

# NRCS Executive Update



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

*"Helping People Help the Land"*

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## *A New & Improved Dam for Payette County*

Nearly 500 farmers and ranchers depend upon the Lower Payette River canals to irrigate 13,600 acres. For the past 85 years, a wooden diversion dam had channeled water into the canals. With age, the diversion dam began deteriorating, causing major problems for both dam workers and those dependent upon the canal's water.

*"With the old structure, we almost lost a guy..."*

-Ken Mineard, Ditch Manager

The Lower Payette Ditch

Company proposed replacement of the deteriorating structure with an automated inflatable rubber diversion dam--or a bladder dam. This project would conserve water; provide efficient water delivery; and offer operator safety, low maintenance, reliability, and adequate fish and recreational boater passage, without adversely affecting the environment.

The cost of the project totaled \$2.3

million. NRCS provided \$624,000 through a congressional appropriation through the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. The Ditch Company also received additional funds from Water District 65, and low-interest loans from the Idaho Department of Water Resources and the Soil Conservation Commission.

Construction crews completed the installation of the bladder dam this past November. "With this new dam, the water delivery will be more efficient, ultimately leading to improved water quality," said Russ Manwaring, NRCS RC&D Coordinator. According to Payette Ditch Manager Ken Mineard, it's all about safety. "With the old structure, we almost lost a guy because his foot slipped while trying to repair the planks—the water pressure was unbelievably strong. Now, the bladder dam is computer-operated. From a safety standpoint, it can't be beat."



*With old structure, crews waded into the water to install wooden diversion need to raise water levels.*



*With new technology, inflation and deflation of bladder dam will be computer-operated.*

## *Renewable Energy Opportunities Blow into Town*



*The wind turbines of Wolverine Creek are expected to add enough electricity to serve 17,500 homes.*

It is wind turbines and wind farms that have many Idahoans attention these days. And it's not surprising—the

American Wind Energy Association ranks Idaho 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation for wind power development potential.

In eastern Idaho, the High Country Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council is taking an active part in wind promotion and development. They recently sponsored a tour of the 10,000-acre Wolverine Creek project east of Idaho Falls.

"I think as energy gets more expensive, this alternative energy will be important," said Dave Radford, Bonneville County Commissioner and High Country RC&D council chairman. One of the RC&D goals is to protect and improve the economic resources of its area.

Fifteen landowners are involved in the project that currently includes forty-three GE wind turbines. The community is already benefiting economically from contracts to lease land for the 197 feet tall towers and roads to access them.



*NRCS District Conservationist Dennis Hadley shares the benefits of a living snow fence while wind turbines gracefully move behind him.*

## Conservationist's Corner



Richard Sims  
State Conservationist  
Idaho NRCS

### “Lets Talk Water”

Tis the season to talk about...water! Directly or indirectly, our activities circle around water. So who is talking about water? The court system will make decisions on water in the near future, state legislators will discuss water in the upcoming session, farmers will plan crops around the abundance of water-- it comes down to discussions on irrigation, fish, recreation and hydropower.

One topic that people are not talking about is the availability of timely and accurate snow survey data and that is where NRCS comes into the picture. The majority of these discussions are based on streamflow forecasts determined from SNOTEL measurements in the mountains. Our SNOTEL sites collect hourly snow, precipitation and air temperature data to provide the most precise readings. NRCS provides the maintenance of the sites, installs new sites, updates equipment, and ensures information is accessible to the end users. We are in the process of adding new features to Idaho's snow survey information. The instrumentation to determine soil moisture and soil temperature will be a great asset in volume forecasting. With these added features, we will be able to improve our forecasting capabilities.

While everyone is talking about water, let's not forget about the infrastructure in place to get the information about Idaho's frozen liquid gold.

**Hard Work Really Pays!** Idaho NRCS employees are committed to conservation progress and it shows. NRCS in Idaho ranked eight in the nation for Farm Bill performance payments in 2006. Idaho received an additional \$1.6 million to help farmers and ranchers implement more conservation on the ground through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Idaho NRCS is “helping people help the land.”

### Soils Information in an Instant

Finding information about local soils is ever increasing in popularity, thanks to NRCS' online Web Soil Survey (WSS) site.

The site's use is steadily increasing—visits average at approximately 2,500 per day. “Real estate professionals, contractors, city planners, engineers, agricultural producers and

homeowners are all logging on and easily downloading soils information,” said Dave Hoover, NRCS state soil scientist in Idaho.

WSS allows users to select an area of interest and then view maps and related data. Future developments to the system will give users the ability to create a soil

manuscript for their own area of interest, complete with a cover page, index, map unit descriptions, soils map, all interpretive maps and tables and a glossary of terms.



### Snapshots from the Field



NRCS scientists at the Aberdeen Plant Materials Center are attempting to grow the endangered and threatened species, Indian Valley sedge. The greenhouse grown plants will then be transported and seeded on a Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) site in Payette to help reestablish native populations this spring.

NRCS District Conservationist Ron Blake is working with the Idaho Department of Lands and Department of Fish and Game to seed 600 acres of rangeland near Mountain Home to improve sage grouse habitat.

