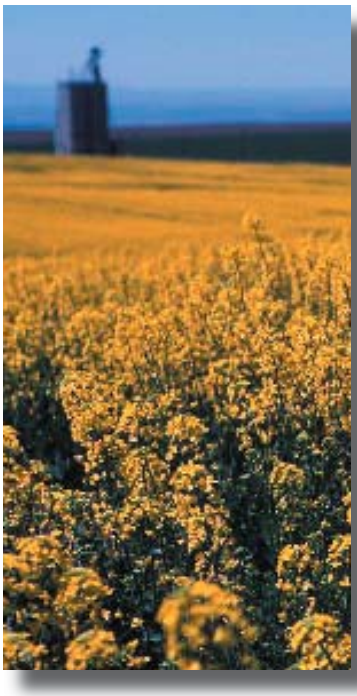


Highlights

The newsletter for Idaho NRCS employees and conservation partners.

Summer 2006 In this Issue

Finding "Nema" ... 2

Nezperce Students Going "Batty" ... 3

Snapshots from the Field ... 4

Personnel Actions ... 5

Quotable Quotes

"People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be."
-*Abraham Lincoln*

"Look at a day when you are supremely satisfied at the end. It's not a day when you lounge around doing nothing; it's when you had everything to do, and you've done it. ."
-*Margaret Thatcher*

"Live to the point of tears."
-*Albert Camus*

Helping People Help the Land

NRCS

Special Feature

NRCS Conserving the Heritage of Native Plants

Sho-Ban Tribes Working to Reintroduce Camas

Every year, members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe at Fort Hall travel to the Camas Prairie near Fairfield to dig camas bulbs.

"Many of the tribal elders remember digging it here [Fort Hall] as kids," says **Kurt Cates**, Fort Hall DC. "But it's not here now."

The camas plant boasts purple flowers and a small edible bulb. Considered very nutritious, the tribe has traditionally pit-roasted the bulbs or dried them for use in soups and stews.

"As a Tribe, we're trying to reintroduce camas to its traditional native areas," Cates says.

Last year, the NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Corvallis, Ore., sent bulbs. Tribal members, along with students from the Sho-Ban School, planted them. Cooperative Extension provided additional seed.

However, tribal members were disappointed to see that none of the plants came up this spring.

"But we're not giving up," Cates says.

(Below) Kurt Cates helps with a fire pit for roasting the collected bulbs while other tribal members look on.

Aberdeen PMC Studying, Releasing Native Plants

The Aberdeen Plant Materials Center (PMC) wants to add another native plant to its list of releases.

The PMC is asking for help in locating stands of sulphurflower buckwheat for seed collection this summer.

"Sulphurflower buckwheat is important to sage grouse," says **Dan Ogle**, NRCS plant materials specialist in Boise. "Like a lot of forbs, the plant is a definite source of insects which, in turn, provides food for sage grouse chicks."

Since the Aberdeen PMC has already grown sulphurflower buckwheat for the Craters of the Moon National Park, they knew they could be successful in making a release.

..."PMC" continued page 2

As part of their annual trek to the Camas Prairie this spring, tribal members brought a new round of camas bulbs back to plant.

"We're also going to get some camas from the Island Park area and plant it in the mountainous areas of the reservation," Cates says.

The Tribe also dries camas bulbs for use in soups and stews.

NRCS Soils Crew Assists APHIS

Finding the potato cyst nematode

by Kristen Clayton
Public Affairs, Idaho Falls

The Idaho Falls soil survey crew recently embarked on a new kind of mission. The soil scientists assisted APHIS in their search for the origination of the potato cyst nematode. Crew member **Bill Hiett** coined the mission, "Finding Nema."

APHIS' goal was to discover the origin of a potato cyst nematode found in a soil sample collected from a potato processing facility in Idaho. NRCS soil scientists compared the soil sample with the worm on two suspected fields.

The Sample

"The first step is to determine what common properties the sample and the suspected fields have in common," says Project Leader **Glenn Hoffmann**. The crew became involved in the project when APHIS staff swarmed into the Idaho Falls office asking for soil surveys and GIS maps.

