

Idaho

Current Developments

August 2003

Message from the State Conservationist

The fiscal year is coming to an end, but not the work generated with our customers, conservation partners, and—of course—the 2002 Farm Bill.

As you read this issue of Current Developments, you'll see the wide breadth of conservation initiatives started by NRCS and our conservation partners. I anticipate several more opportunities for putting conservation on the land next fiscal year.

We will be scheduling several workshops in 2004 for the majority of employees. It is imperative to keep every one of you technically equipped to address Idaho's resource concerns.

Along with this, we'll be going through several critical administrative changes. Some of them are combining PRMS and Conservation ToolKit, direct charging for our work, and more contracting and agreement activities.

Thank you for your FY 03 accomplishments.

/s/ Rich Sims

RICHARD W. SIMS
State Conservationist

The new voluntary program, authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, and pastureland. The program will conserve vulnerable grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses and help maintain viable ranching operations.

GRP funding for fiscal year 2003 was \$49.9 million nationwide. Idaho received \$368,000.

Bartholomew said requests for permanent or 30-year easements totaled about \$99.5 million. Requests for 10, 15, 20 or 30-year rental agreements totaled \$15.5 million.

"I'm sorry that Idaho received so few funds for the program this year," said Bartholomew. "There are many parcels that we'd like to consider accepting into the program. Eligible applicants will remain on file until additional funding becomes available."

The three properties tentatively selected for the program include:

- 40 acres along the Fall River, Fremont County, that provides prime grazing land and wildlife habitat and is at very high risk for conversion to other uses
- 300 acres, also located in Fremont County, that contains good to excellent condition rangeland that provides valuable wildlife habitat
- 16 acres in Latah County that are part of the remaining one percent of the Palouse Prairie

Appraisals will be used to determine the value of each easement to be purchased. The price will be based on the current land value, less the value of the land if restricted to grazing use only.

Astounding response to new Grassland Reserve Program

The first sign-up for the new Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) resulted in 195 applications, according to Bob Bartholomew, assistant state conservationist for programs.

"We were astounded and pleased with the response and interest shown by the ranching community for this program. Considering the short notice for this year's sign-up, the large number of applications is fantastic."

Knight pushes holistic vision

from the Capital Press

Serving notice of a change of focus, Bruce Knight, chief of NRCS, said our agency will help farmers and ranchers take a more holistic approach to conservation in the future during the 58th SWCS meeting held in Spokane last month.

Knight, who was appointed to NRCS a year ago, predicted less emphasis on specific farm bill programs.

“With a more holistic approach we can get more conservation on the ground than anyone ever dreamed. We can become catalysts for conservation,” he said.

Read Smith, past president of the National Association of Conservation Districts and a Palouse farmer, attended the SWCS meeting. He liked what Knight had to say.

“He’s saying look at the resources and decide what needs to be done. Then go back to the tools and plug them in where the problem is. Don’t force them,” he said.

Knight’s comment about a holistic approach dovetailed with his support for the \$3.8 billion Conservation Security Program. Although others do not share his optimism, he said he believes it will be funded by Congress and enacted on a nationwide basis.

Knight said NRCS would do everything possible to get the rules for a vibrant CSP out “in the next few weeks or months.” He called it a program for “leading-edge practitioners of conservation,” not a method of income transfer.

Knight indicated there will be plenty of money for conservation. President Bush has asked for \$3.4 billion in his 2004 budget, up from \$1.8 billion.

The increase in funding, however, means the NRCS’ 11,500 employees will be straining to get practices on the ground. As a result, the agency is expanding its cadre of technical service providers—private companies and individuals who work under contract to provide conservation.

“A farmer will be able to use a private consultant or a NRCS professional. It’s their choice,” Knight told a news conference. “We are using technical service providers as a common-sense way of adding capacity to augment and build upon the traditional service we provide today.”

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed project coordinator selected

The Idaho Soil Conservation Commission has announced that Russell D. Knight has been selected as the new Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project Coordinator at Salmon.

“Knight will lead the collaborative holistic project to protect, restore, and enhance anadromous and resident fish habitat in the Upper Salmon Basin,” said Jerry Nicolescu, SCC administrator.

Knight will join the Custer and Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Advisory Committee, Technical Team, land users, landowners, private, state, tribal, and other entities in the ongoing cooperative watershed efforts.

He comes to the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project from New Mexico where he worked for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Pesticide Management in Roswell. He is a New Mexico State University graduate with a degree in Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences. He reports to work on Sept. 2.

