Investing in Idaho - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to $220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including three in Idaho. This investment, which builds on the $370 million invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

Farmer's Cooperative Ditch Company Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: $500,000 (State)
Lead Partner: Farmer's Cooperative Ditch Company
Number of Partners: 7
Participating State(s): Idaho

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 Implementation

Proposed NRCS Investment: $7.7 million (National)
Lead Partner: Spokane Conservation District
Number of Partners: 21
Participating State(s): Idaho & Washington **(lead state)**

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. Reducing nutrients is key to resolving water quality degradation throughout the Greater Spokane River Bi-State Watershed. TMDL and lake management implementation plans stress the need to address agriculture and forestry within these watersheds. This project supports regional momentum towards 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 compensate producers for the loss of productive land entered into vegetative buffers. This new commodity buffer program is designed 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.

High Desert Drought Resilient Ranching

Proposed NRCS Investment: $1.3 million (National)
Lead Partner: Trout Unlimited
Number of Partners: 17
Participating State(s): Idaho **(lead state),** Nevada & Oregon

Nevada, Idaho and Oregon 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.