

Boise National Forest 2012

Annual Report



Trail Restoration Project Improves Critical Watershed

Above Right: New culvert installed on Bull Creek Trail to improve water quality and reduce erosion.

The Bull Creek sub-watershed on the Emmett Ranger District was historically classified as an at-risk watershed because of poor water quality from sedimentation related to deteriorating trail conditions. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and EPA identified concerns regarding water quality beneficial uses tied to sediment delivery from area trails.

Boise National Forest employees evaluated the trail system and discovered a poor trail location combined with a lack of functioning stream crossing structures, drainage control structures and erosion control devices. These problems caused trail tread erosion resulting in sediment pool filling and alteration of proper stream substrate for bull trout spawning and rearing.

Numerous unauthorized created trails also contributed to unacceptable impacts to soil quality, wetlands, water quality beneficial uses and aquatic habitat for bull trout.

The forest initiated the Bull Creek Trail Restoration Project to correct the trail problems, repair the damage to the sub-watershed and to re-classify the watershed to a higher classification. The project focused on a 22-mile stretch of Bull Creek and Silver Creek trails. This popular recreation section of the trails was closed during the two year project.

The Boise National Forest partnered with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Trails Unlimited and other motorized clubs to complete extensive repair work to these trails.

Trail reconstruction included:

- Installing 42 arched culverts throughout the 22 mile long trail system which provides for water removal and reduced trail erosion
- Rerouting 10 sections (3 major) of trail
- Building a 35 foot long bridge
- Building a 40 foot long retaining wall
- Connecting the upper Bull Creek Trail with the Rice Peak Trail for a longer ride opportunity into the Cascade Ranger District
- Completing extensive brushing and clearing of the trail width and tread

The trail reopened in October 2012 to motorcycle and non-motorized recreation use to provide for sustainable and manageable opportunities while reducing impacts to natural resources and watershed values.

The Treasure Valley Trail Machine Association volunteered weekend work over a two year period for many project tasks. In addition, the Squaw Butte Backcountry Horseman volunteered with trail clearing. The Emmett Rough Riders ATV Club volunteered trail clearing on the Telephone Ridge Trail, which was key to equipment hauling and better access to the upper Bull Creek Trail.

The trail system is seasonally designated for use from July 1 through November 14.



Crews repair deteriorating Bull Creek Trail to restore watershed quality for bull trout habitat.



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New Sage Grouse Research Identifies Critical Habitat on Public Lands

The sage grouse is a symbol of Idaho's high desert country. In recent years, the bird and its sagebrush habitat have declined due to fire, invasive species and human activity. In 2006, the US Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a conservation plan to maintain, improve, and where possible, increase sage-grouse populations and habitats in Idaho.

To assist the agency with its research efforts, the Western Elmore County Sage-grouse Local Working Group requested funds to radio-collar up to 30 sage-grouse from the State of Idaho Cooperative Sage-grouse Project. In 2012, Mountain Home Ranger District Wildlife Biologist, Scott Bodle, deployed 14 radio collars with assistance from forest staff, Air Force personnel, BLM staff and volunteers. This effort is in addition to the previously collared 12 birds by Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Information collected will be used to document survival, identify and delineate key seasonal use areas, and document seasonal movements.

Radio collaring sage grouse occurs at night with no moon or very little moon. The ambient light from the moon can silhouette trappers and spook birds before

they are captured. Trapping typically involves 2-3 personnel. The capturing procedure involves carrying a large battery pack to run a spot-light. Trappers walk around known roosting areas or near mating sites called "leks". The most experienced individual typically carries the pack and operates the spot light. Using binoculars the spotter identifies roosted sage grouse from their unique eye shine. (Sage grouse have a green eye shine that resembles little emeralds sparkling in the brush). Once a bird is identified the trappers move in towards the bird.

At a distance of approximately 50 meters the spotter switches from a high powered spot light to a smaller strobe light. The strobe further disorients the birds allowing for easier capture. Within a couple feet of the bird the netter captures it with a converted salmon size pole net. During the whole operation the spot-



Mountain Home Ranger District Wildlife Biologist Scott Bodle holds a sage grouse during a night survey.



Sage grouse nest found on public lands.

ter is also carrying a radio system that plays loud music. The loud music covers both the noise of the approach and causes the birds to hold in place.

Once a bird is captured its information is recorded including gender and weight. The sage grouse is then fitted for a radio collar and leg bands with a unique number.

