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IDAHO CONSERVATION CONNECTION: A HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCE FOR LANDOWNERS

By Steve Stuebner

Amos Eno, executive director of the Resources First Foundation (RFF), wants to empower private landowners across the nation to engage in conservation activities to improve their lands for fish and wildlife and their farming and ranching operations.

He's launched a series of web sites, including state-based web sites like the "Idaho Conservation Connection" with multiple links to conservation resources, in hopes of providing information and resources at landowners' fingertips to make it easier for them to engage in conservation.

Eno explained, "Our target audience is the private landowner. To me, they are the unused, untapped resource in our nation."

Looking back at the American conservation movement, the primary emphasis has

been on protecting federal lands for national parks, national wildlife refuges and wilderness areas, as well as buying private lands through the national Land and Water Conservation Fund, he said. Certainly, farm, water, and soil-based conservation has been going on since the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s, but many of those programs have been about protecting soil and water resources, not necessarily enhancing private lands for fish and wildlife habitat.

Eno stated, "Today, we can do both, if we can get more private landowners involved. If you look at biodiversity, most of the potential for biodiversity is on private lands, especially in the West because private landowners control the water there," he said. "The private landowner is the most important resource we have for enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, plant diversity

and riparian areas. These areas are the most important ecologically."

While local Conservation Commission officials, Soil and Water Conservation District officials and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) officials continue to work closely with farmers and ranchers on conservation initiatives, Eno hopes to get more landowners on board with his web sites.

"I felt that more was needed," he continued. "I mean about half of the soil and water conservation districts in this country aren't even online."

The Idaho Conservation Connection web site has multiple landing pages in the subject areas of conservation, energy, farm, forests, invasive species, oil and gas,

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recreation, tax, water and wildlife. The Idaho site is one of seven that Eno has done for RFF so far, and he hopes to have 10 state sites completed by the end of 2016. "We started in Maine and California and we've built it up from there," he said.

The Idaho site was launched in July of 2015. The site's traffic is growing from 500 hits per month to 1,000 visits per month, he said. "The traffic has been increasing steadily."

The site is organized by topic or region. He divided Idaho into seven regions, and links to local resources for farming, water and conservation in each region. The site touches on popular topics such as conservation easements, best management practices, estate tax planning, and water resources, linking to existing resources from other web sites and adding more of his own.

Nikos Monoyios, a fellow classmate with Eno from Princeton who owns the Eagle Valley Ranch near Salmon, Idaho, believes that Eno is providing a valuable resource for landowners with the web sites.

"I feel very strongly that this is a very valuable resource for people who are just getting started in farming, ranching or conservation work," Monoyios said. "It will help them figure out what to do and get advice and information. It's a very useful and important resource for ranchers or landowners who want to get started in conservation and want to learn more about what to do and how to do it."

Monoyios said he was fortunate to work with educated and experienced conservation professionals in Salmon, home to the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project, the Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District, an active NRCS office of conservation professionals and the Lemhi Regional Land Trust.

"We were very fortunate to have great advisors who could help us on our ranch before Eno's project came along," Monoyios said.

At the Eagle Valley Ranch, Monoyios and his wife, Val Brackett, have conserved water on Bohannon Creek to benefit steelhead and resident fish. They converted an open irrigation ditch to a buried pipeline, doubling the amount of water in the creek.

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The project also saved water for irrigating hay crops. The conservation work was reported in a video and written story for LifeontheRange.org, called "Lemhi Ranchers: Welcome Home Chinook Salmon!"

"There's 11,000 feet of pipe buried in the ground, and in the process, we eliminated two diversions on Bohannon Creek, and we screened two other diversions for the fish," Monoyios explained. "So, the bottom line is this was a very significant project with Idaho Fish and Game that has had a significant impact on the amount of water that stays in Bohannon Creek."

Monoyios and Brackett run a cow-calf operation with black angus cattle. Their ranch covers over 6,000 acres of deeded ground. Eagle Valley Ranch donated a 5,000 acre conservation easement to the Lemhi Regional Land Trust to preserve the ranch, open space and scenic views. "It was the first easement for the land trust, and it was incredibly significant because it's the size of a watershed," noted Kristin Troy, executive director of the Lemhi Regional Land Trust. "It was an incredible gift, really, to the public."

Last year, the Monoyios family donated an 800 acre conservation easement to the Lemhi Regional Land Trust along 2.5 miles of the Lemhi River. Idaho Fish and Game plans a large fish restoration project in that area. That enhancement project could help create more spawning habitat for Chinook salmon, which spawn primarily in the main-stem Lemhi River, and for resident fish.

"We hope the project we are planning on the Lemhi River will allow it to form some side channels, allow the water to slow down, and create places where Chinook salmon and other fish can spawn or rear their young," Monoyios said in the Life on the Range story.

"Nikos is a perfect example of a rancher who's doing everything right," Eno said. "He's a superstar. The key to the whole equation is how do you get 100s of ranchers like Nikos in Idaho to engage in conservation? The only way to do that is to have a broad array of incentives and programs at their fingertips -- an online yellow pages for landowners."

The estate tax planning section of the web site is another place that Eno wants to steer farmers and ranchers who are at retirement age and need to understand how best to plan their estates so their large landholdings can stay intact without costing the next generation large sums to preserve. "Farmers and ranchers are an aging population. They need to be mindful of estate planning," he said.

The web address for the Idaho Conservation Connection is www.stateconservation.org/Idaho. Look it up and see if might have valuable information and resources for your farm or ranch operation. □

Steve Stuebner is a regular contributor to Conservation the Idaho Way, writing about voluntary conservation success stories.

