



*SWC engineers and conservation staff help Idaho districts plan, fund, permit and execute projects. The Commission is pleased to have filled a number of vacant positions to continue service to our conservation districts.*

## MEET SEVEN NEW SWC STAFF MEMBERS - FROM COEUR D'ALENE TO POCA TELLO

By Steve Stuebner

Retaining quality employees has been a challenge for many Idaho employers statewide and nationwide over the last several years.

The Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission has had a number of positions turn over mainly due to people retiring or moving on to other opportunities.

In this issue of *Conservation the Idaho Way*, we'd like to introduce seven new members of the SWC staff, including four new field staff, two new people in the state office, and a new staff engineer in Eastern Idaho.

"We are really pleased and very fortunate that we have been able to fill our vacant positions with highly qualified people and exceptionally high quality human beings," said Delwyne Trefz, SWC Administrator. "As you get to know them a bit, I think you'll be impressed with what amazing people they are."

### New Field Staff

**Katie Yoder**, Natural Resources Conservationist, based in Coeur d'Alene.

Yoder serves four conservation districts in five counties in District 1 in Northern Idaho, including Benewah,



*Katie Yoder on a xc ski outing.*



Kootenai-Shoshone, Bonner, and Boundary Conservation Districts.

Yoder began working for SWC in June 2021.

"I am originally from the farming community of Palouse, Washington," Yoder says. "I grew up on a small hobby farm where we grew hay for our horses, vegetables, sheep and chickens for eggs."

"I participated in 4-H and FFA all through school and went on to receive a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Archaeology from the University of Montana."

"During college and afterward, I worked for various federal and state agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and spent the most time with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, based out of the Couer d'Alene Regional office."

"I really like working with the districts in Northern Idaho. All four of them are very different and each one has diverse needs and issues, so that makes things interesting every day."

"Outside of work, I like to ride horses, hunt, fish, backpack, go whitewater rafting and cross-country skiing. I also like to dabble with a lot of art projects, painting, pottery and leather-work."

**Meghan Brooksher**, Natural Resources Conservationist, based in Emmett.

Brooksher serves the Div. III Districts of Gem, Squaw Creek, Valley, Payette, and Weiser River. She just joined the SWC staff in June.

"I recently moved to Emmett from the Central Valley of California," Brooksher says. "There, I grew up surrounded by agriculture. On my family's farm, we grew peaches, plums, table grapes and raisins, and for a short time almonds. In 2021, I graduated from Fresno State University with a



*Meghan Brooksher enjoys exploring the backcountry with her husband in their Jeep. She's also has a spoiled cat named "Sir Oliver."*

bachelor's degree in Plant Science.

"My first job after graduating was as a lab assistant in an Entomology Lab working with agricultural biological control. I am excited to use information that I learned there and apply it as a Natural Resource Conservationist with SWC."

"In my free time, I love to go camping in the mountains with my husband. I also like going 4-wheeling on trails in one of our many Jeeps or just driving around town to see what there is to see. I am a proud cat mom to "Sir Oliver." He is the biggest brat cat I have ever seen. He has my husband and I trained well!"

**Joe Peterson**, Natural Resources Conservationist, based in Boise. He serves Districts in both Division III and IV in SW Idaho, including Adams, Ada, Bruneau River, Canyon, Camas, Elmore and Owyhee.

"I started working for the Commission in January of 2021 after having previously worked for the U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of




*Joe Peterson out on a hike.*

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*Dustin Diaz with his wife, Kandis and three children.*

Reclamation, largely focused on the Soda Wildfire restoration efforts and quagga mussels/water quality monitoring in the Pacific Northwest.

"It was a challenging time when I joined the Commission at the beginning of the Covid pandemic. We were in the heat of the pandemic and a lot of monthly district board meetings were either cancelled or held through Zoom.

"Having been with the Commission now for over a year and half has been so exciting and rewarding. Being able to interact and help each district with their own sets of priorities and challenges has been my favorite part of the job.

"I grew up on an evergreen tree farm that my family operated in Emmett. I was surrounded by agriculture in that rural area. My uncle is John Peterson, a sheep rancher in Emmett as well so

I would help him with tasks on the farm during the summer and spend time with the lambs.

"My upbringing helped shape who I am today and my passion for the outdoors and conservation. I graduated from Boise State University with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies.