Currently there are three sage grouse nests on USFS lands with both females with broods and males using national forest lands during critical life stages. This information will be valuable in range allotment planning and could be used for future restoration projects to improve sage grouse habitat.

In 2012, the USFWS found sage grouse were warranted for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act but precluded by higher priority species. Currently sage grouse are a USFS Intermountain Region sensitive species and are considered a candidate species under the ESA.

Challenging Fire Season

With a “normal” winter snow pack, the 2012 fire season started slow, but following multiple hot days in June and July it began in earnest by mid-July. Unique this year was the higher proportion of person-versus-lightning caused fires. Within the Forest, on average, there are 26 person and 109 lightning fires. This year there were 21 person and only 42 lightning fires. However, the acreage burned was substantial, exceeding 152,000 acres, and vastly exceeding the 10 year average of 49,000 acres burned per year.

Large fires included the Trinity Ridge and Springs Fires. In addition, Boise National Forest firefighters provided support to the Idaho Department of Lands for the Avelene and Karney Fires, both located between Boise and Idaho City.

The Trinity Ridge Fire was the most challenging, involving over 146,800 acres, and it required the support of multiple Incident Management Teams from its starting date of August 3 through its containment on October 15th. A strong interagency effort successfully protected the communities of Rocky Bar, Featherville, Pine and Idaho City.

Management action was initiated by a strong initial attack effort with over 100,000 gallons of retardant used in a one day period. But with the dry conditions and challenging fuels, ground forces were not successful in containing the fire. Shortly after initial attack, the fire made a nearly 20,000 acre gain burning approximately five miles from Trinity Ridge to the Middle Fork Boise River in a 6 hour period. Fire managers at that point changed suppression tactics to focus more on community and recreation infrastructure protection.

The 6,300 acre Springs Fire also created impacts by closing State



State Highway 55 between Boise and McCall was closed for a few days due to the Springs Fire

Highway 55 and the Banks-Lowman Road. It actively threatened nearly 1000 homes in the Crouch and Terrace Lakes subdivision area, prompting Boise County Sheriff evacuation notices. No structures were lost.

A strong fire organization consisting of District fire management officers, Forest duty officers, agency administrators, information officers and Boise Dispatch provided excellent coordination throughout the fire season.

In addition, a vigorous interagency effort supported other fires in the Intermountain Region and across the nation, especially in Colorado and the Southwest. The BLM Boise District used Forest Service engines, crews and aircraft to help contain many of their large fires.

“The entire fire organization and many forest employees not associated directly with that organization did excellent work in trying conditions this summer,” said Cecilia Seesholtz, Boise National Forest Supervisor. “What was especially commendable was the interagency support and coordination that occurred which demonstrates an excellent partnership approach to managing wildfires.”

The Featherville Motel and Featherville community were protected by an excellent burnout of fuel by fire fighters involved with the Trinity Ridge Fire.



Prescribed Burns Benefit Forest Health and Wildlife Habitat

The Emmett Ranger District successfully completed two prescribed spring burns treating 4,000 acres to benefit wildlife habitat and to restore forest health.

The Poorman burn treated 1,132 acres in the Station Creek drainage. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation partnered with the forest to provide funding for this project.

The 2,100 acre Rocky Canyon Restoration burn treated forest land in the Boom Creek drainage within the Middle Fork of the Payette River.

Both burns were ignited by dropping small, chemically treated plastic spheres from a helicopter that ignite after hitting the ground. Low to moderate fire intensity reduced the accumulation of pine needles, branches, small diameter wood and lower tree limbs which reduces the



ability of a summer wildfire reaching the crowns of trees.

Prescribed burns facilitate the role of fire in the more non-volatile seasonal periods and benefit wildlife habitat by stimulating new grass and shrub growth.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation funded the Poorman burn to benefit wildlife habitat.



Above: Section of Graham Road washed out in 2010 from flooding.

Two Major Forest Roads Reopen to Public

Forest Service road crews repaired two major forest roads severely damaged by floods located on the Idaho City Ranger District.

Crews repaired a key section of the North Fork Boise River Road which washed out from spring runoff. The road allows public access from State Highway 21 to the Middle Fork Boise River and the community of Atlanta. The repairs involved blasting rock from a nearby cliff, hauling fill-in materials and reshaping the road further out from the river to prevent future issues. The work was completed on a tight schedule prior to the July 4th holiday which connected recreationists with a popular section of the Boise National Forest.

