

Boise National Forest 2011

Annual Report



Boise Coalition members participate in a field trip to discuss Lower Clear Creek Watershed Project.



Boise National Forest Moves Forward with Boise Coalition Recommended Project

The Boise Forest Coalition, consisting of varied public and organizational interest representatives, met for nearly a year with Lowman Ranger District staff to develop a proposed suite of projects to remove culverts and roads, build trails, cut timber and burn the forest under controlled conditions within the Lowman Clear Creek watershed.

They presented their proposal to Boise National Forest staff this summer having built an atmosphere of trust and better understanding of management options through excellent dialogue, facilitated by Common Ground.

In November, the Lowman Ranger District initiated an environmental review for the Lower Clear Creek Watershed Project with a proposal to manage 2,650 acres. The project area is 75 miles northeast of Boise.

The project will follow the Wildlife Conservation Strategy adopted by the Boise National Forest in accordance with its 2003 forest plan. That strategy is designed to improve conditions for key wildlife species by looking closely at vegetation management.



The Wildlife Conservation Strategy (WCS) prioritizes the types of activities that should be undertaken to help maintain or restore habitat for wildlife species in greatest need of conservation. The WCS also identifies where these actions are most needed. For example, thinning smaller trees and connecting habitat areas will likely provide suitable habitat for woodpeckers, owls and elk.

Thinning and controlled burning is proposed on about 1,000 acres for habitat restoration, another 250 acres for protection of summer homes and private lands, and another 700 acres to maintain forest conditions. Controlled burns are also recommended, after some advance treatments, on about 700 acres.

A new 15-mile mountain bike trail along Miller Mountain ridge and leading into Clear Creek is also proposed. This trail would provide mountain bikers a place to ride at a lower elevation where the snow leaves early in the spring.

“The Boise National Forest appreciates the hard work and creative thinking from the citizens who care so much about our public forests and we hope to continue to partner with the Coalition,” said Marie Louise “ML” Smith, Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Boise National Forest.

A list of participants and details of the Coalition proposal may be found at: http://0101.nccdn.net/1_5/39d/0cf/1eb/BoiseForestCoalitionMembership-6-16-11.pdf

Coalition Primary Participants

Wilderness Society
Woody Biomass Utilization Initiative
Trout Unlimited
Common Ground
Southwest Idaho Mountain Biking Association
Long Creek Summer Home Owners
Boise Cascade Wood Products LLC
Idaho Conservation League
Blue Ribbon Coalition
Boise County Commissioners
Idaho Congressman Raul Labrador Staff
US Forest Service – Boise National Forest



“Ultimately, our success at the Forest Service will be measured in terms of watershed health on those 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands.”

Tom Tidwell

US Forest Service Chief

Forest Identifies Two Key Watershed Improvement Projects

One of the US Department of Agriculture’s primary management objectives is to protect and restore our nation’s watersheds. In 2011, each national forest in the country was directed to identify and prioritize degraded watersheds that if targeted with strategically focused investments would result in substantially improved or enhanced watershed condition.

Watersheds are the foundation for sustaining ecosystems and the production of renewable natural resources, values and benefits.

The Forest hydrologist and other staff used a national system to classify the condition of each of the 170 watersheds within the Boise National Forest. Their studies relied on GIS technology, and focused on being cost-effective, implementable within existing budgets and included resource areas and activities that would have a significant influence on watershed condition.

The Boise National Forest selected the following two watershed restoration projects for funding consideration. The regional office in Ogden, Utah expects to select projects for funding in early 2012.

The Scriver Creek Priority Watershed Project on the Emmett Ranger District addresses issues of road-related sedimentation, risk of

large high intensity/severity wildfires and fish migration barriers.

Partners include Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Boise County, Idaho Department of Water Resources, West Central Highlands Resource Conservation and Development Council, Trout Unlimited, Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Land Management, US Environmental Protection Agency, Idaho Snowmobile Association and Idaho Firewise Program.

The Stolle Creek South Fork Salmon River Priority Watershed Project on the Cascade Ranger District identified high road densities, trails and dispersed recreational impacts and the anticipated increase of post-wildfire sediment expected for the next 10-20 years which pose a high risk of damaging the water quality. This watershed is ecologically important to aquatic species such as Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and several amphibian species such as Idaho giant salamander.

This project also has active watershed restoration partnerships including the Nez Perce Tribe, Pacific Coastal Salmon Restoration Group, Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee, and Valley County.



Chinook salmon spawning in Stolle Meadows area of SF Salmon River.

Top Left: The stream ford on the right side of the photo is used by ATV vehicles during summer months due to the disrepair of the bridge putting sediment into Scriver Creek.

A study underway on the Payette and Boise National Forests is increasing our knowledge about interactions among winter recreationists and wolverines in high mountain areas.

