

Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Committee  
ANNUAL REPORT NARRATIVE  
Idaho Senate Committee on Agricultural Affairs  
February 14, 2013, 1:30 pm

SLIDE 1: TITLE SLIDE

Good morning, Chairman Bair and Committee Members. I'm Teri Murrison, administrator of the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission. With me are Commissioners Dick Bronson Norman Wright, and Dave Radford, Jan Webster on PowerPoint, Steve Becker, Treasurer and Bret Rumbeck, Executive Director of the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts. Many more around the state are listening online.

We appreciate this opportunity to talk about the Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission, and Idaho's Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Together with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Idaho District Employees Association, we are partners in Idaho's oldest conservation effort.

Actually "soil and water conservation" is a little misleading. We're about a lot more than soil and water, although those tend to be our priorities. Our partnership is a leading force in Idaho for the conservation of soil, water, air, plant and animal resources.

SLIDE 2: HISTORY

The commission dates back to 1939, when it was established in response to the Dust Bowl era of the 1930's. We begin celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> year sowing seeds of stewardship – conservation the Idaho way - next month.

During the thirties, we had dust and erosion issues caused by what were -- at the time -- common agricultural and land management practices which significantly and negatively impacted our state and natural resources.

SLIDE 3: A NEW PARTNERSHIP

In 1935, the federal government began working with farmers, states, and local groups to address the problem. Idaho joined in early on – establishing the Commission in 1939, and a few years later as units of local government - soil conservation districts.

Today, the Commission and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) supply technical expertise, funding, and other resources to empower conservation districts to be "boots on the ground" of voluntary conservation in Idaho, undertaking locally led projects with private landowners.

#### SLIDE 4: WHAT WE DO

A few key introductory points.

When we say Conservation, the Idaho way, we mean using natural resources to benefit our people, while maintaining those resources in the same or better condition.

When we say Voluntary and non-regulatory, we mean our focus is on voluntary, cooperative efforts with local people – often ranchers and farmers. We respect landowner confidentiality, and private property rights. That's the Idaho way, not a heavy-handed regulatory approach.

And when we say Doing more with less, we mean that like everyone these days, we've had to do more with less. We're proud of what we can accomplish with a staff of sixteen. But we've been forced to take a hard look at what our responsibilities are, where we need to limit our focus, and how to best use the resources we have.

We've gone through a rigorous process of prioritizing. Some things have been put on hold, or scaled back. We've enlisted districts as partners in this, creating district work groups to review and recommend how district funds and our technical field staff workload are allocated around the state.

It's been a challenge and will continue to be this year and beyond.

#### SLIDE 5: OUR GOAL

Our overarching goal is to keep Idaho beautiful – and productive – the Idaho way. And by that I mean intelligent use, to the benefit of Idahoans, in ways that also protect and improve our natural resources.

#### SLIDE 6: ORG CHART

This is who we are.

Five commissioners.

Sixteen full-time staff members. Two part-time, temporary employees. We're lean. We've pride ourselves on doing more with less.

#### SLIDE 7: WHERE WE SERVE

This map shows how our staff is distributed. ----PAUSE ---- Idaho is a big state for sixteen people.

Here are some quick slides showing our partners – and yours - around the state.

SLIDE 8: Legislative District 31

SLIDE 9: Legislative District 28

SLIDE 10: Legislative District 23

SLIDE 11: Legislative District 32.

I particularly like these photos from Legislative District Thirty-Two. On the left is an irrigation diversion structure completed under a federal agency grant. It took a lot of concrete and cost upwards of a half a million dollars. On the right, a diversion structure designed by our technical staff that accomplishes the same purpose, is more esthetically pleasing, and cost thirty thousand dollars. That's what we mean when we say we do more with less, and keep Idaho beautiful.

[SLIDE 12: Legislative District 10](#)

[SLIDE 13: Legislative District 3.](#)

[SLIDE 14: Legislative District 25](#)

[SLIDE 15: Legislative District 18 & 19.](#)

### [SLIDE 16: CORE FUNCTIONS](#)

Let me explain exactly what we do. The Commission focuses on three core functions in our Strategic Plan: Technical and other Support Services, Conservation Programs, and Administration. Administration is self-explanatory, so I will focus on the first two.

### [SLIDE 17: CORE FUNCTIONS: TECHNICAL SUPPORT](#)

We serve Idaho's fifty conservation districts. Technical assistance includes conservation planning, engineering services, project implementation and construction inspections; Best Management Practices, and more. We provide services to strengthen districts and help build their capacity. We distribute state trustee and benefit funds as directed in statute and rule. These funds permit districts to take on administrative and project responsibilities.

