

Conservation the Idaho Way

ISSUE ONE

IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

JULY, 2013



“Take care of the land and the land will take care of you.”
– Hugh Bennett

SOWING SEEDS OF STEWARDSHIP FOR 75 YEARS

Welcome to the first issue of *Conservation the Idaho Way* where we celebrate Idaho’s good stewardship ethic and strong partnerships. We’ve had a long legacy of sowing seeds of stewardship here: it’s our 75th year of promoting conservation in Idaho. In this and future issues, we’ll share information about the people, partnerships, and projects at work to protect and enhance the things we all love about this great state.

Idaho is endowed with a magnificent blend of diverse natural landscapes – rivers, lakes, mountains, forests and desert canyons – combined with rich and fertile agricultural lands well-suited for growing a wide variety of crops and raising livestock. Idahoans have deep roots in the land. They know caring for it reaps benefits for future generations. We believe the best

way to care for and enhance our soil, water, air, plants and wildlife is to promote voluntary, locally led efforts, not onerous regulations and costly lawsuits.

Conservation the Idaho Way is above all, locally led. In 1939 the Legislature established a bottom-up approach to voluntary conservation, and today, local people still lead

local efforts. The Conservation Commission and our partners – local soil and water conservation districts (districts), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and others - combine efforts to assist farmers and ranchers engaged in voluntary stewardship activities. Together we are the heartbeat of voluntary conservation and partners in Idaho’s oldest conservation movement.

The Conservation Commission was created as a state agency during the Dust Bowl in 1939 to address significant soil erosion issues – sheet erosion, wind erosion and severe gully. A 1934 soil erosion survey in Idaho revealed that more than 27 million acres of land, or roughly half the state, had serious soil erosion problems.

The state’s first order of business was to form soil conservation districts at the county level. Farmers and ranchers were elected directors of the districts, providing leadership on project priorities. As districts formed, NRCS and the Conservation Commission provided technical assistance to assist with stewardship projects.

Today we have a small staff of 16 full-time employees located around the state and there are 50 local soil and water conservation districts located from Bonners Ferry to Montpelier. We provide funding and technical staff to empower districts to engage in boots on the ground conservation. District efforts are guided by 5-year plans containing conservation goals and prioritized projects and activities.

The Idaho Legislature appropriated \$2.7 million in FY 2014 to the Conservation Commission (in general and dedicated funds) to support voluntary conservation, \$1.1 million of which goes directly to districts for projects and operations. Because we’re good stewards of public funds, we work to wring every last drop of conservation from every dollar invested.

We also provide incentive programs and technical assistance to promote and support Conservation the Idaho Way. We work with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality to create voluntary Agricultural and Grazing Implementation Plans on Idaho’s 303(d) listed waterways. We develop best management practices to reduce pollutant loads and safeguard water quality. Districts, landowners, and others implement those practices.

While we began working 75 years ago to reduce soil erosion, our efforts now include soil, water, plants, air, and wildlife conservation activities too. For more information on voluntary conservation in Idaho, visit our website at swc.idaho.gov. We encourage you to learn about the people, partnerships, and projects working to care for this special state.



SUCCESS STORY

Owyhee County farmer boosts water efficiency, creates wildlife habitat with conservation plan

Jump Creek is well-known as a popular recreation destination near Marsing, Idaho. As Jump Creek flows out of the front range of the Owyhee Mountains, the water passes through a slot canyon and pours over a spectacular 100-foot waterfall that's a short hike from a BLM parking area.

When Jump Creek exits the Owyhee Mountains, it flows into the farm country. Over the years, excess sediment from farming and grazing operations has caused Jump Creek to be listed as a degraded stream on the state's 303(d) list of impaired waters.

Local farmer Richard Rausch stepped forward in 2002 to work with the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the Owyhee Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install a number of conservation practices on his 712-acre farm to improve irrigation efficiency, reduce sediment flows into Jump Creek and create wildlife habitat. Today, Rausch is happy with the results.

"It's worked out really well," he says. "I like every bit of it."

