

# Resources and Environment Committee

## Teton Dam Water Storage Proposal Moves to the Senate Floor

This week, I had the privilege of presenting **Senate Joint Memorial 101 (SJM 101)** to the Senate Resources and Environment Committee. **SJM 101** calls for a renewed study of potential water storage projects across Idaho, including the reconstruction of the Teton Dam.

Water is essential to Idaho's agriculture, communities, and economy, and securing long-term, sustainable water solutions is critical to our state's future. I'm pleased to share that the committee voted unanimously to advance the measure to the Senate floor for a full vote.

### **A Look Back: The Teton Dam Disaster**

The Teton Dam, located in eastern Idaho, completed in 1976, was intended to provide irrigation, flood control, hydroelectric power, and recreation opportunities. However, as the dam was filled for the first time, a catastrophic failure occurred on June 5, 1976, sending a massive wall of water downstream and devastating communities like Rexburg, Sugar City, and Wilford. The disaster resulted in significant damage, the loss of homes and livelihoods, and a tragic loss of life.

The collapse was attributed to design flaws and poor geological understanding. However, engineering has advanced, and standards have significantly improved since then. Revisiting this water storage site could provide much-needed resources to support Idaho's growing population and water needs.

### **A Personal Perspective: A Text Message That Changed Everything**

This past summer, while considering this legislation, I reached out via text to all our Southeast Idaho legislators. The responses were overwhelmingly supportive, but one message stood out:

*"I was a young man at the time. I remember we lost everything—our farm, house, and livestock. I'll never forget helping my father pull cows out of the tops of trees. I am 110% in favor of this legislation."*

As I began to read the message, I thought, *"oh no, I've offended my friend by even suggesting this legislation."* As I read the final line of the message, I was reminded that while the disaster left deep scars in the hearts of many, Idahoans are resilient. We learn from the past, innovate for the future, and work together to solve challenges.



### **Collaborating with Local Leaders & Experts**

I've met with members of the Rexburg City Council and representatives from the Bureau of Reclamation. In these in-depth discussions experts have assured me that, if given the opportunity, the Teton Dam could be rebuilt safely using modern engineering practices that address the flaws of the past and ensure long-term reliability.

### **The Future of Idaho Water:**

Water is Idaho's lifeblood. This proposal isn't just about rebuilding the Teton Dam—it's about protecting our farmers, businesses, communities. This proposal is a step forward in securing Idaho's water future by preparing for droughts, population growth, and future economic demands

SJM 101 encourages state and federal agencies to:

- Update existing water storage studies.
- Explore the safe, responsible reconstruction of the Teton Dam.
- Evaluate other potential projects, including Minidoka Dam, Twin Springs Dam, and Jackson Lake Dam.

*As the bill heads to the Senate floor, I invite you to follow along and share your thoughts.*

### **Governor's Investment in Idaho's Water Future:**

In his 2026 State of the State Address, Governor Little announced a significant investment in Idaho's water resources. A proposed \$30 million in ongoing, annual funding to address critical water needs across the state..

The Idaho Water Resource Board, which plans and manages the state's water resources, will oversee this funding to ensure priority projects receive necessary resources.