

PORTNEUF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

March 2011

District Updates

The District is wrapping up the Marsh Creek Watershed Project Phase 2 grant. This was a DEQ §319 grant to improve water quality in the Marsh Creek watershed by assisting land owners in the installation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) including improving animal feeding operations, riparian habitat improvements, stream bank protection, fencing, and off-site water. The final report will be available on the District website (www.pswcd.org) in mid-March. Thanks again to all those who helped make this project possible! The Marsh Creek Phase 3 grant is underway; if you would like information on this new project contact the District office.



Lava Hot Springs, after February 1962 flood

Inside This Issue

District Updates

Ground Water Awareness

CRP Info

FSA News

Sage grouse initiative funding

All Portneuf SWCD and NRCS programs are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

Portneuf SWCD is an equal opportunity employer

www.pswcd.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Portneuf SWCD Board Meetings are normally held the second Wednesday of every month at 7 pm, Pocatello NRCS Office. Call for location and time as changes do sometimes occur

Next board meeting Tuesday, March 8, 7 pm, Pocatello NRCS office

IASCD Division V Spring Meeting March 23, 2011 Pocatello Sizzler, 11:00 am, call office for more information

Groundwater Awareness Week, March 6–12

Daylight Savings Time Begins March 13—Don't forget to spring forward!

GROUND WATER AWARENESS

National Ground Water Awareness Week is March 6-12. More than 90 percent of all public drinking water systems rely on ground water to supply the population with drinking water, and millions of Americans rely on ground water from aquifers to supply their private wells. Ground water flows slowly underground through pore spaces between sand, gravel, and cracks in rock, in underground formations called aquifers. These aquifers supply water that is used for agriculture, domestic water, and natural stream and lake recharge. Almost all of the drinking, commercial and industrial water needs in Pocatello and Chubbuck are derived from the Lower Portneuf Valley Aquifer. Very little is known about the aquifers in the south end of the county, but most people that live in these areas depend on ground water.

A number of areas in SE Idaho have been shown to have high nitrate levels in ground water. Nitrates are a concern for several reasons, the primary being health problems associated with infants and small children. The EPA has set a maximum contaminant level for nitrates at 10 ppm; there are some areas that have reported two to three times that amount in well water. The Pocatello office of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has brochures available with well testing information as well as **test strips** that can be used to test your well water for nitrate levels. These brochures are **available at the District office**, the local DEQ office, and many local grocery stores throughout Bannock County.

If you are concerned about the results of a test, contact DEQ at 236-6160. They can also provide a list of labs in the area that can perform more detailed testing and analysis of your well water. DEQ will be providing nitrate testing for well water at the Pocatello Community Environmental Fair on April 23, and at health fairs throughout the county this spring.

For more information, see www.wellowner.org or <http://www.ngwa.org/> from the National Groundwater Association

Please contact the office at 237 -4628, x 111 or at portneufswcd@pswcd.org if you do not wish to receive this newsletter or if you would like to receive it electronically.... Thank you!

TREAD LIGHTLY ON CRP

Although winter continues to drag on here in eastern Idaho, spring is approaching. Gusting winds and February thaws quickly remind us that spring and summer will soon be upon us. Therefore, it is important to remember to *Tread Lightly*, and in many cases, *Don't Tread At All* on CRP ground. Spring announces not only the commencement of the busy season for producers, but it also is the onset of the nesting season for resident ground nesting birds such as sharp tail grouse, pheasants, gray partridge, and mallards, and for migrating songbirds that call Idaho home for at least a portion of their life cycle.

Many Farm Bill programs were developed to enhance agricultural productivity and natural resource conservation on private land. The producers involved in these programs have been very successful at improving overall agricultural practices, reducing soil and wind erosion, and improving water quality. They are also successfully providing safe and secure nesting habitat for many of our grassland birds. Therefore, it is important to remember that many Farm Bill programs, particularly the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), have motorized access restrictions on these enrolled lands.

During the primary nesting season, these motorized access restrictions were developed to help reduce disturbance and nest loss for all bird species as well as to improve brood survival. On many of the current CRP contracts, the primary nesting season is defined as 1 April to 1 August; however, some existing contracts may be from 1 April to 1 July. Check with your local FSA office for specific details. In general, the primary nesting season dates are applicable for the duration of the contract; however, producers are allowed motorized access to the lands during the *establishment* of a new seeding (generally the first 3-years of a new seeding) to control and reduce competition from noxious weeds and undesirable plant through the use of mowing and spot spraying. During the remaining portion of the contract, these dates are expected to be observed. On occasion, the FSA County Committee may allow motorized access on these contracted lands during the primary nesting season for special circumstances, i.e. spot treatment of weed infestations. This practice must be requested in writing and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

This time period is a stressful for most birds due to the high energy demands associated with nesting, brood-rearing and feather development; therefore, haying, mowing and general human disturbance should be restricted during 1 April to 1 August. Additionally, delay all haying and mowing activities for as long as possible to allow nesting birds ample time to hatch their clutches, install flushing bars on equipment to reduce nesting hen mortality, reduce your speed while harvesting or mowing to allow more for time for wildlife to escape, and mow or hay from the center of the field toward the outer edge to allow hens with broods to escape toward the edge of the field. Haying or mowing from field perimeter in a circle toward the center tends to push broods "inward" where they are often killed by the swather or mower. So, give our birds a fighting chance and *Tread Lightly* when you are on CRP.