Wolverine Study



This adult male wolverine, named Mason, was captured on January 28, 2011 near Warm Lake.



One of the baited traps used to capture wolverines.

The U.S. Forest Service needs data to help make management decisions that provide for winter recreation while conserving wolverine populations. While some research has suggested potential conflicts between winter recreation and wolverines, the scientific basis for management continues to rely primarily on anecdotal accounts of the wolverine's response to human-related disturbance.

This study was initiated in 2008 with wolverine trapping and tracking. Surveying winter recreation use began in 2010.

The study already has identified areas with an overlap among winter recreation and habitat used by wolverines for reproductive denning and kit rearing. Researchers say it's important to study the female wolverines and their denning locations because wolverines have a low reproductive rate only producing kids every couple of years.

Most dens occur in areas that are largely closed to motorized winter travel in both Forests. Some instances of den abandonment in response to snowmobile and heli-ski presence have been documented anecdotally. Conversely

in some instances human disturbance did not result in den abandonment.

In the winter of 2010-2011, the study expanded from the eastern portion of the Payette National Forest to include the north end of the Cascade Ranger District on the Boise National Forest.

A total of 11 wolverines were captured and tracked across the two Forest study area. One female was confirmed to have denned in 2011 on the Boise NF. This is the second den found on the Boise National Forest with the first discovered in the 1990's. Recreational snowmobile riders, snowshoers, and skiers also voluntarily carried GPS units to track their recreation use.

This study drew interest from Idaho Public Television who coordinated with Principal Investigator Kim Heinemeyer to be on site during the capture and collaring of a wolverine. This resulted in a segment on the "Working for Wildlife" show that aired on Idaho PBS in July. "Working for Wildlife" explored the interesting and challenging ways that Idahoans assist wild animals, including tracking wolverines and winter recreationists to see if they can co-exist in high mountain areas. Idaho Public Television reaches 98 percent of Idaho homes.

In the winter of 2011-2012, the study will move to the Trinity Mountains on the Mountain Home Ranger District and adjacent lands on the Sawtooth National Forest.

Fire Management Officials Engaged a Varied Season

Fire managers engaged an active season that implemented a mix of fire management strategies, but the season was delayed locally due to a very wet spring and late snow melt. The first declared wildfire was on June 23, about a month later than average. Burned acres reflected the wet conditions, totaling only 4,922 acres, compared to a 10-year-average of nearly 50,000 acres.

The Castro Fire on the Lowman Ranger District was the largest at 4,853 acres. The fire started on August 4th and was located in the 23% of the forest where the emphasis is to ensure lightning caused fires can play a natural role in the fire adapted ecosystem.

Management action to check the fires' spread occurred in late August when dry and hot conditions finally arrived. A helicopter supported burnout was implemented on the northeast flank which stopped that movement, and then a few days later, three hotshot crews worked on the south flank to halt movement in the East Fork 8-mile Creek area. That was equally successful.

The fire, monitored daily by fire lookouts, was declared controlled on October 11 following rain and light snow. It met resource objectives and created a fuel reduced area between the 8-Mile Fire which burned in 2009 under similar management, and the



The Castro Fire ignited on August 4th in an area where the emphasis is to ensure lightning caused fires play a natural role in the fire adapted ecosystem.

Red Mountain Fire which was an intense 40,000 acre fire in the drought year of 2006. Overall, six lightning caused wildfires were evaluated to maximize ecosystem burns, but due to the wet conditions and their locations, five of them went out with no management action.

Firefighters dealt with 104 fires throughout the year, but the majority was very small. Newly placed district fire management officers provided excellent coordination to assign fire assets to the priority fires.

A big challenge was to provide support to other areas and agencies. The BLM Boise District had numerous large range fires, and Forest engines, crews and aircraft helped contain many of those fires. In addition, assets were sent to Texas and the Southwest to support those intense fire seasons.

The prescribed fire program was also affected by the wet spring, but the effort to reduce fuels was successful in many areas through fall landscape burns and the burning of piled limbs and slash.



Ruth Esperance

Idaho City Welcomes New District Ranger

The Boise National Forest welcomed Ruth Esperance as the new district ranger for the Idaho City Ranger District. She is a twenty-one year veteran of natural resource management.

"I enjoy working with the community interests who are passionate about the Idaho City Ranger District," said Esperance. "I am very passionate myself in addressing natural resource issues in an open and constructive manner with a goal to make decisions that are the

best for the natural resources and the public."

Esperance moved to Idaho City from her previous position as the Washakie District Ranger on the Shoshone National Forest in western Wyoming. In that position she worked closely to develop a district wide fuel project with a long term goal of creating a strategic plan to increase fire management options.

