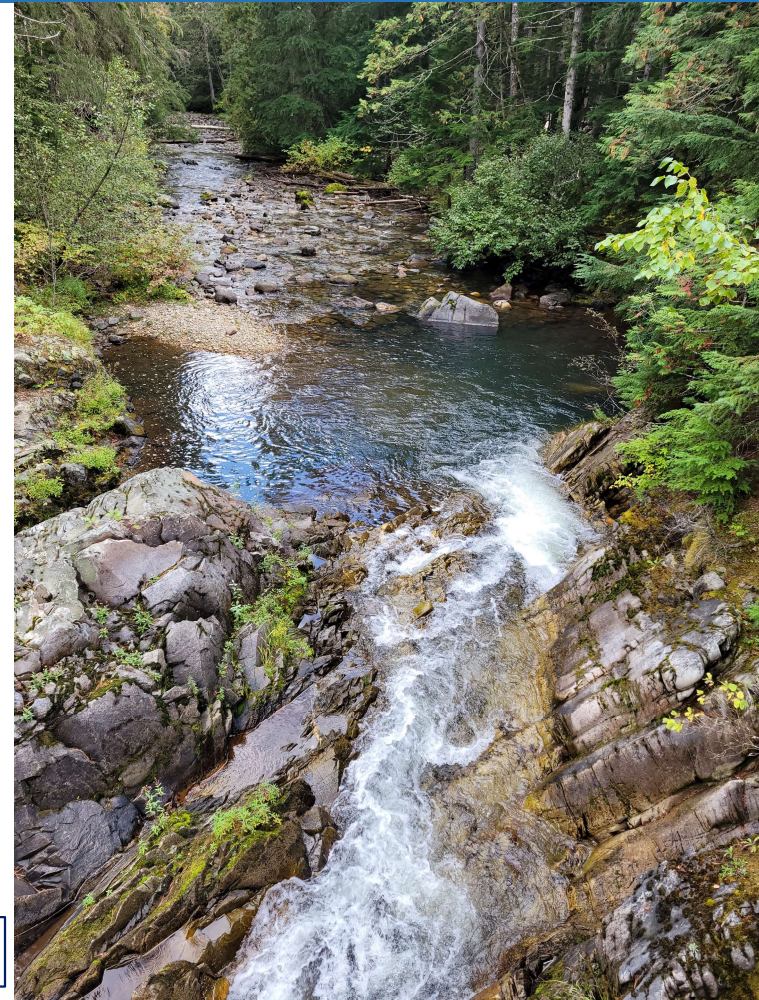
Thorofare



# Stakeholder Feedback

- Need to get dock in water at 2.85'
- Elkins Resort: Summer lake level
  - Higher sooner (Mother's Day)
- Lake level – flooding
  - Lake levels above 4' during Spring runoff
- River fluctuations

Hughes Fork



## Next Steps

- Stakeholder feedback to continue
- Lessons learned
- 2026 operations
- IWRB stakeholder engagement 2026





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Questions?

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