



CROP SIGNS, TREE SEEDLINGS AND ST. JOE RIVER STREAMBANK STABILIZATION PROJECTS

This month, we continue introducing our readers to the various conservation activities being accomplished by Idaho's Conservation Districts. This month we focus on Benewah CD.

By Steve Stuebner

How many people drive by a crop field in rural Idaho and wonder what kind of crop is being grown?

Perhaps they're intrigued by the bright color of a canola field, or the shape of the plant or seed heads ... and they're

wondering, what is that?

Well, when people are driving from Plummer to St. Maries or from Plummer toward Coeur d'Alene on U.S. 95 in Benewah County, they will encounter information signs in crop fields that describe the crop being grown.

"We think it'll be really helpful for the average person on the road so they know what the crops are and where their food comes from," said Tim Schaffer, chairman of the Benewah Soil and Water Conservation District.

In a partnership project with the Idaho Wheat Commission and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), the Benewah District created a total of 40 crop signs. It is a \$6,300 educational outreach project, with \$1,500 contributed by the Idaho Wheat Commission and the balance from the NACD.

"We're thrilled to be a part of it, and we're looking forward to seeing those signs posted in the ground," said Casey Chumrau, executive director of the Idaho



The Benewah District is placing signs next to crops along the roadways.

Wheat Commission. "My aunt always told me that posting signs about crops being grown along the road should be required, so I was the first to tell her about this project."

The signs will highlight crops being grown in the rolling hills of Benewah County including dark northern spring wheat, soft white wheat, wheat, garbanzo beans, lentils, Kentucky bluegrass seed, Timothy hay, peas, canola, barley and oats, officials said.

Chumrau said the Wheat Commission likes the concept and will be looking for more opportunities to educate the public about crops being grown in Idaho elsewhere in the state.

The educational crop signs are one of several projects that the Benewah SWCD has been working on in the last year, including continued monitoring of work done on the Alder Creek Road in 2017, scoring #1 in the state for its next \$319 grant project to stabilize streambanks on the St. Joe River, and more.

Trees are another "crop" grown in the Benewah county area. The Benewah District is working with the Kootenai-Shoshone, Bonner and Boundary districts to grow tree seedling stock with locally grown seeds and trees in the Deary area, including Engelmann spruce, ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine and white pine. About 132,000 seedlings were provided in Division 1

during the 2020 season.

The Benewah District and the other districts are making the tree seedlings available to private landowners for purchase, with no minimum order, officials said.

"We have three foresters on our board, and this is more of a community service for local landowners who need small quantities of trees," said Leann Daman, administrator for the Benewah District. "This is a way to provide conifer species that are suitable for their lands."

To purchase seedlings, people should email Leann at leann.daman@usda.gov

Benewah District officials also are excited about scoring high with their latest \$319 grant proposal to stabilize streambanks on the St. Joe River. By scoring #1 in the state, they are assured of receiving funding to treat about 12 different areas along the St. Joe River to stabilize streambanks with rock riprap and willow plantings.

The project will treat a total of about 1,800 feet of streambank area along

the St. Joe River. The total project cost is \$184,420, with \$111,552 from Idaho DEQ and \$72,868 in landowner matching funding. Bill Lillibridge from the Conservation Commission will provide technical assistance and engineering for the project. The project goals are riparian health, water quality and streambank restoration, Daman said.

The \$319 grants are funded by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency.

As we have reported previously in Conservation the Idaho Way, the St. Joe River and its streambanks are being impacted by the fluctuating levels of Coeur d'Alene Lake in the summer and winter, and impacts from the large wakes of water ski boats and wake-board surf boats in particular.

Lillibridge, who will be crafting designs to stabilize the eroding streambanks, said the dual impacts of fluctuating lake levels and the erosive wave-action of wake-board boats create plenty of demand for streambank repairs along the St. Joe River.

"We'll be doing projects up there for years," he said. It seems like an educational issue more than anything else," adds Schaffer. "We've got people putting in lawns to the edge of the water, and they're irrigating to the edge of the



Riprap streambank stabilization projects on the St. Joe feature willows built into the rock structure for more long-term stability.

water as well. And then the big waves come and the grassy banks start to slough off into the river."

"The impact of those wake-boarding is really pretty significant. Even smaller boats are throwing out huge wakes.

We've got miles and miles to treat," he said. "It's a big problem."

When people are out having a good time wake-boarding on the St. Joe River to escape potentially heavy chop on Coeur d'Alene Lake, "the last thing they're thinking about is causing erosion," Schaffer said.

The projects that the Benewah District has installed along the "shadowy" St. Joe River in past years are holding up well, he said, but more and more landowners are reaching out for assistance. That will keep the District busy for years to come.

