

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed News

NEWS ABOUT RESTORING FISH HABITAT IN CENTRAL IDAHO

Spring 2012

Formation Capital Corporation Funds Fish Recovery



Preston Rufe (left) and Jason Smith of Formation Capital, stand with the Kauer Family (Blair, Thane, Melva and Tex) and Quinton Snook (LSWCD) in front of the new CAFO project that was funded by the Idaho Cobalt Project.

The alliance of industry and conservation has become a mainstay in the recovery of endangered species and the restoration of wildlife habitat. For over a decade, corporate donations have helped fund conservation work and lessen the financial burdens of both private and government organizations. This funding has become even more critical to conservation groups as private donations fluctuate in a climate of economic uncertainty. In the Upper Salmon Basin, corporate sponsors like Formation Capital Corporation US, Idaho Cobalt Project have created unique partnerships with a grant program that benefits federally-listed fish and local economies.

Idaho Cobalt's grant program began in 2008, when the mining company and the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) created the Conservation Action Program (CAP). The goal is to fund on-the-ground habitat improvement projects in the Salmon River Watershed through a

competitive grant process, while also providing opportunities for local contractors and materials suppliers. According to Preston Rufe, Salmon-based Environmental Manager for Formation, "We continue to support efforts which benefit the local community and all Idahoans. The CAP is a testament to Formation's adherence to its principles of environmentally sound operations and in the sustainability of the local environment, its people and their economy."

The Watershed Program in partnership with the Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District (LSWCD) was the recipient of a CAP grant in 2009, the first year the grants were offered. The grant provided funds for an innovative structure designed to passively prevent fish from entering an irrigation system and becoming entrained on the lower Lemhi River area.

In 2011, the Watershed Program/LSWCD was again successful in receiving a CAP grant. This generous grant made possible the completion of an ambitious project in the Upper Lemhi River in cooperation with the McFarland Livestock Company. The main objective was the abandonment of a seven-mile long irrigation ditch that snaked along the hillside above the Lemhi River and replaced it with a pipeline and sprinkler irrigation system. The final phase of the project was to protect a springhead and ensure that water exiting a livestock feeding operation was clean before it reached other tributaries.

Idaho Cobalt's commitment to local environmental efforts exemplifies the key role that industry can have in protecting natural resources and promoting the work of conservation organizations. "We are pleased to work with more progressive mining companies such as Formation, which is developing an underground cobalt mine near Salmon," commented John Robison, *con't on pg 3*

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Watershed Calendar:

- July 12** Custer Soil and Water Conservation District meeting
- August 2** Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District meeting
- August TBA** USBWP Advisory Committee
- August 22-25** Lemhi County Fair

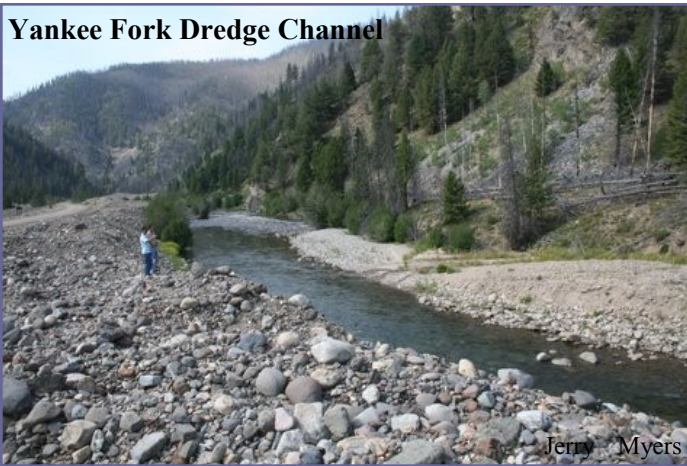
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Yankee Fork Rehabilitation Project Gathers Momentum

Jerry Myers - Upper Salmon Project Manager, Trout Unlimited

The Yankee Fork, one of the Salmon River Basin's largest tributaries, is receiving increasing efforts to enhance native fish populations in central Idaho. Federal and state agencies, local organizations and private landowners are working collaboratively to identify projects that will have the greatest potential to improve conditions for steelhead, Chinook salmon, bull trout and other native species of fish. These interested groups formed the Yankee Fork Interdisciplinary Team in late 2009 to act as an advisory group to direct efforts to build and improve fish habitat.