Newspapers, magazines still first choice

The American Business Media Agri-Council conducted independent research in 2002 that clearly shows newspapers and magazines are farmers’ primary media choice for continuing education and as the source for information on new products, equipment, and suppliers.

From Agri-Marketing, July/August 2003

Local RC&D-BLM partnership efforts highlighted at national conference

by Dan Pierce, RC&D Coordinator, Clearwater RC&D Area, NRCs, Moscow

The Clearwater Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. (RC&D) and Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) ongoing collaborative partnership was highlighted at the recent triennial conference of the National Association of RC&D Councils held July 20-23 in San Antonio, Texas.

The two organizations have been working together on a number of projects since 2001 to address provisions of the National Fire Plan using local community businesses and organizations. The two entities recently developed a special display that underscores the BLM-RC&D partnership while recognizing a large number of other local, state and federal government, tribal and non-government partners who are working to address wildland fire issues in north central Idaho. The display was developed by a local firm under the direction of David Zwerneman, Chairman of the Clearwater RC&D Council's Fire Project Steering Committee and Council Vice President.

Richard Hodge, Fire Committee member and Council Secretary/Treasurer, also attended the conference. Dave Overcast, Fire Use Specialist, BLM, Cottonwood, shared a significant workload with Zwerneman in staffing the exhibit booth and answering conferee's questions. About 1,500 people attended the conference.

In a separate "Council Success Story" presented during a concurrent conference breakout session, Zwerneman detailed the RC&D-BLM partnership and explained some of the project work that will benefit local communities. Here's a brief summary.

Starting in 2001, the RC&D Council entered into a long-term assistance agreement with BLM to help implement objectives of the National Fire Plan. BLM has committed about \$800,000 to help perform various activities addressing wildland fire planning and hazardous fuels reduction. There is special emphasis on using **local resources** to get the job done.

Other funding partners include the Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Commerce and Forest Service.

Over 60 separate entities such as federal and state agencies, local fire departments, county commissions, and other organizations are involved. Component projects include:

- Development of county wildfire hazard assessment and mitigation plans (including a comprehensive resource guide) in all five RC&D area counties
- Development and implementation of hazard fuels reduction projects
- Development of fire management activity plans for BLM in two separate watershed areas meeting NEPA requirements for federal agency land managers and others
- Work with Idaho Department of Corrections to provide crews for fuel break establishment on BLM-managed land in the Wet Gulch area of Idaho County
- Other project coordination assistance and planning to improve local communities' ability to cope with future wildland fire situations

The Council has used a number of local consultants and independent contractors to help tackle the various tasks. Completion of all five county plans is targeted for late summer 2003.

When all current and planned projects and tasks have been completed, it is expected that the Clearwater RC&D Council will have handled and dispersed nearly \$1 million in National Fire Plan Community Fire Assistance funds, primarily from BLM.

Who are you talking to?

Before you start marketing your cause, you first have to define your target audience. Why not go for the masses, or general public?

Consider this: Studies show we're hit with thousands of marketing messages every day...from our cell phone to billboards to TV. We're basically over stimulated to the point of not really noticing unless a marketing message has personal meaning.

How are you going to get your message to stand apart from all the others? You can save a lot of frustration if you know WHO you're talking to and constantly re-evaluate how you can connect with them!

Having a target that's broader, like the general public, **won't make it easier to hit**. Without a defined target audience, your message will be like a paintball and scatter in all directions. Conversely, a tightly defined target and a well-honed message will send your cause right to the bull's eye.

--MPK Connections Newsletter, 7/03, www.mpk.info

Take our sons and daughters to work day 2003

by Patti Hurley, Federal Women's Program Manager, Twin Falls

Three young men participated in the Idaho NRCS "Take Our Sons and Daughters to Work Day" during the first week of May. This program offers youth a first-hand opportunity to explore the work place and find out more about what they may want their future jobs to be. All three actively took part in field office conservation duties.

Jonathon Edwards, age 12, spent time in Rupert with his soil conservationist father, Terry Edwards. He viewed maps on the computer, looked through the Field Office Technical Guide for installation and certification standards, and went out to the fields to check installed systems. Jonathon said, "I liked going out to the fields and observing the finished projects. I would like to have a job that would allow me to work outside of an office."

My 14-year old son Joe spent his time out in the field making a topographical survey with me. He had the opportunity to run the rod and take the shots. Joe said, "I enjoyed the challenge of learning something new and useful." He mentioned it was a cold and windy day and his mother didn't supply him with enough food.