The bank-protection designs will use a "roll-up wedge" – a gradual 1:4 slope of 2-inch diameter rock to larger 12-14 inch diameter rock laid down tightly together, with willow plantings underneath. The designs cause waves to break in the lower portion of the riprap, reducing the velocity and energy of the wave at that point, so the water doesn't jump over the top of the riprap structure and cause erosion above.

"As long as the riprap is thick enough and low-angle, they've been successful in stabilizing the bank and reducing erosion into the St. Joe River," Lillibridge said, crediting the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the original design and significant streambank work in the watershed.



Alder Creek Road prior to drainage work caused a school bus to get stuck in deep mud more than once.

year-round road with improved surfacing, base rock and drainage. It serves private residences in that area and access to the national forest.

"The road stabilization work on this remote roadway for emergency vehicles and residents has great value for all of Benewah County and the State of Idaho," Schaffer said.

With the additional work accomplished, the total amount of road treated is 4.7

After completion of BMP installations on the road project, annual sediment loads were reduced to 0.2 tons per year or a reduction of 9.6 tons, a 98 percent reduction overall, officials said.

Steve Stuebner writes articles for Conservation the Idaho Way on a regular basis.



Alder Creek Rd. after.

Benewah District officials also were pleased to stretch \$319 dollars in 2017 on the Alder Creek Road \$319 project to repair about 2.7 additional miles of the road, adding 8 culverts and base rock to create a more sustainable roadway.

The Alder Creek Road is an old logging road that has since been turned into a

miles and is holding up well for year around access, officials said.

"It's good to have those additional miles fixed," Lillibridge said. "There was one bad spot in there where the school bus used to get stuck on a regular basis, and they'd have to get towed out there when the road was muddy."

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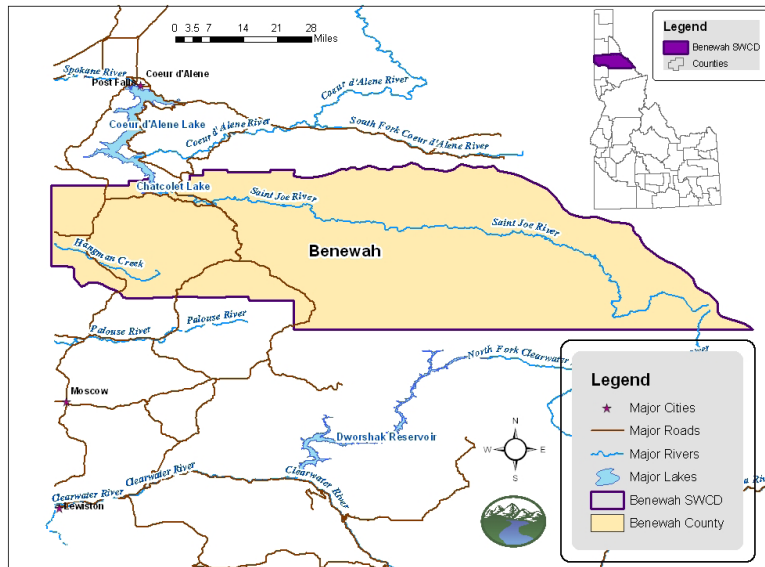
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Conservation Districts are primary entities to provide assistance to private landowners and land users in the conservation, sustinment, improvement and enhancement of Idaho's natural resources. They are catalysts for coordinating and implementing conservation programs, channeling expertise from all levels of government into action at the local level. Programs are non-regulatory; science-based technical assistance, incentive-based financial programs and informational and educational programs at the local level.

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For more information, contact the Benewah District: 900 E Street, Plummer, Idaho, or call 208-987-4011, Leann.Daman@id.usda.gov.

OTHER BENEWAH SWCD PROJECTS

- Continued partnership assistance to Greater Spokane Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which received funding from USDA for forestry and agriculture conservation in the Spokane River watershed. This includes much of Benewah and Shoshone Counties. This is the last of a five year program.
- Led a site visit to the completed St. Joe (\$109,950) project. Accompanied by partners from Idaho Soil & Water Commission, Benewah Board Supervisors, DEQ Lake Management and DEQ Restoration Partnership.
- Received a NACD technical assistance grant in 2020. The District hired a part time conservation planner to support NRCS and the Plummer USDA Service Center.
- Assisted the local NRCS office with a Local Working Group Meeting—opportunity for local input on conservation priorities.
- The recent COVID-19 pandemic prevented participation in outreach activities including: Natural Resource Camp, Forestry Contest, High School Career Fair and Benewah County Fair. The District hopes to renew those outreach efforts in 2021.
- Maintained District business at a remote office site after COVID-19-related office closure in March. Challenges included unreliable internet access, business meetings using ZOOM format, and inability to meet with customers in person.

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