In Fiscal Year 2012, we helped thirty-five districts with projects, initiated forty-seven new projects, worked on forty-five ongoing projects, and with our conservation partners, served two hundred and seventy one landowners.

District assistance has been, is, and will always be a high priority and major focus of our efforts.

### [SLIDE 18: CONSERVATION PROGRAMS](#)

Our second core function is providing incentive and general conservation programs. Our flagship incentive program is the Resource Conservation and Rangeland Development Program – or RCRDP. In exchange for low interest loans, landowners operate under a conservation plan -- improving practices and/or replacing equipment to produce conservation benefits such as water savings, erosion reduction, etc.

We currently have one hundred and thirty-one active loans totaling about five million dollars. These loans enabled conservation on more than forty thousand acres last year.

Under general conservation programs, we manage the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a multi-agency state effort to conserve water use on marginal farm ground in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer. In exchange for NOT farming such ground, participating

landowners receive modest federal payments. Last year one hundred fifty eight CREP contracts were signed with landowners and more than seventeen thousand acres were enrolled.

Through a now-completed Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grant from the NRCS, our work to address pollutants in Nitrate Priority Areas resulted in forty thousand acres treated with Best Management Practices. As you see, we significantly reduced nitrate, phosphorus, and sediment loads.

#### SLIDE 19: TOTAL MAXIMUM DAILY LOAD PLANS

We are the designated lead for agricultural and grazing components of Total Maximum Daily Load implementation planning for water quality impaired surface waters in the state. DEQ develops and the Environmental Protection Agency approves a TMDL. We then put together an implementation plan specifying watershed-specific best management practices that will reduce ag and grazing related pollutant loads.

Since 1998 -- with more FTPs -- we've completed 85 implementation plans. That's a lot -- but not enough to stay on top of the workload or eliminate our backlog. Our prioritization effort has focused more effort here in 2013. That comes at the expense of district support and other programs.

#### SLIDE 20: TMDL WORKLOAD

DEQ sends us an average of seven TMDLs for planning a year. We also review existing plans every five years to see if addendums are necessary -- we have seven in progress now. On average, DEQ generates five new addendums a year. Last year we completed three TMDL Implementation Plans. At the program's zenith in 2009, we completed 11. We've got a backlog of ten "backlogged" or overdue plans, eight of them long overdue. It's a significant challenge.

#### SLIDE 21: SERVICES & PROGRAMS

As you see on the chart, we are statutorily responsible for a number of services and programs. They all promote conservation Idaho's way. The problem is, we can't do them all. So we've ranked them from "priority" - must be accomplished in balance with other responsibilities - to "minimum maintenance of effort", or "inactive" where they can only be provided when we secure new funding and additional staff. ... PAUSE

#### SLIDE 22: SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

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#### SLIDE 23: COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

In FY 2012, we focused on district relationships, including being more transparent and inclusive. We've significantly increased district outreach, collaboratively updated our Strategic Plan, developed a process to allocate our scarce resources, and more. The partnership is stronger and better today and will continue to improve.

### SLIDE 24: RESULTS

This slide shows real, tangible results in terms of RCRDP loans made, acres of land improved through the CREP program, and groundwater benefits.

### PAUSE ----

### SLIDE 25: MAJOR TRENDS & CHALLENGES

As I said earlier, we started with soil and water, but conservation efforts are increasingly impacted by:

Urban growth, creating land use conflicts. These mean we lose productive ag land and open space.

Money and resources for voluntary conservation continue to shrink.

Water quality continues to be a major concern, but it's pushing other funding priorities aside;  
and

We face increased federal regulatory and endangered species issues that drive workload.

### SLIDE 26:

We'll continue to do more with less, to the best of our ability. That means focusing on core responsibilities, making the hard decisions to prioritize use of staff and funds, and streamlining operations.

### SLIDE 27: CLOSING FINAL

We are passionate about sowing seeds of stewardship and we are dedicated to locally led, non-regulatory, voluntary, cooperative partnerships. Conservation the Idaho way means respecting private property rights and landowner confidentiality. It means using the state's great natural resources to the benefit of our farmers, ranchers, the economy, the state, and the public.

We and NRCS supply resources and technical assistance to locally led conservation districts – they supply the boots on the ground. Each of us is a vitally important part of conservation the Idaho way.

Thank you for your time, Chairman Bair and Committee Members. Mr. Chair, I'd like to turn the podium over to Bret Rumbeck to share a brief video before we both stand for questions.

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