

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed News

NEWS ABOUT RESTORING FISH HABITAT IN CENTRAL IDAHO

Fall 2011



Bridges Over Carmen Creek

Ruth Burns was busy taking photos as an excavator nimbly extracted the two rusty old culverts from their resting place in Carmen Creek. As the Lemhi County Road and Bridge crew prepared the site on Parmenter Lane for a new bridge, Burns talked about the nights during spring runoff when she and her husband, John, had to rig chains to pull the logs and debris that blocked the undersized culverts and threatened to flood their property. The waters of the creek flowed placidly on this September day. During high flows, Carmen Creek can be a raging torrent, uprooting trees and moving small boulders and woody debris along its path to the Salmon River.

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Watershed Calendar:

- Nov. 3** Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District meeting
- Nov. 9** Custer Soil and Water Conservation District meeting
- Dec. 7** USBWP Advisory Committee meeting

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USBWP and Bureau of Reclamation Cooperative Lemhi River Reach Assessment

On August 23rd and 24th, a Denver-based Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) river assessment team came to Salmon at the request of USBWP. The team included hydraulic engineers, fisheries biologists, and a geomorphologist. The team's goal was to walk a specific section of the Lemhi River, just upstream of Baker, Idaho, where significant bank armoring and reduced floodplain connectivity has created problems for fish and landowners during high water periods.

Landowners brought attention to this specific reach of the Lemhi River and have been concerned about the river's movements in recent high-water years. One landowner's diversion off of the Lemhi River faces damage as the river continues to migrate and cut into the bank directly next to his diversion. Likewise, the river's high-water energy has continued to cut a meander into another landowner's property.

The USBWP and the USBR Salmon office are expanding the project scope to identify a reach-long solution since treating these as separate projects would only transport the river's energy downstream, potentially creating the same problem further downstream. A large-scale

approach will be developed by assessing an entire section of the river that has historically had issues for fish, private land owners and irrigators. A long-term solution would address property loss and future armoring of river banks, as well as provide the river floodplain access while decreasing excess river energy and improving fish habitat.

The section of river being considered is approximately 3.5 miles and is comprised of twelve parcels of private property. The Watershed Program worked with each landowner individually prior to the river assessment team's August visit and would like to thank them for their cooperation and property access. Addressing problems such as heavy bank armoring, increasing floodplain connectivity, and reducing energy transfers from bank to bank in this section of the Lemhi River would create positive outcomes for resident and anadromous fish, while also allowing for private property protection. A preliminary report of the team's findings will be presented to the USBWP Advisory Committee on December 7th. The Watershed Program and the USBR will cooperatively develop the next steps for this Lemhi River reach potential project.

Salmon and agriculture have been irreplaceable parts of Idaho's core social, recreational and economic value system for more than a century. Idaho's water community has fought hard to protect and preserve both parts and will continue to do so in the future. We do that because the facts show clearly that with good science and hard work we can have both.

-Travis Jones Idaho Statesman, May 22, 2011

A Streaming Fun Time at the Lemhi County Fair

Our table at the Lemhi County Fair was a great success. Many folks picked up literature to find out more about what we do and we got a lot of compliments on our key chains. The stream table was a huge hit and many children spent a few minutes (a few invested real time) into creating streams, dams, and side channels, and placing the farm and river animals. Approximately 80 children enjoyed making edible aquifers on Family Fun Night at the fair- with pudding for bedrock, tan graham cracker crumbs for subsoil, chocolate crumbs with M&M's for topsoil with pebbles, sprinkles as microorganisms, gummi worms and green coconut for grass. Rain (milk) was then poured through all the layers to simulate how an aquifer accumulates groundwater. The children loved the edible education and we're already looking forward to next year.



Koty Olson, Charli Williams (LSWCD), Jane Sandstrom (LSWCD) and Breann Westfall (USBWP) prepare for Family Fun Night at the fair.

Bridges over Carmen Creek, Con't

These culverts were also identified as a passage barrier to certain life stages of fish, hindering the upstream movement of Chinook salmon and steelhead to traditional rearing habitat where young fish grow in preparation for the journey to the Pacific Ocean. Carmen Creek is rated as a priority 1 stream and was historically home to healthy populations of federally-listed Chinook. In his August 21, 1805 journal entry, William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition describes Sammon Creek [present day Carmen Creek], "...Passed a large Creek which fall in on the right Side 6 miles below the forks a road passed up this Creek & to the Missouri." Sergeant Gass adds, "In this branch we shot a salmon about 6 pounds weight."