CONSERVATION MAKES ENO TICK

We first introduced you to Eno last year when he was our keynote speaker for the Idaho Conservation Summit. Unbeknownst to us, he'd been keenly focused on voluntary conservation here for some time, working on the Idaho Conservation Connection website. Now that Idaho's site is finished and we've gotten to know him, it's clearly a passion for conservation that drives him. He's already begun building a similar site for Texas.- Ed

Amos Eno has more than 45 years experience in the conservation field, starting with research posts in national parks and international parks and then moving on to positions in the U.S. Department of Interior and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

He got his bachelor's degree in history at Princeton and his master's at Cornell in interdisciplinary studies focusing on natural resources.

In the late 1970s, he traveled the world, visiting 25 countries to investigate wildlife and environmental issues including Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, Republic of South Africa, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Trinidad, and St. Vincent.

He worked in the ground floor of endangered species programs at the Department of Interior, spent six years working for the Audubon Society, and then moved on to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a private, non-profit foundation established by Congress in 1984 to protect and restore the nation's fish, wildlife, and plant resources. He was the executive director of NFWF for nine years.

Since 2000, he's been running the Resources First Foundation, a private non-profit that works to improve fish and wildlife habitat and biodiversity on private lands.

In many ways, he's worked at all levels of government to improve the plight of fish and wildlife, and over time, he's found that it's easier to get things done with private landowners and private property than it is at the federal level.



Eno & friend enjoying the great outdoors.

"I started out as a Hamiltonian federalist, but you would expect that since my first job was in the Secretary of Interior's office," Eno said. "Bureaucracy is just like hardening of the arteries. Over the years I have morphed to the original Jeffersonian vision of supporting individual farmers, ranchers, and landowners."

The federal budget issues are daunting, he says, noting that the National Park Service has a \$12 billion backlog for operations and maintenance, and the total for the four big land management agencies is \$35 billion. Congress is putting a big share of federal funding into defense programs and weapons systems, while many of the natural resources agencies are almost on life-support.

"The conservation of natural resources and its lifeblood – water – and all the species and biodiversity dependent on riparian areas in the West, is absolutely dependent on maintaining the livelihood of working farms and ranches," Eno wrote in his blog this week.

He quoted a rancher, Jeff Laszlo, who was involved in a panel discussion for the Western Governors Association about Empowering Private Landowner Conservation. "As a rancher, I've learned that conservation and ranching are not mutually exclusive pursuits. In fact, to do either well, you'd have to do them together," Laszlo said. □

ENDANGERED FISH THRIVING IN IDL TIMBER MANAGEMENT AREAS

With the annual observance of Arbor Day on April 29 and the celebration of the role trees play in our lives, the following story is related to the value of trees, forest management and their relationship to fishery and other resources. - Ed.

(Adams County) - Recent fishery sampling by Idaho Department of Lands biologists indicate that bull trout are abundant and widely distributed in timber management areas throughout the Hornet Creek drainage located in central Idaho about 13 miles west-northwest of Council in Adams County.

The upper reaches of Hornet Creek and its tributaries are designated as critical bull trout habitat. A majority of the land in this drainage is managed by the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) for timber production.

"Arbor Day celebrates the value of trees, and since 2005, IDL Payette Lakes Supervisory Area staff have implemented the harvest of 13.6 million board feet of timber generating \$2.3 million in revenue from the Hornet Creek drainage," said Payette Lakes Area Forester Scott Howerton. "However, Arbor Day ideals also recognize the integration of all resources and during this time period \$86,000 was spent on watershed improvement projects."

Completed watershed projects include reducing sediment delivery from roads to surface waters and improving fish passage at stream crossings. Specifically, 1.3 miles of roads were obliterated, 1.4 miles of road were surfaced or resurfaced, drainage was improved on 7.6 miles of road, one mile of road was closed to vehicle traffic, and two stream crossings were replaced to allow unimpeded fish passage.

Bull trout, listed in 1998 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, were sampled in North and Placer Creeks, headwater tributaries of Hornet Creek.

FISH, *cont. from Pg. 3*



Biologist taking environmental DNA (eDNA) stream samples in Hornet Creek. eDNA samples indicate that bull trout were relatively abundant and widely distributed throughout the Hornet Creek drainage. Photo: Idaho Department of Lands, 2016.

assessment indicated the watershed improvement projects were highly successful at reducing sediment delivered to surface waters from the forest road system.

In a separate CWE assessment conducted during the same time period, stream temperatures were slightly cooler after harvest. These results have provided motivation to the agency to refine and apply the methods used to similar areas located throughout the state. Threats to the continued existence of bull trout include actions which increase stream temperatures or otherwise modify critical habitat.

“Arbor Day recognizes the relationship of forests and all the other resources that benefit from trees, and having an abundant population of bull trout in this critical habitat of clear cold water is cause for celebration,” Tretter added. □

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“IDL foresters plan and administer timber sales on state lands for the purpose of generating revenue for the endowments and maintaining healthy and sustainable forests,” added IDL Fish Biologist Chris Tretter. “These professional land managers assess the protection of public resources, such as water quality and fish habitat, using staff specialists with expertise ranging from fishery resources to insect and disease management.”

IDL’s process for assessing Cumulative Watershed Effects (CWE) was first implemented in the Hornet Creek drainage in 1998. A 2010 follow-up



Fishery Biologists Electro-shocking in Hornet Creek. Photo: Idaho Department of Lands, 2016.

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