The original sample was a composite, containing soil from the infected sample and particles that may have come from elsewhere through the processing equipment. Hoffmann was a bit skeptical at first when the chief inspector asked him if it would be possible to isolate the "Nema" soil.

"I first thought, 'Wow, what a shot in the dark' to match this composite soil as it could contain soil from many other sources ," he says. Hoffmann, along with soil scientists **Carla Rebernak** and Bill Hiett, did a feel test with the sample. The results were nearly identical between scientists and narrowing the search became easier.

The Suspected Field

Walking transects across an anonymous Idaho Falls field, Hoffmann, Rebernak, Hiett and **Francine Farrell** took field tests at points along the way. Then they looked at texture, percentage of clay, color and effervescence (which gives a rough idea of the amount of calcium carbonate in the soil).

"We wore rubber boots, gloves and every precaution was made to keep any potentially infected soil from leaving the field," Hoffmann says. "That's important because we wouldn't want to track any soil from a potentially infected field."

Clean up included thorough washing with a chlorine bleach and water solution.

In Boise, **Dave Hoover**, state soil scientist, was able to generate a map showing the extent of the suspected soil series. APHIS now had an idea where "Nema" originated.

Findings

Hoffmann and his team turned over a report of their findings in the field. "Many of the features we found [in the sample] are similar to what we found in the field," he says.

With the help of NRCS findings, APHIS was able to positively identify the location of the potato cyst nematode from a 45-acre field south of Idaho Falls. APHIS and ISDA report collecting 2,500 soil samples in numerous fields associated with the processing facility. The NRCS soil scientists work certainly helped to narrow the search by identifying the soil series.

Hoffmann says it was a nice experience and made him feel good to be able to assist. "I was really pleased to find that the soil mapping done in the Bonneville Soil Survey in the 1970s was reasonable." Interestingly, he adds, "I also learned that APHIS regularly tests soil material coming from potato processing activities and they're always on the lookout for pests."

"PMC"...from page 1

To find the best selection for the Intermountain West, the PMC will plant seeds from many collections this fall and then choose the most promising three-to-five seed sources. Those, in turn, will be evaluated for the final release.

Ogle says sulphurflower buckwheat will compliment the PMC's plant releases, many of them native and culturally significant plants.

"We have a good selection of grasses and shrubs available," he says. "Now we're working on forbs to complete our recommended native plant community seeding mixtures."

Sulphurflower buckwheat growing at the Craters of the Moon National Park.

Richfield Selection firecracker penstemon (above) and Northern Cold Desert Selection winterfat are examples of native plants released by the PMC.

Nezperce FFA Students Building CSP Bat Houses

by Jodi Walker
Public Affairs, Orofino

The Nezperce Junior High shop students were nearly batty by the end of the school year.

With over 40 bat houses completed and plans for that many more, the class learned firsthand how to produce a quality product and perform a community service.

Nezperce ag teacher **Kyle Stapleton** with student-constructed bat houses.

The bat houses are being sold for $50 each by the Nezperce FFA to producers enrolled in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) who chose bat houses as an enhancement project.

The idea stemmed from a conversation ag teacher **Kyle Stapleton** had with **Kevin Seitz**, DC in Nezperce.

"He said we're going to need a lot of bat houses and a lot of bluebird houses," Stapleton says.

Seitz said it was indeed a casual conversation between the two that led to the project.

"I just threw it out," he says. He says he has no doubt some of the more than 60 contracts in the county will use the school's bat houses.

Stapleton got the blueprints for the bat houses, studied them and nearly ditched the project. He took a deep breath, looked at the plans again and began to understand how to build them.

Teaching the kids has been another issue.

"The kids get frustrated because a lot of them have been pulled apart and put back together," he says.

Looking through the pile of finished houses, Stapleton sets aside a couple houses he missed while inspecting them.

"See this," he says, pointing to a beveled edge. "It should be going the other way so the lid fits securely."

As the weeks of building bat houses wore on, the students started catching their mistakes before Stapleton got a chance.

Stapleton said the money raised will go to the FFA program.

This fall another of Stapleton's shop classes will begin on bird houses, also for CSP.

RC&D Grant Helps Homeowners Make Their Community More Firewise

by Gretl Class
WFEP Wildland Fire Educator, Pocatello

In 2004, Three Rivers RC&D was awarded a grant totaling $432,000 to assist homeowners in reducing fuels around their homes.

