



*Water quantity projects are eligible for WQPA grants, including water-efficiency projects, pipelines, aging infrastructure projects and drainage projects. Photo by Steve Stuebner*

## IDAHO LEGISLATURE PROVIDES \$5 MILLION FOR AG WATER PROJECTS; HOW TO APPLY!

By Steve Stuebner

The Idaho Legislature brought the State Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) back to life in the 2022 session by infusing \$5 million into the program, with the funds to be administered by the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

"It's Go Time," says Delwyne Trefz, Administrator of the Conservation Commission. "I'm really excited to see these funds turned into boots-on-the-ground, voluntary conservation projects as soon as possible!"

The State Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) was a very active program administered by the Conservation Commission for more than a decade until the state had

to cut program funds during the Recession in 2010.

"It's great to have the program restored," Trefz said. "It's a user-friendly conservation program that not only benefits local conservation districts, landowners and others seeking financial assistance to implement conservation projects, but also provides widespread public benefits to our natural resources, something that benefits every Idahoan."

Trefz said he truly appreciated the efforts by agricultural lobbyists Roger Batt and Benjamin Kelly, USDA NRCS State Conservationist Curtis Elke, and attorney Dan Steenson in working with the 2022 Legislature to restore

funding for the WQPA program. Paul Arrington and the Idaho Water Users Association also played a key role in supporting the restored funds for WQPA.

The purpose of this article is to give districts, landowners and partners information about what projects are eligible, how to get started, how to reach out for assistance in putting applications together, etc.

SWC already has received 18 applications for cost-share funds through the WQPA program; 17 of them were funded by the Conservation Commission governing board at a cost of \$1.7 million (see project details below).

Approximately \$3.3 million remains



available for projects. Proposals will be accepted until the money runs out, Trefz said. Funds need to be spent by June 2023.

### How to get started?

All project proposals need to be routed through the state's Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Commission staffers around the state are ready to help districts put applications together.

District officials should network with Commission staff around the state if they have a project in mind, Trefz said.

"Our staff is up to speed on the program and how to put together a proposal," he said. "Please reach out to our staff if you have a project in mind."

### Who can apply?

All of the State's Soil and Water Conservation Districts can apply for projects. A wide variety of entities, including landowners, canal companies, and irrigation districts can work through conservation districts and commission staff to put projects together.

### When are WQPA grant applications due?

The Conservation Commission will meet monthly to go through WQPA project applications. Project applicants should be sure they give districts and commission staff time to evaluate the proposals. Upcoming Commission meetings are posted at [swc.idaho.gov](http://swc.idaho.gov).

The next monthly deadline for districts to submit WQPA proposals is May 12.

### What kind of projects are eligible for funding?

Water quality projects, water quantity projects such as water delivery and drainage rehabilitation and improvement projects, projects that install and implement best management practices on ag lands, livestock and grazing improvements,

and other projects that enhance and restore soil and water resources in the state.

The water quantity projects are a new component in 2022, Trefz noted. The idea is to provide cost-share assistance to irrigation districts, canal companies, drainage ditch entities and other water-delivery entities that have a direct tie to agricultural operations such as farming and ranching. Specific improvements might be repairing aging infrastructure, water delivery systems, pipelines, etc. The bottom line is that projects that address the efficient distribution and use of water, as well as those that address water quality concerns are now eligible for WQPA funding assistance.

### Are matching funds required?

Yes, matching funds must total at least 25 percent of total project costs. Eligible matching funds can include project time and expenses not reimbursed by WQPA, such as time, equipment and materials provided by a landowner(s), \$319 DEQ/EPA grant funds, NRCS EQIP funds, Bureau of Reclamation grant funds, the Conservation Commission's Resource Conservation & Rangeland Development (RCRDP) low-interest loan program, and other state and federal funds. Total program cost-share funds from all sources can not exceed 100 percent of the actual project cost.



*Replacing undersized culverts on ag lands is another eligible project for WQPA grant assistance.*

In some areas, districts are applying for WQPA funds to add on to \$319 grant projects in instances where project costs have increased considerably from estimates made during the project application phase. In many instances, supply-chain issues have increased the costs of construction materials, labor costs have gone up, construction estimates are going up, and more.

"These are situations where the

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Districts have an approved \$319 grant, but the costs have since gone up by 25 percent or more, and with a WQPA application, they can try to get funding to cover those increased costs to avoid going into debt to move forward with a conservation project,” said Bill Lillibridge, Commission staff engineer in Lewiston.



*Sediment-reduction projects are eligible for WQPA grants. This project was built in Canyon County to benefit the Boise River. Photo by Steve Stuebner*

“In some instances, whether they can cover those increased costs may make a difference in moving forward with a project or canceling it altogether,” he said.

Culvert and pipeline costs are two items whose costs have gone up dramatically, officials said.

To give folks an idea of what kind of projects have been funded so far, here are a few details about the 17 projects that were funded by SWC in April:

- Clearwater District – Heywood Creek Culverts project, \$19,250 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$92,543. Project benefits: Replace undersized culverts to reduce flooding, ponding, and overland flow of water and pollutants from ag land into creek.

- Clearwater District – Louse Creek Culverts project, \$9,061 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$65,875. Project benefits: Replace undersized culverts to reduce flooding, ponding, and overland flow of water and pollutants from ag land into creek.

- East Side District – Willow Creek

Pivot Project, \$55,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$221,608. Project benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation (pivot).

- Gem District – Lower Payette Pivots, \$205,658 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$249,283. Project benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation (pivot).