Ty Pena, age 11, went to work with his dad, Martin, soil conservation technician in Payette. He worked on a root farm display for the Spanish irrigation video. He also went out to the field on a construction check for a gated pipe system. Ty said his least favorite part of the day was "the staff meeting!!!!!!!" but that he liked "building and painting the root farm."

In recognition of the day, the participants received a mechanical pencil-lead-eraser set along with a NRCS *Signatures on the Land* postcard "thank you."

This is a very worthwhile activity, so plan ahead for next year's "Family Day." The fourth Thursday in April is the actual recognition day. The future is in the hands of our youth. Let's make sure we do all we can to pass the conservation ethic on to them.

Notes from your FWPM

by Patti Hurley, Twin Falls

I attended the 34th Annual National Training Program for Federally Employed Women July 7-11 in Chicago. NRCS and other agencies use this forum for training their Federal Women Program Managers. It provides an opportunity to bring federal, state and private sector employees together to share information and enhance professional development.

It was WONDERFUL! There were over 2,000 participants—all with similar goals, full of talent and energy and neat ideas!

I attended sessions on “Women Mentoring Women,” FWPM forum, workplace harassment, and reward programs. There were a lot to choose from 10 broad categories of EEO, federal management issues, procurement/budgeting, women’s issues, information technology, leadership, communication, success strategies, technical tools, and work/family/health/finance issues.

I came back with a greater appreciation of workforce diversity, support, and networking. I learned a lot about workplace harassment (it is not just sexual) and about the responsibilities of a FWPM. The formal sessions were very informative, but the environment itself was incredibly educational. Ask me to demonstrate support sometime. Here’s some thoughts from the “Women Mentoring Women” session:

Small consistent efforts equal cumulative success over time.

Don’t remain silent in the background. This leads to a passive, passive-aggressive type of behavior. Keep the middle road. Keep talking.

How much work life do you have left?

Most of us aren’t future leaders. The changes we work for are not for us, but for the many behind us.

Support vs. leadership

Or influence vs. authority. Where is the power? What role do you play?

Appreciate others

By saying “thank you,” you have made others aware they are in a responsible position, they have authority, and they are important.

Common e-mail blunders—and how to avoid them

Writing too much: The purpose of e-mail is brevity. A long message encourages the recipient to skip it or worse, not read it at all. If what you have to say is really that complicated, pick up the telephone and call.

Using sarcasm: Avoid using emoticons (the Internet equivalent of body language such as a smiley face with a colon, hyphen and close parentheses mark :-). They interrupt the flow of words.

Expressing anger: E-mail makes it easy to forget yourself. If you’re really angry, a 24-hour wait is good. Remember—once you send it, you can’t get it back. Using all capital letters is considered yelling in the e-mail world. Save it for good news.

Moving too quickly: Careless grammar and misspelled words will undermine the most important message. Take the time to check your message before hitting “send,” and be sure any attachments are attached.

Correction

Judy Schoonover's retirement article in the June 2003 issue of Current Developments contained inaccurate information about Stanley Eugene Barker. Stan came to Idaho as Personnel Officer. In the summer of 1987, he experienced some health problems and went on sick leave in November, pending disability retirement. He took optional retirement on March 18, 1988.

Attention Boise area retirees...

Charity auction planned for annual Christmas party

Mark your calendars now to attend the State Office NRCS Employees Association Annual Christmas Party on Dec. 6. Details will be provided later.

After taking several years off from doing the popular Charity Auction, we've decided it's time to revitalize this event. All proceeds from the auction will be used to sponsor a family/families in need through Mountain States Tumor Institute (MSTI).

Ideas for auction items that can be donated by employees and retirees include toys, home décor, craft items you've made, Christmas decorations, raft trip, services such as babysitting, pet sitting, baking, carpentry, sewing, car washes, car repairs, etc. It could also be something you have at home that's in good condition and no longer want such as a bike or fishing pole. Use your imagination!

Auction items can be brought to the State Office starting Nov. 3 and no later than Nov. 10. We will start silent bidding on the items beginning Nov. 10 and will finalize bids with a live auction at the Christmas party.

For those of you who haven't been involved in this event in the past, get involved this year. It's fun and rewarding.

If you have any questions, call Kelly Vick at 378-5740 or Neva Timmons at 378-5725.

