

Project Summaries

Regional Conservation Partnership Program FY 2015, 16 & 17



Blackfoot River Conservation Partnership

The Blackfoot River Conservation Partnership is a watershed-scale restoration project to restore fish passage, rebuild riparian and aquatic habitats, augment in stream flows and improve water quality throughout the Blackfoot River drainage. The river is the southernmost stronghold for the Yellowstone cutthroat trout; this project will improve habitat for this sensitive species and help landowners divert and deliver irrigation water more efficiently. Major project work will replace two irrigation water diversions with “fish-friendly” diversion structures to enable trout passage and reconnect the river to several tributaries.

Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Stabilization

The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Stabilization project overall goal is to stabilize and recover ground water levels in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). The aquifer covers nearly 10,800 square miles of Idaho and is the sole water source for many producers in central and eastern Idaho. The region produces goods and services with an estimated value of \$10 billion annually and water is the critical element for this productivity. Declining ground water levels in parts of the ESPA led to decreased aquifer storage, decreased spring flows and changing Snake River flows that resulted in insufficient water supplies for existing uses. Project objectives are to reduce ground water withdrawals from the aquifer and increase delivery efficiencies.

Farmer’s Cooperative Ditch Company

Partners will address the excessive amount of sediment and nutrients in the irrigation water, reduce water usage/ improve delivery, improve soil health and provide wildlife habitat for migratory birds. A communication plan will portray the objectives and goals of the project, and will consist of two bi-annual meetings, direct mailings, field demonstrations, workshops, Internet communications and individual one-on-one contacts. The plan will concentrate on environmental awareness, strive to increase the number of conservation practices implemented and show transparency for funds expended.

Greater Spokane River Watershed

Significant sources of sediments and nutrients are carried to the Spokane River watershed by its larger tributaries, and low dissolved oxygen levels and algae blooms threaten aquatic life in the Spokane River, Lake Spokane and Coeur d’Alene Lake. This project supports the adoption of conservation tillage operations and best management practices. Tens of thousands of agricultural and forestry acres, including a tribal farm, will benefit through voluntary NRCS programs. Wildlife and fish habitat will be protected, and long-term easements will be developed for several forest and wetland acquisitions. In addition, this project will introduce a new program that involves using the Risk Management Insurance models to help producers to bridge the financial gap in current cost-share programs and encourage producers to cooperatively implement these practices on their farms. Project success will be evaluated by extensive watershed-based field monitoring to track improvements in water, soil and habitat.

Idaho

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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High Desert Drought Resilient Ranching

Idaho ranchers have experienced a severe drought for the majority of years in the last 30-year cycle. This project will help reduce drought impacts to wildlife and livestock in the Owyhee watershed and adjacent communities in two lesser watersheds, which have been historically underserved. Project partners will work together to develop on-the-ground projects that keep water in streams longer for both livestock and wildlife. Project area selection will emphasize state and private land that currently provides habitat for three focal species: redband trout, greater sage-grouse and Columbia spotted frogs or is adjacent to known populations and has the capacity to restore habitat for these species.

Idaho Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer Stabilization

Through the Idaho Eastern Snake River project, the Idaho Water Resource Board and local partners will implement four actions recommended by the State of Idaho to stabilize and recover ground water levels in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer: ground to surface water conversions; end gun removal/conversion to dryland; fallowing; and flood irrigation enhancements. The project will support agriculture, industry and municipalities on the Eastern Snake Plain and stabilize and recover spring discharges from the aquifer into the Snake River that maintain the minimum stream flows.

Portneuf River Fish Passage and Water Management

The Portneuf River in southeastern Idaho provides an important habitat for fish, particularly salmonid species, and is a significant source of irrigation water for the Shoshone Bannock Tribes and Fort Hall Irrigation Project. The Portneuf Pump Station supplies irrigation water for approximately 13,300 acres of the Michaud Unit. In order to meet the irrigation deliveries of the Michaud Unit and to prevent pump cavitation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been annually reconstructing a rock check dam immediately downstream of the pumping station to adjust the water level as necessary. This rock dam is the greatest obstruction to fish movement in the Lower Portneuf River and is a labor-intensive and difficult to manage tool to regulate main channel water flow. Through the fish passage and water management project, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and partners will construct a previously-designed natural-like fish passage channel on the river's right-descending bank and an Obermeyer gate irrigation check structure in the main channel of the river. Fish passage access will normalize feeding patterns and allow access to better habitats, thereby increasing fish survivability rates in the Lower Portneuf River. Also, the ability to better manage river flow will make additional water available for the Tribal Water Bank leasing program, thereby increasing drought resiliency and providing greater regional water security.

Teton Valley Soil, Water and Wildlife

A new partnership in the Teton Basin seeks to address growing concerns related to the loss of agriculture in Teton Valley, as well as the related loss of wildlife habitat. The partners will implement market-based solutions to address water quality and quantity issues that are impacting farmers and wildlife populations.

