



Delwyne Trefz, center (wearing black cowboy hat) checks on soil moisture in a field with SWCC engineer Bill Lillibridge and SWCC staff. Trefz is retiring after 16 years of service for SWCC, the last four as Administrator. (Steve Stuebner photo)

DELWYNE TREFZ RETIRES, IDWR DIRECTOR MATHEW WEAVER TAKES OVER AS INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR

By Steve Stuebner

Many of the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission staff, friends and family came to a jubilant retirement party for former SWCC Administrator Delwyne Trefz on May 8 at the Best Western hotel in Caldwell.

Born in Calgary, Alberta, Trefz is the son of a third-generation rancher from the remote Alberta prairies who eventually moved his family to Caldwell. Trefz graduated from Gem State Academy in Caldwell in 1976. The Commission staff hailed him as a man who remained true to

the cause of making conservation improvements on Idaho farms and ranches for the benefit of producers and the environment for 16 years.

"As our administrator, Delwyne made tremendous strides in improving relationships with our partners," said Loretta Strickland, Ag Program Manager for SWCC. "I think they are the strongest I have seen since I started in the District Conservation world in 2004. He definitely left the Commission in a better place.

"Delwyne was the highlight of any staff meeting, Division meeting,

whatever meeting he was in," Strickland continued. "Delwyne was passionate about our work and that passion trickled down to all his staff. He made the Commission an extremely positive work environment. We were a team with a shared mission. Delwyne believed in his staff wholeheartedly and gave us the freedom to try new things. He helped us excel at the jobs we were hired to do."

More about Trefz and his reflections on his career in a moment.



Above right, IDWR Director and SWCC Interim Director Mathew Weaver. Left, Weaver with a fresh-caught rainbow trout. Fly Fishing is one of his outdoor passions. (photos courtesy Director Weaver)

Agency and Leadership Transition

Mathew Weaver, the Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), has been named the Acting Administrator of the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission by Gov. Brad Little. Based on communications between Gov. Little and SWCC leadership, the leadership change could be permanent or temporary, officials said.

Statement from Gov. Little:

"Idaho has been self-evaluating and identifying potential areas of increased government efficiency for years ... As it pertains more specifically to the Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC), we have an opportunity to examine possible efficiencies and the chance to leverage partnerships in state government in a pragmatic fashion. To be clear, the conversations have

my staff, acting Administrator Mat Weaver, former Administrator Delwyne Trefz, the state Division of Financial Management, and the state Division of Human Resources. Additionally, we're connecting with stakeholders to ensure their input on any potential changes are taken into account.

"The SWCC plays an important role, and under the leadership of IDWR staff, you can continue to provide rural Idaho this important service. More importantly, it's good practice to examine how our state agencies are truly helping constituents."

Weaver shared the governor's statement at the SWC Commission meeting. He has been IDWR Director since 2023. He served as deputy director for 10 years prior to that. A Montana native, Weaver has a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Montana State

been, and still are, ongoing between

University. He worked in the private sector for about 10 years, focusing on various aspects of engineering design for municipalities, irrigation and development.

Seeking a change, he went back to school, earning a master's degree in hydrologic sciences from Boise State and joined IDWR 17 years ago. He is a licensed professional engineer.

"I'm a fourth-generation engineer born near the Missouri River

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Delwyne Trefz in the Himalayan Mountains. He will have more time now to explore in the mountains, one of his passions. (Photo courtesy Delwyne Trefz)

headwaters,” Weaver said. “I grew up living in rural and urban communities across the Pacific Northwest, giving me a broad interest in natural resource issues. When I’m not working, I enjoy living an active “Idaho Lifestyle” with my wife and twin boys, including hiking, biking, fishing and skiing.”

At the retirement party, Weaver shared his thoughts about leadership and ethics in the field of natural resources and working for state government.

The following are some of Weaver’s core values:

1. Stewardship of the public trust.
2. Commitment to public good.
3. An honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.

4. Self-awareness: See yourself from the perspective of others.

6. Humility — adopting the attitude that you are not better than others and that you don’t know everything.

7. Strong communication— communicating often and always honestly.

8. Develop yourself and others.

Weaver said his near-term objectives for the Commission include:

- Getting to know the staff and their work.

- Outreach with Districts and the Commission.

- Carrying out the Governor’s Code Cleanup Initiative.

- Completing SWCC’s FY2026 – FY2029 Strategic Plan.

- Completing SWCC’s FY2025 Performance Metrics Report.

- Preparing SWCC’s Draft FY2027 Budget.

More about Delwyne Trefz

Following high school, Trefz went to Walla Walla Community College and obtained an Associate’s Degree in Agronomy. After that, he worked for the U.S. Public Health Service for two years in Alaska, helping to install electric and sewer systems in Native American villages.

Upon returning to Idaho, Trefz met and married his wife, Colleen. They settled in Homedale, where he farmed leased ground in the early

1980s. Colleen had two kids of her own at that point, and the couple would have two more kids, for a family of three girls and one boy.

