

SUCCESS

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Panjshir Province, located about 80 miles north of Kabul, is a long narrow valley surrounded by the 16,000 foot peaks of the Hindu Kush Mountains, and in many ways is similar to southern Idaho, beautiful but arid.

Over 85% of the workforce in Panjshir Province is engaged in agricultural pursuits.

Jim Hoffman's projects covered a wide range, included restoring damaged fruit, nut, and grain crops; exploring development of new agricultural pursuits, such as Kashmir wool collection; fish farming; saffron production; and development of tree nurseries

Helping Rebuild Afghanistan's Agricultural Economy

Forest Service Pathologist Spends Year in Afghanistan

Jim Hoffman, a forest pathologist in the Boise Field Office, on State and Private Forestry's Forest Health Protection staff, recently spent a year in Panjshir Province, Afghanistan as an agricultural advisor for the US Department of Agriculture.

Panjshir Province, located about 80 miles north of Kabul, is a long narrow valley surrounded by the 16,000 foot peaks of the Hindu Kush Mountains. After decades of conflict, much of the Province's agricultural infrastructure needs to be reestablished to rebuild the agricultural capacity of the citizens.

The US Agency for International Development and US military provide funding to reestablish Afghanistan's agricultural economy, and the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service provides technical experts like Jim to coordinate the work.

Knowing Who's Doing What

Jim's work as an advisor involved matching needs in the Province with programs offered by a wide array of government and non-government organizations, as well as building relationships and communication between staff of the Afghan and US governments to implement those programs.

To understand which entities could potentially help within Panjshir, Jim waded through pages of mission statements to find out which had the funding and expertise to match the needs and situations in the Province. While Jim notes humanitarian aid is well coordinated among the participating countries and NGOs—who try not to duplicate programs—there still is a tremendous number of entities to track.

As Jim says, "I had to learn a whole lot about a whole lot of groups and keep up with their activities to determine if those groups could be a good fit with needs in Panjshir". Jim's experience in natural resource management helped with reality testing and determining the feasibility of project proposals.

Providing Continuity

Hoffman's work also involved tracking and follow-up on projects underway in the Province when he arrived.

Contact

Jim Hoffman
US Forest Service
State and Private Forestry
Forest Health protection
Boise, Idaho
Office: (208) 373-4221
jhoffman@fs.fed.us



Jim Hoffman overlooking Panjshir Province, Afghanistan

In one case, Jim reviewed the history of a project training locals to collect and clean cashmere wool to sell. The locals prepared and were ready to sell their wool; however, the wool buyer never showed up. Jim pointed out to the Provincial Director of Agriculture the recorded commitment for the wool buyer to purchase the wool. The Director was then able to apply pressure to get the buyer to make good on his promise.

A second wool buyer heard of the available wool and went door to door through the area, buying all the remaining wool. Since the goats that provide the wool are cared for primarily by woman and children, the sale of wool effectively doubled family incomes that year. With two wool buyers now familiar with the product and the Province, the outlook

is more promising for establishing cashmere wool as an agricultural product in Panjshir.

Many Afghans rely on wood as a primary source of fuel. While villagers in the low elevations of the country have a long history of growing hybrid poplars for fuel, the high elevation, arid mountain areas of Panjshir Province do not have that growing situation or experience.

Jim participated in a project to establish trees at high elevations, in villages that, through the years of conflict, had lost their collective knowledge and experience in planting trees. Jim called on another Forest Service employee based in Boise, Idaho—Clark Fleege—for assistance with determining which native tree species were best to use

for reforestation. Clark had previously worked in Afghanistan providing technical assistance to improve the propagation of native Afghan tree species.

Working with the Provincial Director of Agriculture, Jim obtained tree seedlings to plant, including Baloot oak, Afghan pine and Himalayan pine, and established a system of stone walls to protect seedlings from sheep and goat grazing. Jim notes it isn't known how long it will take to raise the trees to a useable size for fuel, since reforestation hadn't been done before at some of those elevations. Meanwhile, caring for the tree seedlings is helping to reestablish local knowledge of reforestation and contributing to the overall goal of building agricultural capacity in Afghanistan.