



Highlights



The newsletter for Idaho NRCS employees and conservation partners.

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Special Feature

Partnership Saves Historical East Idaho Site

Sometimes rivers possess a mind of their own. Case in point: the Snake River on the Fort Hall Reservation in eastern Idaho.

Members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have watched the river carve away three foot of soil annually toward the original Fort Hall site, a stopping place along the Oregon Trail and now a national historical monument. The area also contains sacred burial grounds and cultural artifacts.

Now a partnership between the Tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and NRCS is using BOR cost share, Farm Bill programs and newer bioengineering techniques to protect the site.

“This is a demonstration to show Tribal members we can nudge the river back using natural means,” says Sam Hernandez, BIA engineer in Fort Hall.

The bioengineering practices include log jams and rock barbs to slow the water, create eddies and stabilize the bank. A continuous CRP contract provided fencing to remove cattle from the banks. The Tribe also submitted an EQIP contract this year for planting willows and native grasses.

“I’m proud of what we’ve done,” Hernandez says. “We have something on the ground and,

hopefully, it will evolve into natural habitat over time.”

According to Laverne Bronco, environmental liaison for the Tribes, the project offers an educational opportunity.

“We can have the kids from the Tribe plant the willows,” he says. “It will be our chance to

explain why willows are important to the river and to our culture. We will also be able to show them how to care for this land. It’s our home and our future.”



Kurt Cates, Fort Hall DC, visits with **Sam Hernandez and Laverne Bronco** at the Fort Hall National Monument.



Upriver of the Fort Hall National Monument. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are working with NRCS and others to use bioengineering to stop the erosion.

highlight \hi-lit\ n. 1: the lightest spot or area. v. 2: to throw a strong light on, to emphasize.

Quotable Quotes

“You can complain because roses have thorns, or you can rejoice because thorns have roses.”

-Ziggy

When you begin thinking you just can’t go on, or finish the task, remember this: **“Can’t died in the poorhouse!”**

-F.O. Ferguson

(submitted by **Dave Ferguson**, project specialist, Soil Conservation Commission)

“Never let the fear of striking out get in your way.”

-Babe Ruth



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People Profile: Snow Banks & Seeing Dogs Hydrologist Finds Variety in Job

NRCS Water Supply Specialist **Ron Abramovich** snowshoes among pine trees. His sunglasses reflect blue sky and white powder. The forest is silent except for the swish of his steps.

It's 10:30 on a Thursday morning in March and this is Ron's job.

He stops and pushes a hollow metal pole into the ground, lifts up and reads the scale. There's 23 inches of water at the first sample point for Mores Creek.

"I have the best job in the country," he says. "It's the perfect combination of office and field work, and I travel to some of the state's prettiest locations."

Ron works for the Snow Survey Program. He began with NRCS as a hydrologist trainee in Salt Lake City, Utah. Then he learned streamflow forecasting techniques at the former West National Tech Center in Portland, OR, before coming to Idaho and his current position in 1991.

Ron sees education as a primary component of his job since, in the West, 75 percent of our water comes from seasonal snowpack. Education

requires he work with television and newspaper reporters.

"I've realized the media can make anyone look good on TV," he says. "And they do a better job publicizing our snowpack levels and streamflow forecasts than I could ever do."

He continues, "I've learned it's better to provide a reporter too much information than too little. They will cut your comments and use whatever sound bites they want but, if they don't have it, they can't use it."

Ron says the volatile weather of the past several years—the record cold quickly changing to record highs, and the record low precipitation this spring—has changed parts of his job. Water users are requesting more information about the timing of snowmelt streamflow peaks to optimize water use in Idaho.

"We're working on new technologies like timing products to help private reservoir operators determine when the peak runoff will occur," he says. "We're trying to meet



Ron talks to two Boise metro reporters during a recent snow survey trip.

today's needs instead of just relying on the volume forecasts we've done for the past 70 years."