The Graham Road was reopened in August after it washed out by flooding in 2010. Recreationists use this road to enter a popular backcountry area for fishing, hunting and camping. Forest Service crews realigned approximately 1800 feet of road and improved the ford across Little Silver Creek where the washout occurred.



Left: Graham Road after crews repair washout.

Lucky Peak Nursery Partners with Trout Unlimited to Grow Cottonwoods for Critical Watershed

A one-million dollar watershed restoration project in Mores Creek is nearing completion thanks to Lucky Peak Nursery, Trout Unlimited and dozens of partners who worked together to improve fish and wildlife habitat.

The Mores Creek watershed partnership started in 2005 to address poor watershed conditions resulting from late 1800's mining operations. Tailing piles along the stream banks prevented channel migration, riparian vegetation growth, and limited fish and wildlife habitat. At times, temperatures in the creek reached above lethal levels to fish.

The project includes planting thousands of riparian plants along the stream banks. Trout Unlimited partnered with Lucky Peak Nursery to grow cottonwoods and willows to provide shade for fish, stabilize stream banks and improve habitat for wildlife and birds. Nursery officials successfully germinated cottonwoods and willow using cuttings, but a lack of genetic diversity prompted nursery growers to use seeds instead. Assistant Manager, John Sloan, says working with Trout Unlimited was a great experience and helped the nursery refine its growing techniques.

"This was an excellent project for us to expand our client base and learn how to offer a more diverse product," said Sloan.

Pam Elkovich, a Trout Unlimited spokesperson, says the project is showing signs of success. "For the first time, Kokanee salmon were sited in Grimes Creek far upstream near Centerville," said Elkovich. "People are also seeing osprey seeking fish for food along the creek for the first time."



Above: Cottonwood seeds were planted in styroblocks in June 2011 before transported to Grimes Creek in October. The nursery grew 600 cottonwoods for this project.



Left: This 20 inch plug shows excellent root development and a thick stem on a five month old black cottonwood tree in the Lucky Peak Nursery greenhouse.



"For the first time, Kokanee salmon were sited in Grimes Creek far upstream near Centerville. People are also seeing osprey seeking fish for food along the creek for the first time."

Pam Elkovich

Trout Unlimited spokesperson

Volunteers plant thousands of riparian plants in the Grimes Creek watershed to provide shade and stream bank stability.

Historic Landmark Ranger Station Renovation Near Completion

Renovations to the historic Landmark Ranger Station on the Cascade District are near completion with the aid of key partners and volunteers. Financial and technical support from partners including The National Trust for Historic Places, Idaho Heritage Trust, and Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee. These partners assisted the Boise National Forest with planning and funding historically sensitive repairs to the structures on the compound. The work not only preserves the historic integrity of the site but also improves sustainability and energy efficiency in support of agency operations. This cooperation laid the ground work for a larger deferred maintenance project funded by the Forest Service in 2012. The site includes 22 buildings that serve as a work center and housing for seasonal work crews (fire, trails, wilderness, researchers and others).



Top (l-r): Jim Caswell, Dick Smith, Jim Keller. Bottom (l-r): Jack Lavin, Rich Christensen, Lynn Sprague



Landmark Ranger Station is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Forest received \$700,000 through deferred maintenance funds in 2012 to do the following restoration work at the Landmark site:

- Repairs and upgrades to existing potable water system to comply with modern drinking water standards
- Complete replacement of the electrical system; incorporating hybrid solar power and propane generator system as the energy source
- Reconstruction of two historic porches and multiple log replacements on four buildings
- General repairs to the buildings including doors, windows, flooring, cabinetry, plumbing and mechanical upgrades
- Landscape rehabilitation including re-establishment of historic fencing within the compound

The majority of renovations were addressed by contract and all current contract work is scheduled to be completed in September 2013. Additionally, an agreement between the Boise National Forest and National Parks Service Preservation Training Center and the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team accomplished the cabin porch restorations. The water system reconstruction was accomplished utilizing the Boise National Forest road crew.

History of Landmark Ranger Station

Landmark Ranger Station was established in 1924, and for years served as the summer headquarters for the "old" Payette National Forest. The Forest Service administered important uses of national forest system lands such as livestock and mining in the area from the Landmark site. In 1944, Landmark was transferred to the Boise National Forest.

Landmark was the "hub" of Forest Service activities in Valley County for more than half a century. Rangers provided information, service and shelter to local residents and travelers to the Idaho backcountry.

Landmark consists of five cabins including a ranger's house, barn, shed, blacksmith shop, three garages, office, warehouse and numerous other buildings constructed between 1924- 1942.