My favorite hobbies involve some type of outdoor activity where I can enjoy the scenery of Idaho (or South America for that matter). I recently returned from a trip in South America where I spent three weeks touring southern Chile and Argentina on a motorcycle. Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were absolutely beautiful!"

"I continue to look forward to helping and serving the conservation districts in Southwestern Idaho."

**Dustin Diaz**, Natural Resource Conservationist, serves the Division VI conservation districts, based in Jerome. He joined the Conservation Commission in September 2021.

He started out serving the North Side, Snake River, Twin Falls and Balanced Rock districts, and now he also serves the Gooding and Custer districts.

"I am 25 years old with a wife, Kandis Diaz, and three kids, Abram, 3, Waylon, 1, and Eliana born July 6th of this year. Needless to say, I'm a busy Dad!" Diaz says.

"I am originally from Fernley, Nevada but I consider myself from Kimberly Idaho as most of my life I've lived in Idaho. In Kimberly, I grew up helping on my grandparent's goat farm as well my friends' farms. After high school, my plan was to go to the College of Southern Idaho then transfer to the

University of Idaho for a degree in Natural Resources. I went to CSI then I was granted a perfect opportunity to move to Colorado with my wife and go to Colorado State University where I graduated with a Rangeland Ecology, Conservation and Management degree in December 2020.

"My wife and I then moved back to Idaho in February 2021.

"My hobbies include hunting and fishing and working with my hands such as welding and attempting woodworking."



*Brenda Charles, Grants/Contracts Program Specialist*

### **New SWC State Office employees**

**Brenda Charles**, Grants/Contracts Program Specialist for the Resource Conservation and Rangeland Development Program (RCRDP). Charles has been working for the Conservation Commission for 1.5 years supporting the RCRDP Loan program.

She has worked in local government for 14 years, including 12 years with the City of San Jose.

Outside of work, Charles enjoys traveling, state fairs and is an annual volunteer for the Reno Balloon Festival in Nevada.

**Melonie Zeigler**, SWC Fiscal Officer, joined the Conservation Commission in July.

"I'm a native of Idaho and was raised on a cattle ranch in the Pahsimeroi



*Left, Melonie Zeigler tends to an irrigation ditch at her family's 4th generation ranch in the spectacular Pahsimeroi Valley.*



*Ricki Garden, new SWC engineer, serving Eastern Idaho*

Valley – geographically, on the Little Lost side of Mt. Borah,” Zeigler says. “It was a beautiful place to grow up. In this Valley is where my foundational love of country and agriculture began and continues to grow. I escape to the ranch every chance I get.

“I have a bachelor’s degree in Accounting and technical degree in Civil Engineering.

“In my public sector career, I’ve had the opportunity to work for now my sixth state agency. In addition to working for the great state of Idaho, I took a sabbatical from public service and started my own business to promote Idaho-made products and small businesses and marketing their product sales to local retailers.

“My passion and my heart is IDAHO Strong and Locally Focused. I will work hard to support the objectives of the Commission and cultivate effective partnerships with our local, state, and federal partners.”

**Ricki Garden**, SWC Associate Engineer, based in Pocatello. Garden just began working for the Commission this summer as an Associate Engineer serving Divisions IV, V and VI in the Eastern region of Idaho.

“After completing a bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering, I decided to pursue work more targeted toward field work and environmental endeavors,” Garden says.

“In pursuit of this path, I worked for the Forest Service in multiple seasonal roles, first as a hydrologic technician on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, monitoring sediment quantities and river health across the entirety of the forest. Later, I worked as a forestry technician in Colorado, acting as sawyer on the timber stand improvement crew and serving as a wildland firefighter on multiple extended rolls that found her fighting fires in New Mexico, Colorado, and South Dakota.

“Moving on from these seasonal roles, I once again pursued an engineering path, but this time aimed for a position where I might marry my love of water, dirt, and the hard work I experienced in the forests. I have since practiced in various river and ecosystem-restoration engineering roles across the country, from lands soggy with water in the mountains and plains of Appalachia and the Pacific Northwest to the inner continental dust-choked lands of the arid West in the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico and Colorado.

“Now, I’m calling Idaho home, eager to serve and protect these lands and waters that I hold in my heart as best I can.”

*Steve Stuebner contributes to Conservation the Idaho Way on a regular basis.*

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