Yankee Fork Dredge Channel



Jerry Myers

History

The Yankee Fork contains unique and valuable natural and historic resources, including a rich Native American utilization of the area for the past 8,000 years. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes continue to work with restoration partners to protect and enhance tribal fishing opportunities and are currently leading much of the fisheries research being conducted on the Yankee Fork.

Gold was discovered in the upper Salmon region in the 1860's, and by the 1870's two mining towns, Custer and Bonanza City, had sprung up to support the many ongoing mining operations. So much instream mining was taking place that by the late 1880's the Yankee Fork was unsuitable for drinking water. Firewood cutting operations expanded to feed the growing fuel needs of the mills. Custer Mill alone was using 300 cords of firewood per month in the 1880's. By 1904 much of the area surrounding Custer and Bonanza City had been completely denuded of trees.

A large floating four story diesel powered dredge was built and began operation in 1940. The dredge's large capacity allowed it to excavate a wide swath of the river valley as it worked upstream. In 1949 it was purchased by J. R. Simplot and operated until 1952 when it reached the upstream boundary of the Simplot claim. The dredged reach of the Yankee Fork is approximately 6.5 miles long and is the principal focus area for rehabilitation work. The

dredge is still sitting where it last operated in 1952 and the volunteers of the Gold Dredge Association conduct summer tours. By the 1930's it was apparent that salmon numbers in the Yankee Fork had plummeted, both from activities in the Yankee Fork as well as impacts outside of the watershed. Additionally, road building, sport fishing, grazing and wildfire affected the Yankee Fork salmon runs. While all of these activities had various degrees of impacts, it should also be noted that these same activities provided livelihoods for the pioneers and a rich cultural history in the area. Those important cultural resources will be protected and enhanced as rehabilitation work proceeds in the sub-basin.

Where We Are Now

A Tributary Assessment (TA) of the Yankee Fork was completed under the direction of the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) in January 2012. This TA provides a valuable analysis of existing conditions and identifies areas within the Yankee Fork that will benefit most from rehabilitation efforts.

Under the TA, two projects are gearing up for implementation in 2012 and 2013. They are located approximately 5.5 miles up the Yankee Fork on private land owned by the J.R. Simplot Company and public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). These projects will increase side channel habitat through the dredged section of the river where channel diversity is lacking. Future projects will be identified by the Interdisciplinary Team and reviewed by the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program's Technical Team.

Funding is being provided by Bonneville Power Administration with the USBR doing the lion's share of data compilation and assessment work. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are continuing to provide stream and fish related data with support from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The USFS and the J. R. Simplot Company are helping with access, compliance and *con't on pg 3*



Overview of Yankee Fork Dredge

Jerry Myers

People in the News



V. Don Olson (shown with wife, Kathy), Salmon cattle rancher and Chairman of the USBWP Advisory Board, was inducted into the 40th Eastern Idaho Agriculture Hall of Fame on March 23rd. The award recognized Olson as one of Eastern Idaho's most distinguished leaders in the agriculture industry and for outstanding contributions to conservation, community involvement and ranching in the Lemhi Valley. Olson participated with the USBWP in a Lemhi side-channel enhancement project on the Olson Ranch in 2008 and has been active in the current Ground Water Recharge Study.