This site is significant for its association with important events in Forest Service and Idaho history.

Several retired Forest Service employees including Jack Lavin, Rich Christensen, Lynn Sprague, Jim Keller, Jim Caswell and Dick Smith also volunteered during the renovation process.

Forest officials are working with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office to list the site on the National Register of Historic Places. Officials are also considering making the cabins at Landmark available through the cabin rental program.

Specific Forest Outreach Programs

Hispanic Community Outreach

Forest staff teamed up with Smokey Bear to support two Hispanic community events in Canyon County. Nearly 3,500 people attended Dia de los Ninos (Children's Day) and Cinco de Mayo. Participants learned about fire safety and forest recreation opportunities.



Hispanic youth meet Smokey Bear during Dia de Los Ninos in Canyon County.

Junior Snow Ranger Program

The Boise National Forest is one of five forests chosen to host the Junior Snow Ranger program. The program mission is to inspire 4th and 5th graders to embrace a life-long relationship with the winter environment and to become stewards of the land. The forest is in its seventh year of hosting a program called Snow School for underserved students to learn about winter ecology at Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area. In 2012, 350 students received Junior Snow Ranger scholarships to attend Snow School.

Forest's Community Outreach Programs Focus on Youth

The US Forest Service is contributing to a growing national movement of connecting kids to nature. The Boise National Forest received a "More Kids in the Woods" grant for \$32,000 combined with \$86,000 in-kind contributions that helped the forest launch programs to reach diverse and underserved youth populations.

The forest participated in several partnership events including Kokanee Days, Trout Camp, Salmon and Steelhead Days, International Migratory Bird Day and many more for underserved youth to connect with nature and increase watershed habitat awareness.

The "More Kids in the Woods" program is a competitive funded program for partnership projects that engage kids in active, meaningful learning experiences that get kids outside. Projects focus on reaching diverse youth and serving underserved populations, using outdoor activities and nature-based learning to create meaningful and lasting connections to nature and to advance children's health.



Student field trip along Boise River funded with a More Kids in the Woods grant.



Students learn about winter ecology during Snow School at Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area.



Emmett Welcomes New District Ranger

The Emmett Ranger District welcomed Richard Newton as the new district ranger in October. Newton was the district ranger on the Dubois Ranger District and Forest Heritage Staff Officer on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

“Richard brings with him many skills and

experiences that will help the district and the forest in our collaborative efforts,” said Boise National Forest Supervisor Cecilia Seesholtz. “He has experience in dealing with large restoration activities, management of our water and recreation resources and fuels and fire management.

Newton says he’s excited for this new opportunity and the challenges that come with managing a complex district.

“I will continue to build relationships between the district, local community and many key interest groups who care about the management of their public lands,” said Newton.

Richard is already busy working with the Boise Forest Coalition on exploring opportunities for the west-side of the ranger district, and working with his staff to complete a variety of projects.

Newton is a native of southern New Mexico and has a BA and MS in anthropology from New Mexico State University.

Newton and his wife have one daughter and two grandchildren.



Emmett District Ranger Richard Newton

Employee Receives Award for Conservation Education Achievement

Forest botanist Edna Rey-Vizgirdas received the *Gifford Pinchot Excellence in Interpretation and Conservation Education Award* for her outstanding achievements in environmental education.

Edna has developed several innovative environmental education programs that involved numerous partners in an urban audience, engaging thousands of underserved youth in Forest Service programs.

Her widely recognized leadership ability enhanced cooperation for programs that involved all seasons, all ages and multiple partners. She expanded her normal botany position responsibilities

to initiate wide-reaching environmental education programs in a cost efficient and participant effective manner.



Edna Rey-Vizgirdas (3rd from right) receives the R4 Gifford Pinchot Award for her environmental education efforts at the National Association of Interpretation Workshop in Hampton, VA (along with other awardees).

A Message from the BNF Supervisor



Boise National Forest Supervisor Cecilia Seesholtz

The Boise National Forest faced a very active fire season this year with more than 152,000 acres burned on the forest. I want to express a special thank you to the forest employees, Incident Management Teams and partnering agencies that helped manage and suppress our fires.

The Boise National Forest, with its dedicated workforce, accomplished a wide range of projects that met Forest Plan goals and current objectives in 2012. I’m especially proud of the aquatics work accomplished in the Bull Creek watershed to upgrade its condition class, with improved water quality and aquatic habitat for bull trout.

I am proud of all our accomplishments in 2012. 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.

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