Guide Dogs Go to Work

On a day **Ron Abramovich** isn't measuring snow, he inputs data at his desk. A yellow lab sprawls at his feet, wearing a green jacket that says, "Guide Dogs for the Blind—Puppy in Training."

Ron started guide dog training two years ago with his children, Dylan and Abby. Since someone needs to be with the puppy all the time, they take turns watching him.

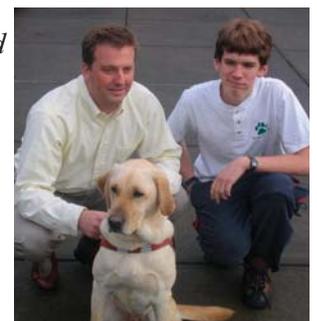
The family's most recent dog, Ozark, spent much of his day sleeping in a classroom or underneath Ron's desk.

"At the office, people didn't even know he was there," Ron says. "I thought I had an exciting job, but Ozark thought it was boring."

Pam Lyon, Boise cartographic technician, has helped her daughter, Kim, train guide dogs for the past seven years.

"It's been amazing to watch Kim grow and learn responsibility," she says. "And everyone at the office has been very supportive."

Dylan and Ozark's new owner, Steve Atkinson.



Snapshots from the Field



Earth Team Volunteer. **Jerianne Crobridge** helps at the Malad FO as part of her high school work program. She plans to work in the Rexburg FO this summer before attending college. "I've liked working on my own projects," she says. "I hope it will look good on my resume and help my career."



Gooding Irrigation Project. **Cindy Snyder**, District I & E specialist, and **Steve Thompson**, Gooding DC, overlook a new pipeline to convert irrigators from groundwater to surface water. An EQIP project, the pipeline will help mediate a recent "call on water" that would bankrupt dozens of producers in the area.



Snapshots from the Field



Idaho Senator Larry Craig speaks in support of the Fuels for Schools Program in Council, ID. The Panhandle Lakes RC&D Council is working on a statewide level with a private consultant, the USDA Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Lands to establish two demonstration schools for wood chip heating systems. "This is a great private and public partnership," says Kim Golden, RC&D coordinator. "It will reduce wildfire potential and improve air quality, help the schools save money and promote the local economy."



Jason Broome, engineer, Idaho Dept. of Agriculture, and Ralph Fisher, agronomist in Boise, teach new NRCS employees and Technical Service Providers the nutrient management software.



Andy Becker, Emmett engineer, found this bull snake while out surveying. "I just wanted to get a picture of it," he says.



We have grizzlies! According to Frank Fink, biologist in Boise, this WRP-project cornfield in Bonner County was stamped down by several grizzly bears. "It was supposed to be food and cover for upland birds," he says.



Idaho engineers attended a workshop provided by the Washington SO. The group includes Bob Lehman, Rexburg, with 40+ years of service to new engineers Andy Becker and Warren Weihing, Emmett, and Brian Henneman, Boise SO.

Personnel Actions Jan-March 2004

Career Conditional Appointment

Bateman, Mark GS-07 Rangeland Mgmt Spec./Marsing FO, 03/07/04.
Gardner, Brian GS-11 Soil Scientist Project Leader/Moscow SO, 01/11/04.
Montesi, James to GS-07 Hydrologist /Snow Survey/SO, 02/22/04.
Tilley, Derek GS-07 Range Con. (Plants)/PMC/Aberdeen, 02/08/04.
Schnably, Jamie GS-09 Soil Scientist/Idaho Falls SO, 01/11/04.

Reinstatement

Edgerton, Don GS-09 Rangeland Mgmt Spec./Idaho Falls SO, 01/11/04.
Hiett, William to GS-09 Soil Scientist/Idaho Falls SO, 01/11/04.