A Wisconsin native, Ruth has a BS in Forest Administration from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.



Left: Track hoe begins road decommissioning.
Below: Decommissioned road in upper Johnson Creek.



Forest Uses Funds to Repair Roads and Trails to Enhance Watersheds

The Legacy Roads and Trails program provides funds for road decommissioning and road or trail repair or maintenance. Projects emphasize areas where such infrastructure may be contributing to water quality problems. The Boise National Forest spent \$335,000 to improve critical watersheds and protect fish habitat. Two major projects were accomplished under this program with key partners.

Johnson Creek Watershed Improvement Project

The Johnson Creek Watershed project decommissioned roads, re-routed trails and rehabilitated dispersed camping sites within this drainage which is a major tributary to the South Fork Salmon River. Roads in the South Fork Salmon River watershed were identified as the largest contributors of sediment into the river. Improvements included six miles of fish habitat enhancement, 16 miles of road decommissioning, eight miles of trail maintenance and five trail bridges reconstructed.

This project utilized \$98,000 of partnership funds from the Nez Perce Tribe and \$20,000 from the Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee.

Middle Fork Payette River Watershed Improvement Project

The Middle Fork Payette River Watershed Improvement project on the Emmett Ranger District was completed in partnership with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. It reduced sedimentation from a motorcycle and non-motorized dual use trail. This partnership resulted in improvements to two State of Idaho regulated public water supply systems. Seven miles of the Silver and Bull Creek trail were reconstructed and/or re-routed to improve fish habitat for Bull Trout and native Redband trout.

Six arch culverts were installed to enhance bull trout habitat and 19 small culverts were installed to drain water in wet or muddy areas. The local Treasure Valley Trail Machine Association volunteered to assist with trail maintenance, backfilling the arched culverts and placing turf block at the ingress/egress of bridges.



Left: One of the new six arched culverts to enhance Bull Trout habitat. **Below:** Trail realignment mitigated water run-off and reduced erosion as part of the Middle Fork Payette River Watershed Improvement Project.



Connecting Fish and Aquatic Habitat

The Boise National Forest initiated an intensive road culvert study in 2003 that identified 700 culverts blocking bull trout and other aquatic organism passage to spawning and rearing habitat. Of these, managers listed 200 culverts for priority replacement. About 90 percent of these crossings were determined to be barriers for young or adult wild trout or salmon. Many of these culverts are 50 years old and have outlived their useful life.

The goal is to replace at least three to five culverts per year. The cost ranges from \$20,000-\$750,000 per culvert depending on the size of stream, amount of fill and design of replacement structure.

“Wild trout and salmon need continuous, cold and connected streams to spawn, rear and continue healthy and diverse populations.”

Since 2003, the Forest replaced 30 priority crossings with open bottom culvert structures or bridges to allow fish and aquatic organism passage. This has reconnected 165 miles of streams for wild trout and salmon to spawn, rear and continue healthy and diverse populations.

In 2011, seven road culverts were replaced at the following creeks: Mormon, Fawn, Pierce, Fivemile, Tennessee, Bearskin and Bull.

Other partners in this effort include local Resource Advisory Committees, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Tribes, local highway departments, counties, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy

In 2003, the Boise National Forest teamed up with the Payette and Sawtooth National Forests in the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup to revise their forest plans together. The purpose of a forest plan is to guide natural resource management activities

Included in the forest plan is the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS). It provides a scientific direction to maintain and restore characteristics of healthy, functioning watersheds, riparian areas, and associated fish habitats.

This strategy integrates many of the goals and objectives of both the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.

The components of the ACS all help to maintain and restore the productivity and resilience of watersheds and their associated aquatic systems.

Safety Starts with Every Employee

In 2011, the agency began implementing a series of actions intended to foster an agency culture that seeks to ensure every employee returns home safely each day. The Chief asked each employee to participate, before the end of 2011, in a day-long “Safety Engagement Session” intended to lend a common foundation from which to work and the opportunity to share our best thinking, ideas, and concerns about safety.

“The Forest Service nationally spends about \$30 million on workman compensation claims each year,” said Boise NF Safety and Occupational Health Specialist Todd

DeMasters. “There are between four and six job related deaths in the agency each year and even one is too many.”

“Nearly 500 employees attended one of the twenty sessions on our forest,” said Boise National Forest Supervisor Cecilia Seesholtz. “The goal was to have every permanent, seasonal, volunteer and Job Corps employees attend a session.”

DeMasters says many employees are taking advantage of sharing safety stories because whether the outcome was good or bad a shared event could affect another employees decision-making.