- Idaho District – Butcher/Three Mile Creek Livestock BMPs, \$29,125 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$183,523. Project benefits: Fencing, watering facility, manure management structures, access road and roof runoff structures to reduce amount of sediment, bacteria and nutrients entering streams.

- Idaho District – Cottonwood Creek BMPs, \$275,177 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$503,570. Project benefits: Fencing, watering facility, manure management structures, access road and roof runoff structures to reduce amount of sediment, bacteria and nutrients entering streams.

- Lewis District – Livestock BMPs, \$105,472 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$197,470. Project benefits: Fencing, windbreak, watering facility, livestock water well pipeline, access road, and heavy use pads to reduce amount of sediment, bacteria and nutrients entering streams.

- Lewis District – Soil Health BMPs, \$58,300 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$374,000. Project benefits: nutrient management, pest management and cover crops to decrease nutrient and herbicide usage and decrease soil erosion.

- North Bingham District – Irrigation Project, \$110,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$240,164. Project benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation (pivot).

- Owyhee District – South Bend Lateral project, \$315,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$1.5 million. Project benefits: Convert a lateral from earthen ditch to pipeline, facilitating conversion of surface irrigation systems to sprinkler.

- Individual applicant – Surface to Sprinkler irrigation, \$43,509 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$113,102. Project benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation (pivot).

- Portneuf District – Cohn Creek Restoration project, \$55,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$122,139. Project



benefits: Fencing, aquatic organism passage, streambank protection, channel bed stabilization, irrigation pipeline, structure for water control.

- Portneuf District – Forage Kochia project, \$1,160 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$1,406. Project benefits: Forage kochia planting to protect streambank denuded during previous juniper-removal operations to reduce soil erosion and sediment loading in the creek.



*Off-stream stockwater developments are a popular and effective Best Management Practice to install. Stockwater projects are eligible for WQPA grant funding. Photo by Steve Stuebner.*

- Portneuf District – Yellow Dog Creek project, \$55,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$67,921. Project benefits: Fencing, brush management, livestock pipeline, watering facility, heavy-use area protection, spring development with pumping plant to improve water quality in Yellow Dog Creek.

- Power District – Rock Creek water irrigation project, \$55,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$95,178. Project benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation to improve water use efficiency and reduce pollutant-loading in the South Fork of Rock Creek.

- Power District – Rock Creek Water Quality and Quantity, \$93,524 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$307,980. Project benefits: Fencing and provide off-site stock watering to keep livestock out of the creek, convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation to improve water use

efficiency and reduce pollutant-loading in South Fork and East Fork of Rock Creek.

- Yellowstone District – North Fork Teton River Pivot project, \$69,661 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$105,548.

Project benefits: Convert surface-to-sprinkler irrigation system to increase water-use efficiency and reduce pollutant-loading in the North Fork Teton River.

- Central Bingham – Central Bingham Irrigation project, \$165,000 awarded through WQPA, total cost with matching funds: \$276,293. Project



*Stream-restoration projects are eligible for WQPA grants.*

benefits: Convert surface irrigation system to sprinkler irrigation (pivot).

**Total amount of WQPA funds allocated with these 17 projects: \$1.7 million. Total cost is approximately \$4.9 million.** This

means that for every \$1 spent from WQPA will accomplish almost \$3 dollar's worth of conservation after matching funds are added. In our



book, that's a conservation triple!"

### Details about applications

- Establish a specific project area, where the efforts to improve water delivery and drainage and/or water quality will be focused. The project area may be as large as a watershed or as small as a single ag field.
- Describe the overall goal and expected outcome of a project.
- Identify the conservation measures and Best Management Practices that a district plans to implement and estimate site-specific costs of

installing each component of a project.

### Conservation Commission staff ready to help

- Katie Yoder, N. Idaho region, [katie.yoder@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:katie.yoder@swc.idaho.gov)
- Bill Lillibridge, State Engineer, [bill.lillibridge@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:bill.lillibridge@swc.idaho.gov)
- Eileen Rowan, Clearwater region, [Eileen.rowan@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:Eileen.rowan@swc.idaho.gov)
- Brian Reed, NE Idaho region, [brian.reed@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:brian.reed@swc.idaho.gov)
- George Hitz, SE Idaho region, [George.hitz@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:George.hitz@swc.idaho.gov)

• Carolyn Firth, Magic Valley region, [Carolyn.firth@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:Carolyn.firth@swc.idaho.gov)

• Joe Peterson, Southwest region, [joe.peterson@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:joe.peterson@swc.idaho.gov)

• Dustin Diaz, western Magic Valley and Sawtooth region, [dustin.diaz@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:dustin.diaz@swc.idaho.gov)

For more information on the WQPA program, please contact Loretta Strickland, SWC Deputy Administrator, [loretta.strickland@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:loretta.strickland@swc.idaho.gov) or Delwyne Trefz, SWC Administrator, [Delwyne.trefz@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:Delwyne.trefz@swc.idaho.gov); 208-332-1790.



*Rigby High School took first place at the Envirothon.  
Team sponsored by Jefferson SWCD.*



*Gooding Team 1 placed second at the Envirothon.  
Team sponsored by Gooding SCD.*



*North Gem captured third place at the Envirothon.  
Team sponsored by Caribou SCD.*

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### SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

322 East Front Street, Suite 560 Boise Idaho 83702  
P: 208-332-1790 • F: 208-332-1799  
[info@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:info@swc.idaho.gov) • [www.swc.idaho.gov](http://www.swc.idaho.gov)

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