The two-year grant funds the Fuel Reduction Cost Share Program, providing homeowners 50-70 percent cost-share for reducing fuels around their homes. Since the award, many homeowners residing in the wildland-urban interface near Pocatello have made their homes and properties more Firewise.

The first project occurred in the Mink Creek area south of Pocatello. Being aware of wildfire behavior, Bruce and Elaine Kilgore built their home in compliance with Firewise principles. For example, their house includes a metal roof and siding and their yard is composed of irrigated grass and Firewise plants. While their home and immediate yard are Firewise, the Kilgore's were still concerned the surrounding area could lead to a fire. These hazardous fuels included conifers and a juniper woodland area.

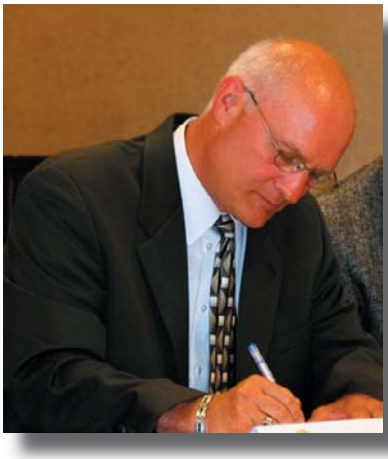
The Kilgores contacted the Three Rivers RC&D Wildland Fire Education Program (WFEP) to request an in-depth home evaluation. From the recommendations provided, they decided to participate in the Fuel Reduction Cost Share Program. These included: (1) removing ladder fuels (lower branches) from the spruce and Douglas-fir below the house; (2) moving a woodpile that was closer than desirable to the house; (3) thinning out a thicket of chokecherries on the hill below the house and (4) generally reducing fuels within 100 feet of the house.

The Kilgores were impressed and decided to continue work the next year farther out from their home. Another home evaluation indicated the juniper trees south of the house needed to be removed. About 30 piles of materials were left to be burned after the first snow arrived.

"We were extremely happy with the work of the Three Rivers RC&D WFEP as well as the contractors we worked with," Bruce Kilgore says. "We would highly recommend that others in the wildland-urban interface around Pocatello and other communities consider projects of this sort."

The Kilgores also starred in the WFEP DVD, which provides information to homeowners on the importance of reducing fuels around homes.

Snapshots from the Field



State Conservationist Rich Sims signs the agency MOU for the Idaho Greater Sage Grouse Plan. He was joined by Idaho Governor Jim Risch and eight other government agency directors.

Dippel Ranch Manager Gill Harris (right) visits with Rich Sims, state conservationist, and Keith Swallows, Plummer technician, about his WQPA and 319 grant water quality projects. NRCS provided the engineering assistance.

School kids enjoy the Conservation Jeopardy game at the Idaho Falls Water Festival. IASCD, NRCS and the East/West Side SWCDs partnered to bring a booth and the game to the Festival.

Hard at work: EQIP Payment Training session, Pocatello. Left to right are Cameron Williams, Soda Springs soil conservationist; Roy Fowler, American Falls DC; Mary Goode, SO budget officer; Chris Bergmann, SO financial tech.; Beth Rasumussen, Montpelier soil conservation tech. and Dean Smith, Blackfoot DC.

Rob Fredericksen, CSP program manager, and Terril Stevenson, natural resource specialist, answer questions during the recent "Get Ready for CSP" producer workshops held June 20-22 in the Magic Valley.

Did You Know...

Some nurseries unknowingly sell ornamental landscape plants that are really weeds.

Beware of the following plants that are officially listed as noxious weeds in Idaho yet were widely available at nurseries in the Boise area in 2003: scotch broom, perrenial pepperweed, orange hawkweed, purple loosestrife, yellowtoadflax and black henbane.

Nurseries may also offer other plants with beautiful flowers that can rapidly expand and out-compete native plants. These include: sulfur cinquefoil, saltcedar, spotted knapweed, Russian-olive, St. Johnswort, ice plant, myrtle spurge, chicory, bachelor buttons/cornflower, bouncingbet, meadow knapweed, cypress spurge and dame's rocket.