It's time to say goodbye

by Sharon Norris, Public Affairs Specialist

Many people gasp when I tell them how many years I've worked for NRCS and ask why I'm still working. A few months ago, a visitor to the office called me an "institution." Just last week a friend said I was a "fixture in NRCS."

Yes, that's how long I've been around—almost 40 years. It doesn't seem possible! I can't be this old! But time goes fast when you love your job, the agency and its mission, and enjoy the people you work with—both inside and outside of the agency.

I've known some of you since you first came into our agency. Some of us have matured together.

But the time has come for me to bid farewell and retire.

So, in the style of all those stories I've written for retirees the last few years, here's mine.

I'm a native of Idaho, born and raised in Wendell (the Hub City of Magic Valley) on an 80-acre farm. I graduated from Wendell High School in 1960. In those days, most young women went to school to become a nurse, teacher, or secretary. I chose the secretary route because a year of business college was much cheaper than four years of college. So off I went to Twin Falls Business College to earn a secretarial degree.

When I graduated nine months later, I came to Boise to look for a job and found one with the Idaho Wool Growers Association. The job paid well, but there was never enough to do! So I took the Civil Service test for clerk-steno to qualify for a federal job. A few months later, I was at the SCS state office for an interview with Stan Zauha, assistant state administrative officer. I got the job and started work as a GS-3 Clerk-Steno on the Administrative Staff on Feb. 17, 1964.

I resigned in 1965 when my husband and I decided to move to Reno. I got a job at the VA Hospital as a ward clerk, but I lasted only three days. I hated the job and the atmosphere. So I checked in with SCS and accepted a part-time job in the Reno Area Office as a clerk-typist.

A few months later I learned of a job opening back in the Boise State Office for a clerk steno on the watershed planning staff. I applied and transferred back in April 1966. I had never liked Reno and was glad to return to Idaho.

I worked for Blaine Morse, assistant state conservationist for water resources, and the watershed planning staff for the next eight years. In those days, the ASTC had public information responsibilities for the state, including production of our monthly Idaho Current Developments. It was my job to type, reproduce, and distribute it.

Can you believe I've been involved in producing our employee newsletter for 37 years? Me neither!

In 1968, Lee Morgan, state conservationist, decided to add an information person to the state staff. In those days, SCS "hid" public information people on their staffs as resource conservationists. Morgan selected Neil Sampson for the job, a soil conservationist at Idaho Falls. The plan was to get him his own secretary, but I begged to keep that portion of my job so I could stay busy all the time.

In working with Neil, I developed a strong interest in public information and began to consider it as a possible career. By this time I was single with two small children to support and needed some kind of future beyond that of being a clerk-steno.

By 1974, the stage had been set for me to become a GS-5 public information specialist. Neil had moved on to another job, and the person hired to replace him as information specialist had also been reassigned.

With help and encouragement from State Conservationist Guy Nutt and Pete Taylor, assistant state conservationist for operations, I entered the position thinking I could do anything. I completed an intense training plan developed with the public information director in National Office and started taking classes in communications at Boise State University.

My mentor, Pete, retired a couple of months after I entered my new position, leaving me pretty much on my own to figure out how and what I should be doing. It wasn't easy! I didn't even have the line and staff organization figured out! And for those women in NRCS today who think it's so tough, I want you to think about what it was like 30 years ago. There were so few women in leadership roles in our agency. No one to ask for advice. For years, I would be the only woman among participants at meetings, in training sessions, staff meetings, etc. I had to work hard to gain acceptance from male coworkers and was on a high learning curve for years.

I achieved my goal of becoming a GS-12 in May 1982 during Amos Garrison's tenure as state conservationist.

I went through a period of time when I worked at being "first." I was the first female SCSer to join the R.N. Irving Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. The first woman to hold the position of treasurer, secretary, president-elect and president of the Chapter. The first woman to be elected to the Society's Council, where I represented the Western Region. The first course coordinator for the tri-state Conservation and Management for New Employees training course held at Eastern Oregon State College in LaGrande.

I've also served as a member of the SCS National Equal Opportunity Committee, worked a three-week detail in NHQ in the days of the Resources Conservation Act. I was a charter member of the NRCS Instructor Cadre and have served as both state and regional volunteer coordinator.

The reorganization that we went through in 1995 was difficult for me. When Luana Kiger came to Idaho as state conservationist, I sat in limbo for several months.

