

## Boots in the Forest

# BRIAN ANDERSON

By Jaimie Olle

“Honestly, wandering around in streams is always a good day,” asserts Boise National Forest’s south zone hydrologist Brian Anderson. “Getting out in the field is the best benefit of this job.”

Anderson, who’s been in his current position for a tad over a year, began his career on the Boise National Forest in 2006 with the [Idaho City Hotshots](#).

During his undergraduate studies in environmental studies at the University of Idaho, Anderson had a great groundwater professor who

made him excited about the topic. His love for the subject, coupled with a passion for sports such as backcountry skiing and fishing, led him to pursue a master’s degree in hydrology from Boise State University.

Beginning in 1999, Anderson worked as a seasonal employee on the Salmon-Challis, Payette, and Boise National Forests as a Youth Conservation Corps crew leader, wilderness ranger, and hotshot firefighter. He became the hydrologist for the Emmett Ranger District in January of 2011.

As a hydrologist, Anderson’s responsibilities span a wide-range of activities and departments. In the field, he visits project sites while doing analysis for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), oversees Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) work and assessments, tests water quality, monitors stream flows, assesses stream crossings, and surveys habitats in relation to streams. During the winter season, he’s also out monitoring snow stability and snowpack depths.

Anderson evaluates a variety of proposed projects forest-wide to ensure they will not degrade water quality or pose a potential threat to groundwater or stream flows. He visits mining claims to ensure water quality standards are met. He also samples groundwater at campgrounds and guard stations to ensure recreationists have safe drinking water. Hydrology is a unique field in that hydrologists play a role in nearly all departments of the Forest Service.

“We’re kind of like the ambassadors for water science,” suggests Anderson. It’s important for hydrologists to know a little bit about everything that’s happening on the Forest.



*Brian Anderson wears wading boots when he’s doing stream surveys or other data collection that calls for him to be in and out of the water.*

While he has his share of days in the office writing technical reports, Anderson enjoys his days spent in the field. Although the types of projects and work vary, most field days follow a general outline, coupling data collection with assessment and on-the-ground monitoring of projects.

“A typical day starts with coming into the office to gather the relevant field materials for the day, whether that’s a camera or GPS or monitoring equipment,” says Anderson. “From there, I’ll head out to a project site. I’ll collect data and consider any necessary changes for ensuring that we’re complying with relevant policies. At the end of the day, I’ll head back to the office to download the day’s materials.”

Anderson usually wears either 10-inch fire boots or wading boots for these field days. But he has a collection of over a dozen pairs of boots from over the course of his career.

“It’s cool to be able to look at them and remind yourself about the past experiences you’ve had,” he remarks, after emphasizing the importance of quality footwear for any type of fieldwork.

A wide-variety of footwear plays a role in Anderson’s downtime as well. He’s passionate about backcountry skiing, backpacking, fishing, camping, and running, often frequenting the same areas where he completes his work. Regularly, he comes across something that relates to work while recreating on the Forest. He’ll pull out his camera and begin snapping pictures and taking notes.

“I’m lucky to have landed a job where I get to work in incredible places,” believes Anderson. “I have great opportunities to make positive impacts on a piece of ground. Being part of a land management agency means having the ability to positively influence a chunk of ground.”