The \$243,500 project was financed through state cost-share funds via the Conservation Commission's Agricultural Water Quality Program (\$69,811), federal cost-share funds via NRCS's Equip program (\$57,500) and Rausch contributed \$116,200. To qualify for government assistance to help pay for improvements, Rausch developed a conservation plan on his property with the assistance of the NRCS and the Conservation Commission. The plan includes:

- Increasing irrigation efficiency by installing pivot irrigation equipment on several fields.
- Adding pivot irrigation to a previously non-irrigated field to increase his cropland.
- Fencing the riparian area along Jump Creek.
- Installing watering facilities away from the creek for livestock.

- Stabilizing the Jump Creek stream channel and channel banks to reduce soil loss and sediment flow into the creek.
- Converting a 28-acre field from pasture to wildlife habitat, including a wildlife pond.
- Installing two V-weirs in Jump Creek in the wildlife habitat area to slow down the water and create more pool and riffle habitat for aquatic species.
- Planting grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees along the riparian area to assist with stream bank stability and enhance wildlife habitat.
- Installing two hardened crossings on Jump Creek for livestock to pass through without stirring up sediment.

By adding more irrigated cropland to his

Richard Rausch



operation, Rausch has increased crop yields. He grows mostly feed corn to supply nearby dairies with cattle feed. By converting to pivot irrigation from surface irrigation on 203 acres on the farm, it reduced sediment loading on Jump Creek by 2.5 tons/acre/year, or about 507 tons per year.

Adding the wildlife habitat has worked well because Rausch is seeing more wildlife than before. "I don't let people hunt there," he says. "I see ducks using the wildlife pond, and we've got pheasants, quail, hawks and deer. We couldn't have done a better thing."

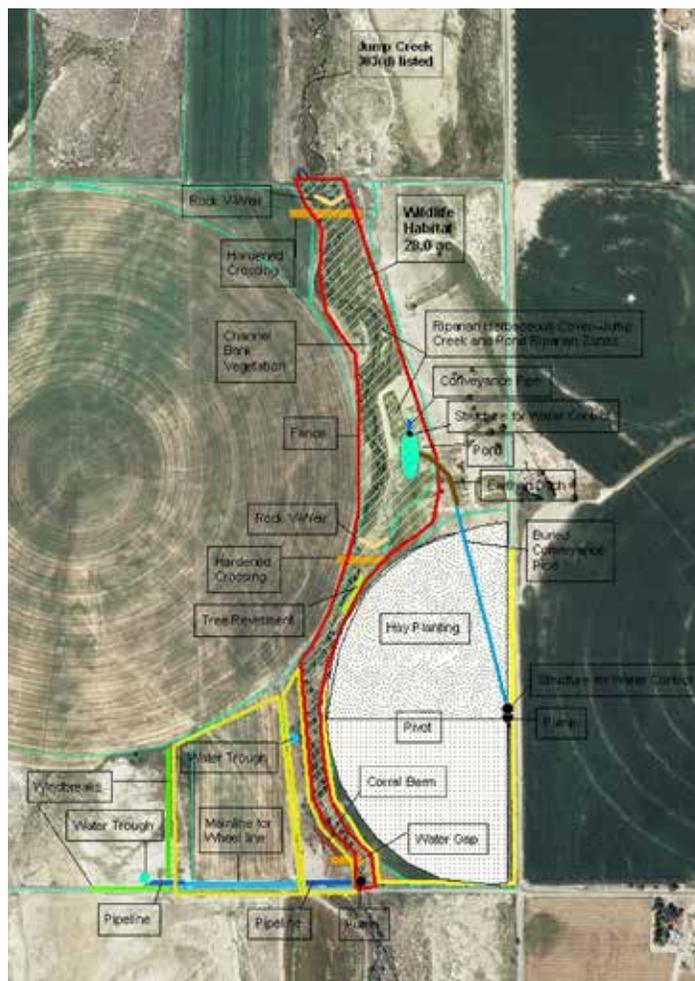
As some staff members from the Conservation Commission visited the property recently to evaluate the conservation measures, they noticed one thing that has occurred over the last four years since the project features were

installed -- a lot of weeds and non-native vegetation have sprouted inside the fenced-off riparian area.

Delwyne Trefz, a district support and services specialist for the Conservation Commission who has been working with Rausch on maintaining and improving the conservation best management practices, said he is recommending some spot herbicide control and closely managed grazing to eliminate the prolific weed growth and allow native plants to thrive along Jump Creek.