Then one day, Rick Waters, acting state administrative officer, and Lee Brooks, assistant state conservationist for technical services, visited my office to tell me I was being reassigned to the Technical Services Staff. Working on that staff turned out to be a remarkable experience, and I'm very proud of the fact that I am probably the only PAS in the nation to have been assigned to a technical staff.

When Rich Sims came to Idaho, he moved me back to supervision by the state conservationist.

I've had many exciting adventures during the 29 years I've worked as public affairs specialist. I've traveled to more states than I ever thought possible, met many wonderful people, worked on some incredible projects. I've written countless articles, stories, reports, histories, and publications. I've trained many of you in photography, public speaking, and writing. Just as I had mentors who helped me a great deal throughout my career, I've worked hard to be a mentor to any employee who asked for my help.

What was my scariest experience? There have been a couple.

I swear I developed my claustrophobia problem as a result of a visit to the Bunker Hill Mine at Kellogg. John Massey, the photographer from the Technical Service Center in Portland, and I were doing a story on a tree nursery located deep in the mine. We climbed aboard the rail car that would take us into the tunnel, huddled down, and moved down the track. As the light disappeared, I knew I was in trouble! I could hardly breathe. I wanted to jump off and run to the light!

We made it to the tree nursery, located in a large and roomy cavern, took the pictures, asked the questions. I could hear "booms" in the distance. Then it all started closing in on me. That's when I announced that I needed to get out, NOW! Had a hard time sleeping that night. Every time I closed my eyes, I felt the panic sweep over me again.

Claustrophobia followed me after that. In 1985 I was on my way to Coeur d'Alene for a Girl Scout Roundup and boarded a nine-passenger plane to get there. I started to panic the moment I got seated. I felt like I wanted to bust the windows out! By the time we got to the end of the runway, I was screaming at the pilot that I had to get off! He immediately turned the plane around and headed back to the gate to let me off the plane. I finally got up the nerve to board a plane later that afternoon—a much larger one, this time.

My problem with claustrophobia was pretty well known by everyone in the State Office. When the office was in the post office building downtown, I got on the elevator at the third floor and started to go down. But it stopped. I was stuck. I called Myrna Kallas on the elevator's phone to report my problem. She told State Conservationist Stan Hobson, who was ready to get an axe to get me out of that elevator. The only thing that saved me was being able to talk to Myrna until they got the elevator moving again.

I think the greatest challenge I've faced during my career is the year I came up with the idea to document a day in the life of rural Idaho by giving every employee in the state a day to do nothing but photography. It was the late 1980s and professional photographers around the world were doing "day" photo shoots in various countries. I simply grabbed the idea and localized it for our agency's 1990 Centennial project.

Hobson and the area conservationists thought it was a great idea, and we watched the changing seasons for a year until we decided that May was the best time for the photo shoot. But in 1989, Stan transferred to Portland and we got a new state conservationist, Paul Calverley. He was extremely hesitant about the whole idea, and we all had to talk hard to convince him it was a worthwhile project and would serve as a stress reliever to employees who were working so hard on Farm Bill activities.

Employees shot over 7,000 slides. I had to look at every one of them to select the very best ones. And then it came time to design and produce a slide show to showcase them and tell a story. I didn't have a clue how to approach it.

As I searched for ideas, I happened to glance through the 1976 Yearbook of Agriculture that featured photos only, no text. That gave me the idea to do a show with no narration. Then Roy Fowler, the district conservationist in Mountain Home at the time, called to offer the use of some original music recorded by some friends for the Idaho Centennial song contest. The music was perfect.

The show turned out to be a huge success, and SCSers showed it statewide to well over 20,000 people. The show won a "Take Pride in Idaho" Centennial Award.

As others before me have said countless times, what I've enjoyed most about my career are the wonderful people I've met and worked with over the years. It's been my privilege to work for every state conservationist except the very first, R. Neil Irving. I've also had the privilege of working with the first generation of SCS employees who came to the agency from the CCC and worked so hard to organize conservation districts in the state. Those early SCS pioneers knew our mission so well and conveyed their love for the land and this agency to me.

What will I miss most about NRCS and my job? The challenge of finding new ideas and ways to present our conservation message to the public, the creative process, and writing bits of Idaho conservation history.

My plans for the future? Now I'll have more time to enjoy gardening and reading and develop some hobbies that I've put off for years. I also have a brand new home computer just waiting for me to start using. Maybe I'll start writing that book I've talked about!

My best wishes to each of you for an exciting and satisfying career like I've had. I hope you'll remember me as a true conservationist who did her part to help get conservation on the land. Keep in touch!