

NRCS Executive Update



"Helping People Help the Land"

Spring 2007

Soil Survey Complete for Nez Perce Reservation

NRCS State Scientist Dave Hoover shows NP Land Services Dir. Jack Bell new soil survey features.



For the first time, agricultural producers, conservation professionals, and land use planners now have access to soils information for the entire Nez Perce Reservation. Stemming from a request by the Nez Perce Tribe Land Services, NRCS recently compiled an inventory of soil resources that included maps of 149 soil types, soil

descriptions, and physical and chemical soil properties of the reservation's 770,000 acres.

Previously, anyone needing soils information about the reservation had to search through five separate county soil surveys. With this new survey, multiple searches have been ousted. "This soil survey is exclusively for soils data within the reservation boundary. Because it's tailored to this area, users are able to obtain information more efficiently," said NRCS State Soil Scientist Dave Hoover. The compilation also allows conservation professionals to make agricultural evaluations for Farm Bill programs and set conservation practice standards, among other uses.

Soil surveys provide information needed to protect water quality, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. Soil surveys also help predict soils suitability and productivity for cultivated crops, trees, and grasses.

Anyone can access soils information for their land through their county's soil survey or the Web Soil Survey (WSS). The WSS provides access to the most current data anytime with a computer and internet connection. Visit websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov for details.

Conservation Partnership Protects Historic Tribal Site

Equipped with water-jets, sledge-hammers, and shovels, NRCS and Tribal employees, volunteers, and Federal officials converged at the Snake River's edge to plant hundreds of native willows to help stabilize its banks. For six years, Idaho NRCS, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and the Bureau of Reclamation have been continuously working to prevent the river's wandering waters from destroying the Fort Hall national historic landmark and Oregon Trail stopping point.

"This is a continuing effort until we see the river back off completely," said NRCS wetland ecologist Chris Hoag. "We're using streambank soil bioengineering practices, or vegetation treatments, to restore the streambank."

"We planted willows to roughen up the banks, get some silt deposition to raise the east bank near the old Fort Hall site in

an attempt to move the river away. The roots and the willows themselves also stabilize the banks so that it stops eroding," said Hoag. "If you look closely, you can actually see the waters slowing as they move away from the bank."

Funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the conservation practices applied at the Fort Hall site will be used along eroding streambanks throughout the State. Benefits include improved water quality, the trapping of productive soils, water temperature control, and enhanced wildlife habitat.

In previous years, partners installed structural practices like logjams and rock barbs to slow the water and help secure the banks — all part of the comprehensive stabilization strategy.



Don Dixon, Ag Director for U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (left), joins NRCS and Tribal employees bundle a fascine for use in strengthening the Snake River's banks.



Participants install fascine at base of stream's edge to prevent erosion.

Conservationist's Corner



Richard Sims
State Conservationist
Idaho NRCS

“Effects of Idaho’s Burn Ban”

If you participate in USDA commodity credit programs, farm highly erodible land (HEL), and were burning your small grain residue, it is very important that you review your conservation compliance plan with your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

The 1985 farm bill had a provision stating that everyone wanting to voluntarily participate in commodity credit programs was to develop a highly erodible conservation plan. The 1990 farm bill required the implementation of the conservation plan. Some of these plans have not been reviewed for several years.

Recently, a Federal court decision prompted the state of Idaho to ban growers from burning crop residue, outside Indian reservations, to clear their fields. With the burn ban in place, it would be very unfortunate for a producer to till small grain residue beyond the conditions of the conservation compliance plan. It may take a phone call or a trip to the local office to discuss alternatives, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

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Successful Partnership on the Bear River

The Bear River in southeastern Idaho provides critical habitat for the threatened Bonneville cutthroat trout. This river and its tributaries also provide major sources of irrigation water for farms and ranches along the riverbanks.

According to District Conservationist Larry Mickelsen, after irrigation season, there were countless fish found trapped in the irrigation ditches. With assistance from the Bear Lake Soil and Water Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, the Ovid Irrigation Company and landowner Dennis Carlsen contacted NRCS to cost share a better fish passage and improved irrigation system.

The NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provided 75 percent of the \$45,000 project. The Bear River Project Environmental Coordination



Completed diversion structure with fish screen in Montpelier, ID.

Committee (ECC) picked up the remaining 25 percent.

Today, a large irrigation diversion structure and screen exist on Bear River’s tributary, Ovid Creek. It is expected to prevent the fish from being trapped and killed when traveling up and down the spawning tributary. A bypass pipe is used to transport fish back to the stream, while screened water is discharged into the canal.

Mickelsen enjoys the partnership and expects to have future joint projects.

Snapshots from the Field



Officials from NRCS and the Forest Service recently recognized Nakia Williamson of the Nez Perce Tribe, for his artwork on NRCS’ American Indian Heritage Month Poster. Throughout the last five years, NRCS has recognized artists from the five Federally-recognized Tribes in Idaho as part of its outreach strategy to embrace diversity.

Since construction began in 2004, the wildlife population has increased exponentially on Richard Zamzow’s Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) site in Emmett, ID. “I’ve seen bald eagles, egrets, mallards, ducks, pheasants, red-winged black birds, killdeer and more,” said Zamzow. “This is 100 times more than what we could’ve ever expected.”

