
Corridor Handbook and case study can help plan watershed scale wildlife projects

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed, tested, and incorporated a comprehensive, watershed-scale wildlife habitat planning tool into the agency's National Biology Handbook.

The Conservation Corridor Planning at the Landscape Level: Managing for Wildlife Habitat (Corridor Handbook) was developed and then tested in the Henry's Fork Watershed of the Snake River in Idaho by Utah State University (USU) in partnership with the former NRCS Watershed Science Institute and Wildlife Habitat Management Institute.

Corridors valuable to wildlife

Riparian corridors of woody and herbaceous vegetation occurring along the edges of streams and rivers are used by more than 70 percent of all terrestrial wildlife species during some part of their life cycle.

But those corridors are declining, and the remnant fragments or patches of relatively large undisturbed habitat are becoming less common, smaller, and increasingly isolated.

How corridors are arranged and connected within the larger landscape context determine their wildlife value. The Corridor Handbook emphasizes planning, designing, and managing corridors to optimize multiple benefits.

"The handbook is designed for NRCS conservationists and partners as a planning tool," says Dr. Craig Johnson, who led the corridor project on behalf of USU. "It emphasizes partnerships and cooperation in planning to realize a shared vision of land, water, and wildlife conservation among farmers, ranchers, developers, conservation organizations, local communities, and local, State, and Federal agencies."

Lower Henry's Fork Case Study

Partnerships and cooperation among many of those committed to land, water, and wildlife conservation are already a reality in the Henry's Fork watershed.

A 40-mile reach of the lower Henry's Fork flows through privately owned ranch land and productive winter wheat, barley, and potato farms. Like many watersheds with few residents, breathtaking scenery, world-class fishing, and other recreational opportunities, the Henry's Fork is experiencing increased development pressure.

The Henry's Fork Watershed Council and Agricultural Corridor Project used the Corridor Handbook as a process for people interested in the future of the watershed to define and work toward common goals.

They targeted stream corridors and farmlands for protection, prioritizing those that support waterfowl flyways and wildlife migration corridors, cottonwood forests, open space, and scenic recreational experiences.

The conclusion of the Henry's Fork test was that the principles and methodology of the Corridor Handbook provide the procedures and tools necessary for successful wildlife planning on a watershed scale.

Both the handbook and case study offer insight for NRCS field planners, according to Hank Henry and Ed Hackett, biologists with the NRCS who helped facilitate the projects.

Hackett is with the NRCS Agricultural Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC), formerly the Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, which funded the project. The AWCC, located in Madison, Mississippi, is a fish and wildlife technology development center.

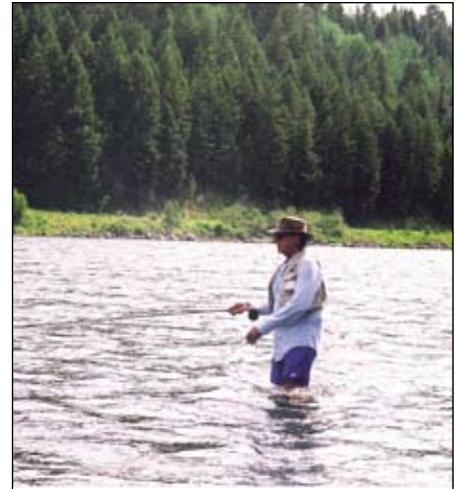


Photo by Craig Johnson, USU

Fishing Henry's Fork

Summary of:

Agricultural Wildlife Conservation Center
Project # 40-7482-1-125

For more information on wildlife conservation technology, contact:

Ed Hackett
NRCS AWCC
Phone: (601) 607-3131
E-mail: ed.hackett@ms.usda.gov
Web site: <http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov>

For more information on this summary, contact:

Dr. Craig Johnson
USU
Phone: (435) 797-0507
E-mail: cjohnson@hass.usu.edu

Hank Henry
NRCS East National Technology Support Center
Phone: (336) 370-3349
E-mail: hank.henry@gnb.usda.gov