Watershed Program staff opted to solve the passage problem with a modular bridge. Bridges are not only cost effective but require less maintenance than culverts. The natural flow is returned to the creek and fish have easier access to cooler waters upstream. The bridges are stout and can handle heavy loads.

Further upstream from Parmenter Lane, another culvert on Carmen Creek also presented a problem to fish passage. The project on Archie Lane was completed by a private contractor in October with the installation of a 55 foot by 24 foot bridge. This project was a cooperative effort between the McFarland Family and the Watershed Program.

The Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored both projects, providing administration and construction oversight. Funding for the bridges was provided by Bonneville Power Administration.



Fish salvage prior to creek dewatering was conducted by Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game.

The Latest on the Ground Water Recharge Study

Preliminary dye tracer tests have yielded valuable procedural information required for the successful planning of 2012 and 2013 tests. Periodic measurements of ground water levels in wells across the basin have illustrated some areas where ground water increases during the irrigation season, and where it remains relatively unchanged. Additionally, continuous measurements in wells in the upper basin have provided early estimates of aquifer properties. All of the information gathered during the 2011 season will be used to help guide the more intensive hydrologic tests of 2012 and 2013.



People in the news

Merrill and Sharal Beyeler and sons, of Beyeler Ranches of Leadore, were awarded the Salmon Valley Stewardship's David Krosting Sustainability Award. The award recognizes outstanding contributions in the areas of environment, economy and community. The Beyeler family have taken extraordinary steps to improve fish and wildlife habitat on more than 2,400 acres of land. Their efforts to enhance connectivity and flow on ten local creeks have proven to be immensely helpful to endangered Chinook salmon and rainbow trout. At the same time, their innovative conservation techniques allowed them to expand their cattle operation and improve profitability. You can read more about the Beyeler's conservation story at our website, www.modelwatershed.org.

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program

Homegrown, Common-sense Conservation

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NEWS ABOUT
RESTORING FISH
HABITAT IN
CENTRAL IDAHO

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To:

Our Mission: Protect and restore the region's significant fish habitats through a partnership approach that respects agriculture and improves our way of life.

Coordinators Comments *By Hans Koenig*

The trees are wearing their fall coats, varying shades of bright yellow with an occasional glimpse of red. Even without the dramatic, flaming crimson colors of oak and maple, the fall foliage in the Upper Salmon Basin is a pleasure to behold. Like the thin sheet of ice on my windshield in the morning, it's also a reminder that winter isn't far away and our construction season will soon be coming to an end. It has been a remarkable year so far and it's not quite over.

Teri Murrison, the new Administrator for the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, visited our office in mid-August to meet our staff and learn more about the Watershed Program and discuss future collaborative efforts. Growing up on her family's sheep ranch, Teri developed a life-long vested interest in agriculture and sustainable resource management. Teri most recently served as a Tuolumne County, California County Supervisor and was Executive Director of Counties Count, a group focused on promoting local control and productive relations between local, state, and federal governments. Teri was also a member of the California Natural Resource Agency's Statewide Watershed Advisory Committee. We welcome Teri to Idaho's Conservation Partnership.

In August, we set up and manned our eye catching new display at the Lemhi County Fair. The stream table was a popular attraction for young people who were sometimes

shoulder to shoulder vying for a chance to create a landscape and watch the effects of erosion.

In September, Bonneville Power Administration staffers Greg Baesler, Joe De Herrera, Kathy Fisher and Tracey Yerxa flew from Portland to Salmon and joined us for a week of touring projects in the Lemhi, Pahsimeroi, Salmon-Panther and Yankee Fork sub-basins. Along with Bonneville staff, we were joined by Joe Spinazola from the Bureau of Reclamation Office in Boise. USBWP Tech Team Chairman and BLM Fisheries Biologist Jude Trapani dedicated most of the week to assist Mike Edmondson and I with the site visits. Karma Bragg of the Custer Soil and Water Conservation District highlighted several outstanding Pahsimeroi habitat improvement projects that have already yielded positive results for anadromous fish. Our thanks to everyone who helped to showcase the commendable work that is being done here.

This issue of the Watershed News features several of our projects that were completed this summer and fall. These include the two bridges constructed on Carmen Creek north of Salmon. Taylor Dixon from the Idaho Department of Water Resources provided an update on the ground water recharge research project that he is spearheading in Lemhi County. Dixon will give a presentation on his project to the USBWP Advisory Committee at their December meeting.