Volunteers Build New Recreation Trail near Warm Lake

This summer volunteers spent a week building a new trail for mountain bikers and hikers on the Wewukiye Trail east of Warm Lake and Stolle Meadows on the Cascade Ranger District. Wewukiye (pronounced “Wawookia”) means “elk” in the Nez Perce tribal language. The crew included a Forest Service trail crew, Joe Pickett with the Idaho Trails Association/Student Conservation Association and volunteers from across the nation.

“We heard from users that they wanted more non-motorized trails,” said Jen Hensiek, recreation specialist on the Cascade District. “This is one of the products.”

REI sporting goods company provided a \$10,000 grant to build the two-mile section of trail as part of a 17 mile route to connect various recreation areas. The areas include Warm Lake, Tule Lake, Stolle Meadows, a Chinook salmon viewing platform on the South Fork of the Salmon River, an historic cabin and Vulcan Hot Springs.

The money helped coordinate volunteer work as well as the purchase of tools to use on Wewukiye and future trails.

This effort was part of a “volunteer vacation.” Some of the workers paid their own way to come



Volunteers, including Cascade District Ranger Bill Rice, build new trailhead.

to the project from as far away as Florida.

“They are only asked to work according to their skills, endurance and number of days they can participate,” said Hensiek.

John McCarthy with the Wilderness Society said, “After volunteering for two days on this project I have to say you have a great set of folks working recreation and trails. I was totally impressed with the efficiency, skill, organization, attitude and great example for trails and work ethics. I worked trails for two years in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and I found your folks as committed and as competent as my memory of us old hands -- back in the day.”



Volunteers with the Idaho Trails Association work on new trail head.

New Cascade District Ranger Is Building a Foundation for the Future

Bill Rice joined the Boise National Forest as the new Cascade District Ranger in May. Rice is a 30-year veteran of natural resource management, public relations and communications.



Bill Rice

He's spent his first months involved with some major watershed projects and getting familiar with the community, partners and his staff.

“My goal is to reach out and be available to look at the opportunities the Cascade Ranger District can offer to the community,” said Rice.

He says he's grateful to be in Cascade to work with such an experienced and knowledgeable staff.

“I enjoy working with the community of Cascade, the forest employees and the many partners involved in public land management,” said Rice. “My primary focus centers on public safety, service and land stewardship.” He says he's pleased with the work being done on the Upper South Fork Salmon River Resource Project.

“This is a project that balances watershed restoration with recreation activities and identifying how the two can co-exist in a critical resource area,” said Rice.



Containerized bitterbrush and conifer seedlings growing in the Lucky Peak Nursery greenhouse.



Lucky Peak Nursery Branches Out to Meet New Market Demands

In FY 2011, the Lucky Peak Nursery (LPN) produced and distributed 1.5 million one-year old greenhouse-grown conifer seedlings for reforestation efforts on National Forests in the Intermountain Region, which amounts to approximately 5,000 acres of reforestation. The majority of the conifers (douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, western larch, Engelmann spruce) were planted on the Boise National Forest following the Cascade Fire Complex in 2007.

The LPN also produced and distributed 1.5 million bare root dry-land shrubs for restoration projects on public lands throughout the Great Basin. The majority of Wyoming big sagebrush seedlings were used to re-establish critical sage grouse habitat in east-central Washington on lands administered by the Department of Defense and the Department of Interior Fish & Wildlife Service.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of the bitterbrush seedlings were planted to re-establish crucial big game habitat in southern Idaho on lands administered by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

“The nursery was initially established to address the conifer reforestation needs in the Intermountain Region, but over time our mission has evolved to help other government agencies meet their restoration goals for high desert environments, aquatic riparian areas, and critical sage brush habitat,” said Clark Fleege, LPN nursery manager.

The LPN also processed over 3500 pounds of native tree, shrub, grass, and forb seed for various public land management agencies throughout the Great Basin. The site-specific seed, collected from over 200 locations, will be used on a variety of restoration projects.

“The importance of using native seeds and plants is that it helps maintain the native vegetation and limits growth of noxious weeds,” Fleege added.

A Note From our Supervisor

The Boise National Forest, with its dedicated workforce, accomplished a wide range of projects that met Forest Plan goals and current objectives in 2011.



Cecilia Seesholtz
Boise Forest Supervisor

I am proud of all of our accomplishments—those of note that are briefly represented in this Annual Report and the many more that could not be included. In particular, developing and continuing partnerships, finding collaborative funding opportunities, and balancing the Forest organization with tight budgets were outstanding.

The goal to serve the public and care for the land is being met. The work to restore our public forests, provide clean water and involve citizens is a mission that was met with excellence this year.

“The nursery was initially established to address the conifer reforestation needs in the Intermountain Region, but over time our mission has evolved to help other government agencies meet their restoration goals...”

Clark Fleege
LPN Nursery Manager

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