Promotions

Baker, Carla GS-11, Soil Scientist Project Leader/Idaho Falls Soils Staff, 01/11/04.
Davis, George GS-07 Soil Con. Tech/ Caldwell FO, 03/07/04.
Engle, Scott GS-12 DC/Pocatello FO, 01/26/03.
Hales, Allen GS-07 Soil Con. Tech/ Preston FO, 02/22/04.
Seitz, Kevin GS-11 DC/Nezperce FO, 03/07/04.
Swallows, Keith GS-06 Soil Con. Tech/Plummer FO, 03/21/04
Wagner, Janet GS-07 Admin. Mgmt Asst./Moscow FO, 01/11/04.
Wright, Aline GS-07 Purchasing Agent/Admin. Staff/SO, 01/25/04.
Resignations/Transfers
Andrews, Lisa – Resign. 02/06/04.

Jayo, Melissa – Transfer, Bureau of Reclamation, 01/11/04.

Reassignments

Bohr, Jeffrey GS-12 DC/Caldwell FO, 03/07/04.
Cole, Lisa GS-05 Soil Con.,Lewiston FO, 02/22/04.
Meagher, Maureen GS-11 Soil Con./Area Staff (East), Jerome FO, 03/07/04.
Nunez-Hagius, Martha GS-09 Civil Engineer, Pocatello FO, 03/21/04.

Retirements

Beckley, Bonnie GS-06 Admin. Asst., Gooding/Twin Falls RC&Ds, 03/31/04.
Mann, Linda (Lin) GS-09 IT Spec., Lewiston FO, 01/31/04.
Disability Retirement
Price, Monte GS-07 Soil Con. Tech, Malad FO, 03/06/04.



RC&D Hosts Huckleberry Workshop

Over 80 people were looking for hands-on huckleberry growing advice at a recent workshop in Clearwater County.

The **Clearwater RC&D** organized the day-long workshop with several non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies. **Dr. Dan Barney**, horticulture professor, Sandpoint Research & Extension Center, was the featured speaker. **Malcolm Dell**, Clearwater RC&D council member, and **Theresa Beaver**, Rural Roots, discussed marketing opportunities.

According to **Dan Pierce**, RC&D coordinator, a number of the workshop participants want to form a huckleberry growing association.

“This is an exciting time for those willing to start growing huckleberries on the ground floor,” he says.



Terri Summerfield, economic development coordinator, accepts a huckleberry plant donated by Horticulture Professor **Dr. Dan Barney**.



*WHIP Project in Caribou County. Producer **Kent Clegg** constructed two ponds to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. **Larry Mickelsen**, Montpelier DC, coordinated the project and **Bruce Sandoval**, Twin Fall engineer, designed the ponds.*

Improving Soil Health: Direct Seeding

49 Drain Wells Down and Fifteen to Go

by **Patrick Evans, Rupert DC**

Minidoka County is almost done with a project requiring help from several agencies and dozens of producers.

The Minidoka Land and Water Management Project (the A&B Project) is only fifteen drain wells from completion. Forty-nine drain wells have been closed to date.

The flood irrigation systems used by most producers required a drain well for overflows. Well tests in the late 1990s found nitrate levels above safe standards in 24 percent of the wells, pesticide residue in 81 percent, a coliform bacteria count in 63 percent, and 9,000 tons of sediment. This created immediate concern for Southern Idaho’s drinking water.

Julie Thomas, Mid-Snake RC&D coordinator, spearheaded a request for \$2.5 million to address the wells without burdening agricultural producers. The Minidoka County SWCD, Bureau of Reclamation, A&B Irrigation District and NRCS, helped garner a Congressional Earmark to be

administered through EQIP.

About 100 producers are receiving financial and technical assistance to convert from flood to sprinkler irrigation. This work also is one of the first times Idaho NRCS has used Technical Service Providers for irrigation designs.



Dan Strickler, Minidoka County SWCD, stands in a well that is to be capped. When these wells were functioning, they produced a loud suction noise as runoff contaminated with nitrates, pesticides, bacteria and sediment rushed down into the aquifer.



Phil Oestreich, Lewiston soil conservationist, sent these pictures. The Lewiston FO, is helping producers use direct seeding as part of their EQIP contracts. Direct seeding into dryland crop residue improves soil moisture content and organic matter. “This technology can build soil health in five years,” Phil says.

