

# Executive Update



Helping People Help the Land

A special update for Idaho conservation leaders ♦ Winter 2008

## Special Feature: Stream Restoration Project to Increase Steelhead Habitat

A routine stream survey triggered major stream restoration efforts on Latah County's Corral Creek last year. The survey, conducted by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), concluded that Idaho's threatened steelhead were abundant in lower Corral Creek but absent upstream of an old, deteriorating culvert. This finding initiated a huge partnership effort between Federal, State and local agencies to remove the obstructive culvert and open up

18 miles of fish habitat not previously accessible.

"During high spring flows, water would shoot out the downstream end of the undersized culvert approximately 10 to 12 feet before hitting the bank. This was also the time of year steelhead were migrating to spawn but could not move further upstream because of the barrier," said Kevin Traylor, area biologist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). During lower flows, the culvert's smooth concrete lining dispersed the flow into a thin sheet of water too shallow for fish.

Part of the stream restoration process involved determining the most viable replacement for the culvert. NRCS engineers decided on an artificial

*Old culvert structure, sitting below 60 feet of compacted fill, blocked fish passage upstream of Corral Creek.*



*New stream channel will allow steelhead and other fish to access 18 miles of habitat.*

stream channel. They calculated how much water and sediment could come through the stream so it would have the right velocity to allow fish passage, but not erode or degrade. "If we made the channel too small, then water would be too fast, and if the channel was too large, sediment would drop out and fill it," said Rob Sampson, NRCS state conservation engineer.

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## Grant Explores Irrigation Management on Potatoes

by Cindy Snyder, TSP public affairs specialist

For hundreds of years, potatoes have been planted in raised rows. But why? Planting in raised rows allows the water to drain away from the plant and then leave the field via the furrows created between rows.

John Taberna is hoping a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service will help him convince farmers to try a different method of planting potatoes. His company, Western Ag Research, has modified potato planters to plant

in a grid -- a bed -- rather than rows.

Planting in rows creates steep side hills that are subject to erosion. Using the bed technology eliminates those steep hills and creates a "flatter" field--the flatter the field, the less water that drains or evaporates. If more water is available in the soil to grow the crop, farmers may be able to reduce the amount of irrigation water applied to the field.

The grant also allows him to continue working with the USDA Agricultural Research Service to gather the

*Potatoes planted in rows and beds. Close bed plantings shade the soil and conserve water.*



scientific data needed to bring the technology to more wide scale use. "Our ultimate goal is to get equal or better yields with ten to fifteen percent less water," said Taberna.

## Conservationist's Corner



Rick Noble,  
Acting State  
Conservationist  
Idaho NRCS

### *“Looking Ahead”*

Conservationists across the nation are looking forward with anticipation to the new Farm Bill. The Conservation Title of the new Farm Bill will set the direction for conservation programs on private lands for years to come. The framework established in this bill will translate to implementation on the land. Private landowners across Idaho will utilize technical and financial assistance to apply conservation practices to treat numerous resource concerns.

The new Farm Bill will undoubtedly contain changes from the 2002 Farm Bill. As conservationists, it will be important for us to understand the differences and the changes put forth in the new legislation. We need to understand these changes so that we may articulate them at the local level. We will be tasked with carrying the conservation provisions forward and working with private landowners and our valued partners in conservation. It is this kind of effort carried out at the local level that makes voluntary conservation and the conservation partnership such a success.

While this new legislation will provide the framework for conservation programs, the implementation will happen on farms and ranches across Idaho. Ultimately, good conservation is applied through quality conservation planning, which is invaluable in helping landowners address all natural resource issues and crafting economical solutions. Change is inevitable, but be assured that our conservation planning is always available.

## Snapshots from the Field



**Idaho County, Idaho Department of Lands, Salmon Rural Volunteer Fire Department, and the Bureau of Land Management.**

**The Clearwater Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council helped implement a fire mitigation education program that reached over 150 homeowners in the Salmon River Canyon last year. This project provided information and education about defensible space and provided free assessments for structures within the wildland urban interface. Partners included the Nez Perce National Forest,**

**The Aberdeen Plants Material Center (PMC) is wrapping up evaluations of six native species for potential use for land restoration in northern Idaho and Montana with the USDA Forest Service. Over 50 accessions of bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, blue wildrye, tufted hairgrass, Sandberg bluegrass and western yarrow were studied in replicated field trials. These native collections were established at the PMC in 2004 to evaluate and compare them with known industry releases. A few promising collections were identified during this study.**



## Stream Restoration (cont'd)

**T**o remove the 200 foot-long culvert, crews had to cut through approximately 60 feet of compacted fill. Removing the large, heavy culvert and the mounds of fill above it required careful coordination between the NRCS, IDFG, Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service. These partners provided funding and/or technical assistance for the research, engineering, construction, vegetation and restoration efforts to assist in this

huge conservation venture.

It took crews 5,000 truckloads to excavate the 49,000 cubic yards of fill above the culvert. Now, a restored stream channel resides in its place, allowing water to flow naturally from the creek to the Potlatch River. NRCS is currently in the process of revegetating the stream bank with native plant species to reduce erosion, enhance stream bank stability and provide shading for the fish. “Plant shade cools the water, which is desirable for fish and the organisms that fish feed on,” said Ronnie Graham, NRCS soil conservation technician. “Planting a healthy riparian zone with suitable vegetation creates aquatic ecosystems that are key to fish survival.”