"This project is very dynamic like many projects we manage," Trefz says. "You do the best you can when you install the conservation measures, but you have to carefully monitor the projects over time, and you're always tweaking them and trying to make them better."

Other than the weeds, Rausch is happy that he participated in the project, particularly because he's seeing more wildlife around the farm. "One night I looked up and saw all of these ducks in the sky. It was beautiful," he said. "And then right before it got dark, they all came down and landed in the pond and filled it all up. I'm happy that we created a home for them."



UPDATE ON DISTRICT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

Because of state budget cuts and reduced staff resources, the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission worked with the state's soil and water conservation districts to create a new system for evaluating requests for services from districts in the last year.



"With our current resources, geographic limitations and other program responsibilities, the SWCC can't take care of all district requests for assistance. We had to come up with a system to process requests in an equitable manner," said Teri Murrison, SWCC administrator. "So we involved the districts, the association and the commissioners in developing the process, and we're following their recommendations."

A 14-member committee comprised of commission staff, SWCC commissioners, district officials and IASCD officials met 10 times in 2012 to develop criteria for distributing SWCC staff hours equitably. The committee is called the statewide Technical Assistance Work Group (TAWG).

After the SWCC received requests for fiscal 2014, district regional evaluation committees sifted through the requests for services and set priorities. Overall, 39 districts requested SWCC assistance, representing 123 projects. The requests would require approximately 13,035 hours of SWCC staff time statewide, and the available staff time was calculated to be 11,520 hours, resulting in a deficit of 1,515 hours.

"This illustrates why it is necessary for us to use careful planning in order to allocate our limited staff hours efficiently and effectively," said Delwyne Trefz, district support services specialist.

"We want the district officials and landowners to know that we don't like having to pick and choose projects any more than they do," Murrison said. "But we had to do something to ensure that we don't burn out our staff, yet, at the same time, be responsive to the districts' highest-priority projects."

The following summary shows the requests for services from each of the district regions or divisions. In four of the six divisions, there were more SWCC staff hours available than requests. All of those projects will be served. But in two regions, there were more requests

for services than staff hours available. See the summary for how the regional evaluation committees recommended solutions to settle the difference.

DIVISION 1 - IDAHO PANHANDLE

Benewah, Bonner and Kootenai-Shoshone districts requested 740 hours of service, and SWCC had 1,113 hours available, so all of the requested projects will be serviced.

DIVISION 2 - NORTHCENTRAL IDAHO

Nez Perce, Idaho, Lewis, Clearwater and Idaho districts requested 5,439 hours of service, and SWCC had 1,463 hours available, so there was a deficit of 3,976 hours. The Division 2 evaluation committee ranked the requests. Based on the committee's recommendation, 12 of 19 requested projects will receive SWCC services this year.

DIVISION 3 - SOUTHWEST IDAHO

Adams, Canyon, Gem, Owyhee, Payette, Squaw Creek, Weiser, Ada, Adams, Elmore and Valley districts requested 1,990 hours of service, and SWCC had 1,993 hours available, so all of the projects will be serviced.

DIVISION 4 - SOUTHCENTRAL IDAHO

Minidoka, Balanced Rock, East Cassia, Wood River, Snake River, Twin Falls, West Cassia and North Side districts requested 920 hours of service, and SWCC had 1,474 hours available, so all of the projects will be serviced.

DISTRICT 5 - SOUTHEAST IDAHO

Central Bingham, Power, South Bingham, Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida and Portneuf districts requested 3,725 hours of service, and SWCC had 2,083 hours available, meaning

that Division 5 districts will have to find alternate sources for 1,642 hours of assistance in FY 2014.

DIVISION 6 - EASTERN IDAHO

Clark, East Side, Jefferson, Madison, Teton and West Side requested 288 hours in services, and SWCC staff had 936 hours available, so all of the requested projects will be serviced.

In those districts where fewer hours were requested than are available, the balance of hours will go toward catching up the SWCC's long Total Maximum Daily Load Program to-do list. That work will ultimately benefit districts, charting a course for their future water quality improvement efforts based on detailed assessments of water quality-impaired streams and resulting plans to apply best management practices.

"The project review process was less painful in most of the divisions than we thought it would be, but it was still very tough in Division 2 and District 5," Trefz said. "As promised the Technical Assistance Work Group will evaluate how things worked and didn't. They will recommend modifications to next year's process for consideration by Commissioners at their August meeting."