Dave McFarland was awarded Cattleman of the Year by the Lemhi County Cattle and Horse Growers Association in November. Dave said there are three main reasons he is working in the beef-ranching industry "1) When given the opportunity to own a ranch, you have been given a gift to preserve a small part of creation for the future, 2) the lifestyle offered by ranching is incomparable, and 3) you don't need to stab your neighbor in the back to get ahead." He has been active in many civic organizations in Lemhi County, including being a part of the original Lemhi County Land Planning Commission, which was a fore-runner for the USBWP. McFarland owns a ranch on Carmen Creek and participated in last fall's Archie Lane bridge project which replaced two culverts with a fish-friendly bridge across Carmen Creek.



Tom Curet was recently elected vice-president of the Idaho Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. He is on the USBWP Advisory Board and has worked for the Idaho Department of Fish & Game since 1993. Tom is currently the Regional Fishery Manager in Salmon.

* **Please contact us if you'd prefer
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Dye Tracer Groundwater Research Study

Alison Burnop, a new hire from the Idaho Department of Water Resources, is off to a great start picking up the Research Study. She plans to release dye in both a sprinkler irrigated field and a flood irrigated field in May to investigate flows paths and surface water times. We hope to see some preliminary results by the end of the summer.

CAP, con't. from pg. 1

public lands director for the ICL. He continued, "Although mining will always affect the environment, Formation is taking encouraging steps to protect water quality at their Idaho Cobalt Mine and, in partnering with the Idaho Conservation League, has demonstrated its commitment to programs that benefit the local watersheds and the communities that depend on them."

Yankee Fork, con't. from pg. 2

permitting for individual projects. The Custer County Commissioners and the Custer County Natural Resource Advisory Council are supporting and advising our progress in the Yankee Fork. Trout Unlimited, a nationwide cold water fisheries conservation group, is assisting with facilitation, public outreach and construction of the projects. If you would like more information about the Yankee Fork Rehabilitation Project please contact Jerry Myers at jmyers@tu.org or visit the USBR website for the Yankee Fork project at: www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/fcrps/thp/yf.

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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Check out our website for stories on the:

- Upper Lemhi
- East Fork Salmon River
- Iron Creek
- Lemhi River
- Pahsimeroi River

www.modelwatershed.org

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*

2012 marks the 20th Anniversary of the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program. Officially designated as the Lemhi River Model Watershed Program in June of 1992, its establishment closely followed the listing of Snake River Spring/Summer Run Chinook Salmon as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act in April of that same year.

Several years before the Model Watershed Program, Lemhi ranchers had already organized and began to develop a salmon restoration plan. Irrigators hoped that they could head off future federal mandates by being proactive and developing a subbasin plan to enhance fish passage. The fledgling Watershed Program harnessed the energy of these ongoing efforts in the Lemhi and expanded the geographic scope of the restoration to include the Pahsimeroi and East Fork Salmon River Basins. Later, the entire Upper Salmon River Basin was included and the name was eventually changed to the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program.

With funding from the Bonneville Power Administration and support from area irrigators and numerous state and federal agencies, the program became a nationally recognized model for community-inspired collaboration. In 2003, the Watershed Program

received The Conservation Project of the Year Award from the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service.

Although the work that was started is not finished, we continue to honor the commitment that we made two decades ago to provide service to the community and to the resource.

We are pleased to announce that USBWP Technician IV Abbie Gongloff has been promoted to Project Planner. Abbie had previously been a part time staff member and has joined USBWP staff as a full-time Planner.

Hydrologist Alison Burnop will take the reins of the Groundwater Research Study in the Lemhi River Basin. Alison was recently hired by the Idaho Department of Water Resources and will be based in Boise. She received her Master's degree in Hydrologic Sciences from Boise State University. We welcome Alison to the watershed team.

Our feature article in this issue of the Watershed News highlights the Conservation Action Program sponsored by Formation Capital U.S. Idaho Cobalt Project/Idaho Conservation League. Read about how Idaho Cobalt is helping to restore fish habitat and support agriculture in the Upper Salmon Basin.