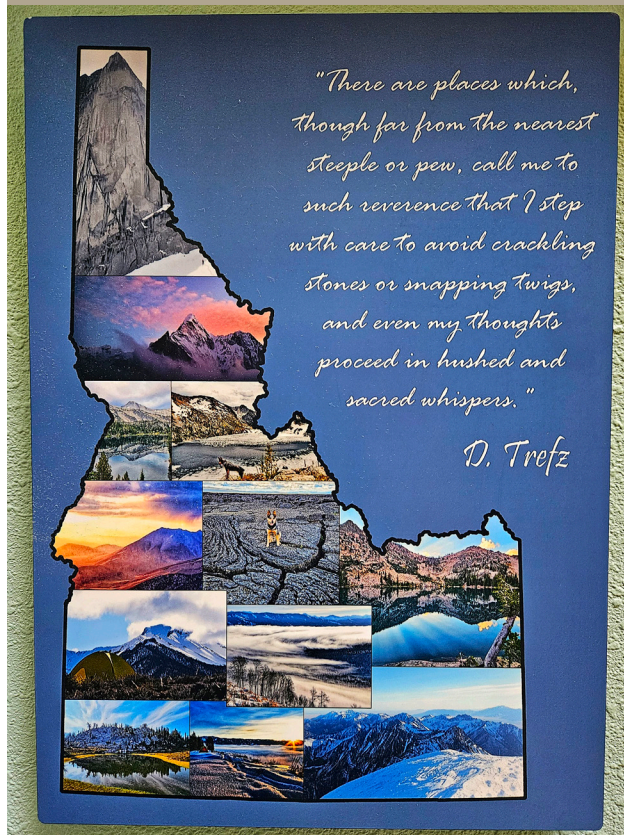
In Fall 1986, they moved to Moscow for Trefz to finish his college education. He earned a master’s degree in Plant Sciences from the University of Idaho. Trefz went to work in the vegetable seed industry in the Columbia Basin, based in Moses Lake, Wash., for 12 years.

Following that stint, the family moved back to Homedale, and Trefz launched a small business working as a silver smith for 5 years, making silver-mounted bridle bits, spurs, and sterling jewelry. By late 2007, the economic recession started to grip the nation. “Sales were slumping, and I realized I needed to get a regular job,” he says.

Trefz began working on contract for the Idaho Association of State Conservation Districts to coordinate an Owyhee Conservation District \$319 project, which involved working with producers to implement nutrient and irrigation best management practices throughout northwest Owyhee County.

“Working with conservation districts and our private and public partners was a real eye-opener,” Trefz says. “When I was farming in Homedale in the 1980s, I didn’t even know that the Owyhee Conservation District existed. But after working with the grant administrators at the EPA and DEQ, they helped me understand how you could identify worthy projects with landowners and districts, and then write applications for these grants, and you could install conservation projects at the ground-level that would have lasting benefits for the landowner and the environment.”

In June 2009, Trefz began his career



Plaque presented to Delwyne Trefz at his retirement party. (Courtesy SWCC staff)

with the Commission as a Water Quality Resource Conservationist serving Elmore, Bruneau River, Ada, Canyon, Owyhee and Weiser River conservation districts. In 2011, he moved up to serve as the SWCC Ag Program Specialist, responsible for supervising field staff and administrating District Support Services. In 2014, he was promoted to be Deputy Administrator, and in 2021, the Administrator, following the retirement of Teri Murrison.

"Early on in my career with the SWC, I acquired a deep appreciation for everything conservation districts and our professional staff – now

day.

"And they do this from remote locations, often a long day's drive from their supervisor or even the nearest other SWCC employee. As an administrator, having staff working in remote locations presents challenges, which I've always felt are best handled by taking the time required to recruit and hire good people, and then turning them loose, trusting them to make good decisions to advance the conservation cause."

Trefz made sure the staff understood that assisting landowners and the state's 50 conservation districts in

referred to as Natural Resource Conservationists (NRC) – contribute to the conservation partnership. They are the true "boots on the ground" responsible for developing science-based, yet pragmatic solutions to natural resource issues on private farms and ranchlands in Idaho.

"In addition to the technical expertise required, our NRC's must be self-starters, curious, good listeners, eager learners, excellent problem solvers, and highly adept at conducting themselves in a professional manner while dealing with the plethora of individuals they interact with every

implementing conservation projects in the field was, ultimately, the bottom line.

"Our field staff have all heard my oft-repeated mantra—"Happy Districts, Happy Delwyne!" he says. "The surest way for the commission to shine is for every one of the 50 conservation districts to be a total rock star!"

Says Strickland, "Delwyne had a profound impact on me and the person I aspire to be as a Commission employee. In the future when I find myself in a situation with hard decisions, I will be asking myself, "what would Delwyne do?" He will be missed. But I think we will all smile and wonder what mountain he is climbing."

At his retirement party, Trefz received several plaques from staff. One of them said, "We know the mountains are calling. Thanks for being the Administrator of a Lifetime."

Another plaque (shown above, left) provided a quote from Trefz, showing his love for the outdoors: "There are places, though far from the nearest steeple or pew, which call me to such reverence that I step with care to avoid crackling stones or snapping twigs, and even my thoughts proceed in hushed and sacred whispers."

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

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SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

322 East Front Street, Suite 560 Boise Idaho
83702 P: 208-332-1790 • ww332-1799
info@swc.idaho.gov • www.swc.idaho.gov

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