To see the full report of district technical assistance requests, contact Delwyne Trefz at delwyne.trefz@swc.idaho.gov or call 208-896-4544 x111.

LOW INTEREST LOANS FOR IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

Sprinkler Irrigation
No-Till Drills
Livestock Feeding Operations
Fences
Solar Stock Water Pump Systems

2.5% - 3.5% INTEREST
TERMS 7 TO 15 YEARS
LOANS UP TO \$200,000



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WELCOME TO CONSERVATION THE IDAHO WAY

We look forward to the 75th anniversary of the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission with great excitement on achieving this significant milestone. As we look back, we acknowledge and remember all the people and partnerships -notably with local conservation districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service - that we forged to accomplish the impossible. These partnerships have allowed us to create and perpetuate wonderful programs benefiting our most valuable natural resources in Idaho: the land, water and air. Without protecting and preserving these, there will be no tomorrow for future generations.

Our next 75 years can be even more exciting. We learned from the past how to protect our future. Did we make errors in the past? Certainly. But sometimes we have to take chances and think outside the box or we'll never make progress. How do we know they are errors until we try them? Will we make errors in the future? Maybe, but someone



told me once that those are correctable errors. No, we cannot stand still, for if we do then we are going backwards.

So I challenge all of us to think ahead to our future, and not to dwell on past achievements or past mistakes. We need to put all our resources together to look forward to where we're going. Let our past be just that. Let's work together in Idaho's oldest conservation movement and see a brighter future for all Idahoans.

H. Norman Wright, Chair

COMMISSION NEWS

After two years of strong leadership, Dick Bronson has stepped down as Chair of the Conservation Commission and Dave Radford from the office of Vice Chair. Both men have numerous professional and personal commitments competing for their attention, but plan to remain on the Board. Commissioners and staff expressed appreciation for their service and dedication to voluntary conservation for the Commission.

At the June meeting, the Board elected new officers to lead the Commission's voluntary conservation efforts in FY 2014. They are:

H. Norman Wright, Chair
Roger Stutzman, Vice Chair
Gerald Trebesch, Secretary

Commissioners also:

- Adopted a FY 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. It was reviewed by partners and contained only minor changes from last year's plan. The adopted Plan can be reviewed at swc.idaho.gov.
- Reappointed Administrator Teri Murrison for FY 2014.

- Approved allocation of District Capacity Building grants. Funds will be distributed in August. Grants were awarded as follows:
 - o \$1,500 State Forestry Contest, (Bonner District sponsor) regional.
 - o \$1,000 North Central Idaho Division II Grazing Conference, (Idaho District sponsor) regional.
 - o \$1,500 Ag Symposium Conference, (Payette District sponsor) regional.
 - o \$2250 Skill Soft Training Licenses for Districts.
 - o \$875 to each of the 50 districts for outreach and capacity building activities.
- Conducted the annual District Budget Hearing. The twenty districts that submitted Budget Requests reported that their total unmet conservation project funding in FY 2015 is anticipated to be \$ 2,168,686 million for their first priority projects, \$1,262,250 million for second priority projects, and \$1,248,398 million for third priority projects for a total of \$4,679,334 in prioritized conservation project unmet needs. This

amounts to an average of \$233,967 in unmet project funding needs per district.

- Re unmet TMDL-related projects, analysis indicated an additional appropriation of \$209,000 would provide each district (50) with \$4,180 of additional project funding in FY 2015 and would assist to implement conservation projects like:
 - o Installing a rock lined ditch to reduce sediment loading of a TMDL creek.
 - o Installing a grade control structures and hydro-seeding to control runoff and reduce sediment loading of a TMDL water body.
 - o Providing cost share to encourage landowners to use cover crops and sediment basins to reduce sediment and nutrient loading of surface waters.
 - o Completing a comprehensive watershed assessment to guide development of an effective restoration and remediation plan.
 - o Demonstrate benefits of using precision ag to decrease nutrient loading of surface waters by reducing soil acidification through lime applications.

COMMISSION

H. Norman Wright, *Chairman*
Roger Stutzman, *Vice Chairman*
Jerry Trebesch, *Secretary*
Dick Bronson, *Commissioner*
Dave Radford, *Commissioner*
Teri Murrison, *Administrator*



SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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