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Snapshots from the Field

"I'm so excited about what this new pivot is going to do for my cattle/haying operation. It's like a gift from heaven," says Steve Murdock of Hamer. Rigby DC Howard Johnson (right) helped Murdock switch from flood irrigation to pivot.

Denise Adkins, Rexburg DC, Steve Smart, RC&D coordinator, and Martha Nunez-Hagius, Pocatello civil engineer act out Sacagawea's kidnapping as part of a special Civil Rights presentation.

Personnel Actions: April - June 2006

NEW HIRES

Susan Looper – DC, Rupert FO, 04/16/2006
Julie Koeberle – Hydrologist, Boise SO, 05/14/2006
Kristina Copeland – Soil Con. Tech. (term), Driggs FO, 06/11/2006
Andrew Whitmore – Hydrologic Tech. (temp), Boise SO, 05/22/2006
Carol Moore – Statistical Clerk (temp), Idaho Falls, 05/24/2006
Jennifer Latimer – Statistical Asst., (temp), Boise SO, 05/14/2006

EXCEPTED APPOINTMENTS

Derek Terry – STEP Bio. Science Aid, Aberdeen PMC, 05/24/2006
Tymon Bloomer – SCEP Soil Con., Burley FO, 05/30/2006
Michael Cabusi – SCEP Soil Con., Moscow FO, 06/01/2006
Alvaro Casanova – SCEP Range Mgmt Spec., Emmett FO, 06/11/2006
Jessica Davis – SCEP Range Mgmt. Spec., Rexburg FO, 05/14/2006
Mark Layton – SCEP Range Mgmt. Spec., Soda Springs FO, 05/14/2006
Rusty Norrie – SCEP Range Mgmt. Spec., Weiser FO, 05/14/2006
Jesse Fullmer – SCEP Soil Con., Idaho Falls FO, 05/14/2006
Alexandra Barner – SCEP Soil Scient., Moscow FO, 06/25/2006
Benjamin Montgomery – Career Intern Soil Con., 06/25/2006

PROMOTIONS

Terrence Edwards – Promotion, Soil Con. Gooding FO to DC Jerome FO, 04/16/2006
Beth Rasmussen – Career Ladder, Soil Con. Tech. – Montpelier FO, 04/02/2006
Jack Miller – Career Ladder, Soil Con. Idaho Falls FO, 04/16/2006
Rhoda Suderman – Career Ladder, Office Auto. Asst., SO, 06/11/2006
Chad Gipson – Career Ladder, Electronics Tech. – Boise SO, 06/11/2006
Ryan Clayton – Career Ladder, Soil Con. Tech. – Idaho Falls FO, 06/11/2006
Tom Nadgwick – Career Ladder, Soil Con. Tech. – Rupert FO, 05/28/2006
Patti Hurley – Promotion, Soil Con. Tech. Twin Falls FO to Soil Con. Jerome FO, 06/25/2006
Blake Tubbs – Career Ladder, Soil Con. – Payette FO, 06/25/2006

REASSIGNMENTS

Eric Moore – Soil Con., Twin Falls FO to Gooding FO, 06/11/2006
Mark Bateman – Rangeland Mgmt. Spec., Marsing FO to Emmett FO, 05/14/2006
Katie Oliphant – Soil Con. Tech., Driggs to Preston FO, 02/19/2006
Joseph May – State Range Con., Hawaii to Boise SO, 04/16/2006
Sara Wernicke – RC&D Program Asst., Moscow AO, to Admin. Mgmt. Asst., 06/25/2006

RETIREMENTS

Janett Wagner – Admin. Mgmt. Asst. Moscow AO, 06/30/2006

SEPARATIONS

Krystal Firebaugh – SCEP Civil Engineer, Pocatello FO, 06/16/2006
Jessica Helsley – SCEP Soil Con. Moscow FO, 04/30/2006
Martha Robles – STEP Engineering Aid Emmett FO, 04/30/2006
Christine Waite – Career Intern Soil Con. Pocatello FO, 04/21/2006

TRANSFERS

Alina Rice – Transfer from Soil Scientist Moscow FO to Oregon, 05/14/2006
Jeff Stewart – Transfer from DC Sandpoint FO to South Dakota, 04/16/2006effective 06/11/2006