



*The Payette Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored a WQPA grant project to upgrade a major drain for the Canyon County Drainage District #2 near the City of Payette. (photo by Meghan Brooksher, SWC)*

## IDAHO CONSERVATION DISTRICTS ENCOURAGED TO APPLY FOR WQPA GRANTS FOR PROJECTS IN FY 26

By Steve Stuebner

After three years of success with more than 115 voluntary conservation projects installed statewide by 47 of Idaho's conservation districts, the Idaho Legislature approved an additional \$1 million for the Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) grant program in fiscal 2026.

"We really appreciate the support from the Idaho Legislature to extend the WQPA grant program for another year with significant funding for conservation projects statewide," said Loretta Strickland,

Ag Program Manager for the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, which administers the grant funds.

"We have been impressed since the WQPA grant program was revitalized in FY 2023 how all of Idaho's conservation districts across the state have stepped up to work with local producers to submit applications for projects," Strickland said. "And we have leveraged \$11 million in funding from FY 2023-25 to install 116 projects with a total value of \$27.84 million in conservation projects implemented

on farms and ranches statewide."

Participation in the WQPA program has been high since it was revitalized in FY 2023. The Conservation Commission has received a total of 221 proposals with a total cost of \$23.5 million, including local cost-share funds proposed.

"Obviously, the demand is high statewide to obtain grants and install more conservation projects," Strickland said. "In a lot of cases, without the WQPA grant or other partner funding, these projects would not have been moved forward."



Since the end of the 2025 legislative session, the Conservation Commission has been publicizing the new grant opportunity under the WQPA program to conservation districts statewide.

**The application period is currently open from April 15-May 15.**

Eligible projects include:

- Improve or rehabilitate water delivery and drainage.
- Implement Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs), including livestock BMPs.
- Enhance and restore soil and water resources.

Projects must be installed prior to May 31, 2026 and provide 35% matching funds.

In this newsletter, the Conservation Commission has spotlighted numerous WQPA projects that turned into conservation success stories. Below, we will recap those projects briefly to give conservation districts and landowners ideas of worthy projects that were funded:

- The Galloway Dam/Diversion Rehabilitation Project in the November 2024 issue – Total cost: \$383,000; \$150,000 in WQPA funds, and \$124,410 Aging Infrastructure Grant from the Idaho Water Resource Board.
- A WQPA video in 2025 featured the support from Idaho Gov. Brad Little and the Idaho Legislature for water quality and water infrastructure projects statewide, and spotlighting the China Creek water quality



*New, right-sized, fish-friendly culvert projects are among the type of conservation projects eligible for WQPA funding. This one was a partnership project between Clearwater SWCD and the Clearwater County Road Department. (photo courtesy Clearwater SWCD)*

project and the Cohn Creek stream-restoration project (see more about that below).

- The Portneuf Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored the \$55,000 WQPA grant for the Cohn Creek restoration project on the Arimo Ranch, south of Pocatello. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided over \$222,000 and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service funded \$31,000 for engineering and design.

- The Idaho Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored the China Creek WQPA project. The total cost of the project was \$170,000 with the WQPA grant covering \$57,376 and a DEQ grant covering \$96,000. Local landowners contributed \$17,000. The new fish-friendly arched culvert will result in the following reductions per year to improve water quality:

- o75 tons of sediment
- o120 pounds of phosphorous
- o240 pounds of nitrogen

- In the December 2023 issue, we featured the Elmore District livestock BMP water improvement project with off-site cattle troughs developed away from a live water source. The Elmore District received \$67,000 in WQPA grant funds in the spring of 2023 to allow rancher Neil Helmick to move forward with the project. The total project costs were about \$95,000, with a \$22,425 cost-share contribution from the Helmick family.

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*Contractors position new drain pipe into position for the Payette SWCD and Canyon County Drainage District #2. The project has been completed in time for the 2025 irrigation season. (Photo by Meghan Brooksher/SWC)*

•In the same issue, we featured the Boundary SCD Cow Creek Bank Stabilization Project, a \$26,000 WQPA grant project with a total cost of about \$35,000 and \$8,700 landowner cost-share. The Twin Lakes Canal Improvements, sponsored by the Camas District near Fairfield, enhanced two sections of an aged and deteriorated canal with \$123,750 in WQPA funds, \$37,500 in cost-share funds and a total cost of \$161,250.