For additional information regarding access control, and haying and mowing on CRP please contact your local Farm Service Agency office.

Submitted by Brett Gullet,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

FARM SERVICE AGENCY NEWS

The Bannock County FSA office is currently taking applications for the 2011 DCP (Direct/Counter Cyclical Payment) program. Advance payments are once again available for DCP this year. The advance payment rate is 22% of your total DCP payment and can be paid the month following application approval. As always, there is paperwork to complete with each new crop year, so call the office for an appointment and we will work with you to make sure you are up to date for 2011.

You may have already heard that FSA will be conducting another CRP signup from March 14th thru April 15th. Currently though, Bannock County is at 24.8% of our maximum cropland limit (25%) for land enrolled in CRP. This means that our county will not be able to accept any more acres at this time because our eligible acres are at or below 1000 acres (465 acres to be exact). However, there are still **acres available** for enrollment into the **SAFE (State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement)** program. This program is much like CRP in that land is planted to a permanent vegetative cover, and yet different because it is specifically designed for wildlife habitat, in particular, habitat for Columbian Sharp-tail Grouse. This means the cover that currently exists on CRP acres does not qualify for SAFE. Any land currently enrolled/planted in CRP would need to be replanted with a seed mix conducive to Sharp-tail Grouse habitat needs. The rental rates for this program are comparable to CRP rental rates and there are incentive bonuses as well. Each SAFE contract runs for 10 years. Call the office if you have any questions. We are also able to accept CCRP (Continuous Conservation Reserve Program) offers on cropland acres now as well. Prior to this year, the only acres available for CCRP were acres on marginal pastureland. Practices and requirements for CCRP differ from general CRP, so call the office for details.

Finally, as always, please notify the office if you have any changes in your farming operations. This includes land sales, change in owner/operator, or changes to entities such as partnerships, corporations etc. Every year, there are payments held up due to incomplete or inaccurate farm records. Please help us help you keep up to date on your farming operations and paperwork. As you begin this new crop year, we at the Bannock County FSA office want to wish you all a safe, productive, and successful year. We look forward to working with each of you. Please call us with any questions you may have. Our number is 208-237-3435, extension 2. Our office hours are Monday thru Friday, 8:00am till 4:30pm.

All the best!

Steve Myler
County Executive Director
Bannock County FSA

Board of Supervisors

Scott Henderson, Chair
Kevin Koester, Vice-Chair
Dave Jackson, Treasurer
John McNabb
Kit Tillotson

Associates

Morgan Evans
Brad Kent
Kirk Irick
Paul Danielson
John Sigler

District Staff

Janet Pacioretty
Office Administrator

NRCS Staff

BJ O'Doherty,
District Conservationist
Martha Nunez-Hagius,
Engineer
Ryan Woodland, Soil
Conservation Technician

IASCD/ISWCC Staff

Chris Banks, Water Quality
Resource Conservationist
Kelsey Flandro, Water
Quality Analyst
Steven Smith, Water Quality
Resource Conservationist

PSWCD Office:

1551 Baldy Ave., Ste. 2
Pocatello, ID 83201
208-237-4628 x111
portneufswcd@pswcd.org

Funding Available to Improve Sage-grouse Habitat in Idaho

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service increased program funding this year to help farmers and ranchers protect declining sage-grouse populations and habitat in Idaho.

The Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI) helps pay for putting specific conservation practices in place that will improve sage-grouse habitat or reduce threats to bird survival. These practices may also improve rangeland conditions. Idaho received just over \$3 million for the initiative this year.

Producers can apply for the Sage-grouse Initiative at any time. Applications received **before April 15** will be ranked for funding in fiscal year 2011. Landowners in the historic range for sage-grouse are eligible to apply for the initiative.


"The Sage-grouse Initiative supports both sustainable ranching and healthy sage-grouse populations by focusing on improving rangeland conditions," said Jeff Burwell, Idaho NRCS State Conservationist. "Some of the practices used to improve sage-grouse habitat are the same practices required to maintain healthy grazing land for livestock."

NRCS spent over \$1 million in 2010, the fiscal year for the Sage-grouse Initiative. Producers across southern Idaho used the initiative to help fund projects that enhanced sage-grouse habitat and also improved range condition such as:

- Seeding rangeland to increase availability of sage-grouse food plants and improve livestock forage;
- Installing new fencing and water developments to assist grazing management;
- Removing juniper trees in key breeding, brood-rearing and wintering sites to restore sage-grouse habitat and increase livestock forage production; and
- Improving grazing systems to incorporate a rest period to improve sage-grouse cover during the nesting season.

Declining sage-grouse populations and habitat across the west generated interest in helping the species so that it will not need protection under the Endangered Species Act. The species depends on sagebrush for cover and food and are found at elevations ranging from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet. For more information on the initiative, contact your local NRCS office, or visit our website at http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/sage_grouse/index.html.


The Voice of Agriculture
in Bannock County



Bannock County
Farm Bureau
Call 233-9442

Proud Sponsor of PSWCD

D. L. Evans Bank
"Idaho's Hometown Community Bank Since 1904"



www.dlevans.com

4080 Yellowstone Ave. Pocatello 637-2265

Portneuf Soil and Water
Conservation District
1551 Baldy Ave., Ste. 2
Pocatello, ID 83201
208-237-4628