
Upper Salmon Basin Watershed

NEWS ABOUT RESTORING FISH HABITAT IN CENTRAL IDAHO

Spring 2015



Hawley Creek in late 2013

WATERSHED PROGRAM UPDATE

The year 2014 and the first half of 2015 have proven to be busy and productive for the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program. Construction projects were completed in Poison Creek and Lower Hawley Creek in 2014 (see pages 2 and 3 for project details) and projects were recently completed in Carmen Creek and Upper Hawley Creek (to be highlighted in the next newsletter). These projects removed a total of four fish barriers, added two fish screens, provided an additional 3.5 miles of fish habitat and kept almost 15 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water in streams for fish while simultaneously providing irrigation efficiencies for landowners. The Watershed Program continues planning for the future: engineering and design is complete for four projects scheduled for construction this summer and planning for another ten projects is underway for 2016-2017 implementation.

In addition to project planning, the Watershed Program hosted a Re-Vegetation Workshop on March 3 and 4, 2014. The workshop was tailored to those working to implement projects including biologists, ecologists, engineers, contractors, and landowners. The workshop was a great success with over 70 people in attendance. Check out the workshop presentations on the Library page of the modelwatershed.org website.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: POISON CREEK

The status of anadromous fish in Poison Creek, a tributary of the Salmon River located on private property, was a mystery to the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program and its partners until property manager Troy Olson approached the Watershed Program in 2012 with an idea.

Olson had recently become the lessee of the property located at the mouth of Poison Creek. He recognized that improvements to the Poison Creek Ranches' irrigation practices could benefit both the ranch and the fish in Poison Creek, but he needed help to make these improvements a reality.



Installation of the new fish screen.



A steelhead returns to Poison Creek to spawn.

Watershed Program and Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG) staff visited Poison Creek and confirmed that not only were fish using the creek, but that it was great riparian habitat with mature cottonwood trees shading the stream and providing cover for fish. However, fish were only able to access the first 0.35 miles of the creek until they ran into the first of three diversions that acted as fish passage barriers. Project planning went into full swing as Olson worked with the Watershed Program and its partners, including IDFG and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on project details.

In the fall of 2013, construction began. With funding from the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, Bonneville Power Administration and NRCS, the project installed a gravity fed water conveyance pipeline to convert from a flood to a sprinkler irrigation system. The project provided the Poison Creek Ranch with three new pivots and 12 in-line irrigation pod systems. This conversion not only increased water-use efficiency for the ranch, but it left an additional 7.5 cubic feet per second (cfs) – or about 3,360 gallons per minute – of cold, clean water in Poison Creek for fish. The three diversions identified as fish passage barriers were removed by the landowner and replaced with one fish-friendly diversion with a screen from IDFG. This action resulted in an additional 1.22 miles of fish habitat in Poison Creek.

The results of this project have been almost instantaneous – shortly after the project was completed in spring 2014, IDFG counted a record 31 steelhead redds, the spawning nests made by fish, in Poison Creek.

COMMUNITY CELEBRATES STREAM OF DREAMS

On Saturday, May 10, 2014, the community came together to celebrate the culmination of the Stream of Dreams project. Community members and students worked together to hang 650 hand-painted fish on the fence bordering the school grounds on Highway 93 South. The event also included music, a raffle and prizes, fishing demonstrations and food. Hundreds of people participated in the event made possible by local organizations and businesses, state and federal agencies, and non-profit organizations. The project was spearheaded by Iona McCarty and Terry Myers, who saw a similar mural in British Columbia and discovered it was the work of the Stream of Dreams Mural Society. The society’s founder, Louise Towell, has worked with over 50 communities in Canada and Washington, but this is the first of its kind in Idaho.

The project honored the very thing our town is named for, Salmon, and included education for Salmon school children on fish, migration, life cycles, riverine ecosystems and the importance of our watershed. In addition to learning about the fish, students also had the opportunity to design and paint their own fish to be a part of the beautiful mural that now greets visitors as they enter Salmon from the south.



The Stream of Dreams mural located on Highway 93 South.

LOWER HAWLEY CREEK CULVERT REPLACED WITH NEW BRIDGE

A new bridge was installed last fall on the Hawley Creek County Road to replace a culvert that created a fish passage barrier. This project opened up nearly a mile for fish access upstream.



What makes a culvert a fish passage barrier?
 Numerous factors contribute to whether a given culvert is a barrier to fish passage. Culverts are likely fish passage barriers if they have a drop at the outlet that is greater than ½ foot, constrict the natural stream channel, or if the slope of the culvert is greater than the slope of the natural channel.



The Hawley Creek culvert (top photo) was replaced with a new fish-friendly bridge (bottom photo).

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program

Homegrown, Common-sense Conservation

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RESTORING FISH
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To:

IN THIS ISSUE

- Watershed Program Update
- Project Spotlight: Poison Creek
- Community Celebrates Stream of Dreams
- Lower Hawley Creek Culvert Replaced with New Bridge

WATERSHED CALENDAR

- **USBWP Office Closed:** May 25 and July 3
- **USBWP Advisory Committee:** August 6, 1 p.m.

Coordinator's Comments *By Daniel Bertram*



Dustin Miller, Administrator of the Governor's Office of Species Conservation (left) with Wyatt Prescott, Executive Vice President of the Idaho Cattle Association.

It is hard to believe we are already halfway into 2015 and summer is knocking at the door. Now that I have completed my first full calendar year as Coordinator for the Watershed Program, I've felt both a sense of accomplishment and a sigh of relief as the first restoration projects of my tenure were completed.

Currently, we are hard at work completing two ongoing irrigation efficiency projects and are in the midst of doing the final preparations for four projects

to be completed this summer and fall. These upcoming projects will remove three partial and one full fish barrier within three separate tributaries to the Lemhi River. True to the nature of our office, we are already looking ahead to some exciting projects coming up in 2016.

In the Upper Salmon Basin, 92% of the land is public and 8% is privately owned. However, 54% of steelhead and Chinook spawning habitat occurs on that 8% of private land. As my work progresses with the Watershed Program, I am continually pleasantly surprised by the cooperation and support of these private landowners that we call our friends and neighbors. Our recent projects, highlighted on page 1, would not be possible without the cooperation and support of these agricultural and cattle producers. With each project that occurs, countless hours are spent working in a partnership approach to ensure that while our office is working towards our fish recovery goals, we are simultaneously working to improve the landowners bottom line and make their operations more efficient.

I like to think that the smiles in this photo of two friends and colleagues, in what some would consider opposing fields, are indicative that fish and cattle can coexist within the Upper Salmon Basin if we continue working together.