#### **Payette SWCD WQPA drain project**

In another recent WQPA project funded in FY 2025, the Payette SWCD recently completed the Phase II Underground Drain Replacement project for Canyon County Drainage District #2. The objective was to replace a section of a buried agricultural drain that is outdated and no longer functioning properly,

officials said.

CCDD#2 and its users have not been able to effectively use this aged concrete drain as it has become damaged due to the concrete collapsing underground. The entire length of underground drainage is 1,650 feet. Phase I of project replaced 140 feet of pipe in FY 24. Phase II replaced approximately 160 feet of this drainage pipe in FY 25.

The project is located approximately five miles north of the city of Payette. It flows from the end of an irrigation ditch, carrying return flows to the Snake River. The current 24-inch concrete drain serves to transport both subsurface ground water (flowing year-round) and agricultural runoff during irrigation season. This underground portion of pipeline that is to be replaced sits near the end of the drain, making it

a critical objective to replace.

“The CCDD#2 drainage district of Payette County jumped at the chance to apply for a WQPA grant to replace a portion of the underground pipe that had been plugging and settling problems,” said Jo Anne Smith, Chairwoman of the Payette District. “The drainage district operates on a small budget and could not afford to replace aging infrastructure without financial assistance. The district applied twice for grant funds from the Idaho Water Resource Board, but was unsuccessful.

“WQPA grant funds facilitated the drainage district in improving conditions for managing agricultural tail water and natural spring flow.”

The concrete pipeline was replaced with a modern 30-inch perforated ADS pipe with drain rock and filter



fabric. The current pipe had sunken in multiple locations, resulting in the breakage of pipe and causing the drain to become plugged.

This impacts users of the drainage system as the irrigation runoff can no longer be adequately conveyed and the natural spring water that runs through the pipe leaks into the water table and creates high moisture/ponding issues for the parcels of farmland in the area.

The project goals included:

1. Replace roughly 160 feet of collapsing and plugged concrete pipe with a larger and more modern 30-inch ADS perforated pipe.

2. Adequately convey and divert irrigation runoff and natural underground spring water to a NRCS wetlands reserve and into the Snake River providing critical habitat for wildlife.

3. Improve the water quality and increase the year-round supply of water for the wetlands area and the Snake River.

4. Alleviate user issues with high moisture and ponding of agricultural fields as the natural spring water will be able to continue to flow and be transported effectively.

5. Alleviate user's issues with sinkholes forming on the parcels of cropland directly above the old underground pipeline.

6. Improve the safety of the field as sinkholes can be dangerous for people, livestock, and equipment.

The total cost of the drain project



# WQPA

WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURE

## WQPA COST-SHARE FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROJECTS

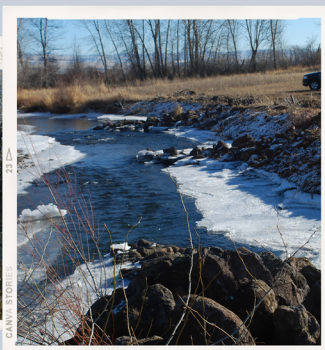
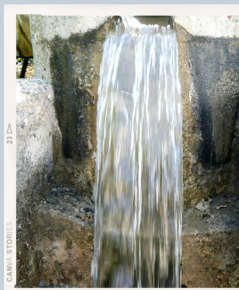
Cost-share funding is available for eligible soil and water conservation projects to:

- ▶ **Improve or rehabilitate water delivery and drainage**
- ▶ **Implement Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs)**
- ▶ **Enhance and restore soil and water resources**

**Applications will be accepted April 15-May 15**

**Projects must be installed prior to May 31, 2026 and provide 35% matching funds.**

*For more information about WQPA or assistance to get the application process started, please contact your local SWCC staff person or Loretta Strickland at [loretta.strickland@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:loretta.strickland@swc.idaho.gov).*



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was \$56,150. The WQPA grant covered \$36,498. CCDD#2 provided \$19,652 in local cost-share funds. The drain is a critical piece of infrastructure that serves over 100 water users and 2,300 acres of farmland.

For more information about WQPA

grants, contact your local SWC staff person or Loretta Strickland at SWC, [Loretta.Strickland@swc.idaho.gov](mailto:Loretta.Strickland@swc.idaho.gov) or call 208-810-0769.

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

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