



Model Watershed News

QUARTERLY NEWS ABOUT RESTORING FISH IN CENTRAL IDAHO

SUMMER 1994

Habitat Inventory Completed

On April 18 the Model Watershed Advisory Committee coordinated an interagency effort to complete a stream inventory for the Lemhi, Pahsimeroi and East Fork of the Salmon Rivers. The purpose of the inventory was to collect data on fisheries habitat currently available in these river systems. The Lemhi had been surveyed in 1941 and again in 1985. The Pahsimeroi was also surveyed in 1941. There are no records of a habitat survey ever being conducted in the East Fork.

Interagency teams of personnel from the Soil Conservation Service, Idaho Division of Environmental Quality, Soil Conservation Commission, Bonneville Power Administration and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes were led by fishery biologists from the Salmon District Bureau of Land Management to inventory over 120 miles of stream. They walked the streams in teams of three and recorded data by habitat units broken into pools, runs, riffles and glides. They also recorded data on stability of the banks for each of the different habitat types.

The data has been entered into the model watershed's computer and will be analyzed and compared against criteria established by the Model Watershed Advisory Committee. One of the criteria is the stream's ability to support,

in terms of spawning and rearing habitat, 1960's levels of salmon. The average number of redds from 1960 to 1965 was 1300 for the Lemhi, 700 for the Pahsimeroi and 900 for the East Fork.



Current data can be compared to historic and future data to determine trends for the habitat. Data will also be analyzed for streambank stability and its contribution of sediment. If it is determined that streambank stability is key to rearing fish, then a project may be developed to improve streambank stability.

The inventory has many values both to landowners and to the model watershed project. It will be the

cornerstone on which the model watershed plan is built. The inventory will guide the planning and implementation process by identifying limiting factors to fish production.

Ralph Swift, Model Watershed Coordinator, said a full report would be written on the inventories by August 1, 1994. Swift also said that the support of the landowners for this effort can not be understated. Without their cooperation this effort could not have taken place. This continues to show landowner support for a coordinated local effort to dealing with fisheries issues.

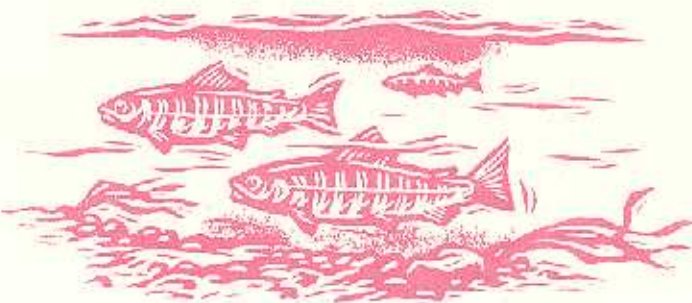
Challis Challenges

While the main focus of the Model Watershed Project is in the Lemhi, Pahsimeroi and East Fork Valleys, there are many challenges outside of these areas that could benefit fisheries. The salmon issue has created many opportunities for people throughout the Salmon River Basin to look at how they do business now and how they may be doing business in the future.

One challenge is the consolidation of diversions to reduce the number of fish screens that need to be built, maintained and negotiated by fish. This past year operators from four canals in the Challis area met on several occasions with personnel from Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Soil Conservation Service and the Bureau of Reclamation. They met to see if there was a possibility to consolidate the Kaise Ditch and the upper and lower McGowan Ditches into the Challis Irrigation Canal. These four ditches in the Salmon River irrigate the round valley area south of Challis.

It was determined that the consolidation is feasible. The next step is to determine how to deliver each irrigator's water at least cost to both the irrigator and the funding agencies. Personnel from the Soil Conservation Service will be working with individual landowners to insure irrigation water delivery in an efficient economical fashion.

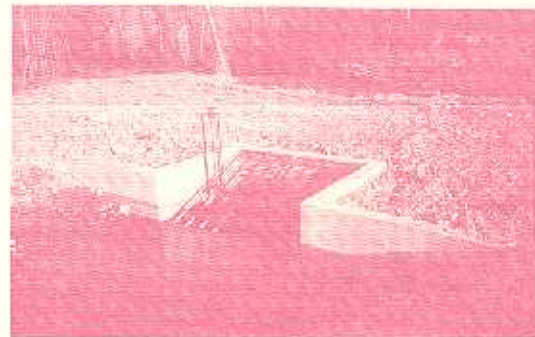
This will not be an easy, cheap or quick fix. It will take time to make decisions that are good for the irrigator and good for the fish. It will take the cooperation of landowners, who initiated the project, with the technical agencies in a supporting role. Progress is evident. Some decisions should be made this winter which will help implement this project.



Big Flat/Carmen Creek Siphon Project

Often opportunity knocks and you think it's the wind so you don't open the door. Luckily when it knocked this time, someone had the foresight not only to see who it was, but open the door. Who was knocking? The irrigators from the Big Flat Ditch Company. They came with a project that was not only good for them but has the potential to re-establish an anadromous fish run in Carmen Creek.

For many years the Big Flat area north of Carmen was irrigated with Carmen Creek water. This was done by blocking the creek near its mouth and diverting it down a canal to the Big Flat area. This was the first water right on the creek and left many acres in Carmen Creek dry after high water. Around 1940 the upper landowners on the creek proposed a trade: They would build a ditch from the Salmon River to the Big Flat Ditch in return for a water right on Carmen Creek. When this was completed, the ditch company had a dual right for both Carmen Creek and Salmon River water.



The problem with this ditch is that it crossed Carmen Creek necessitating a gravel dike across the creek bed to force the water into the ditch. This dike halted fish migration except during high water or storms which could wash out the gravel dike.

This spring the Big Flat Ditch Company worked with the U.S. Forest Service, using cost-share funds provided by Bonneville Power Administration, to build a siphon which transports the water under Carmen Creek. This eliminates the dike barrier during spring migration of both adult and juvenile anadromous fish. Design was by the Soil Conservation Service, Salmon Project staff.

The landowners are to be commended for their efforts and foresight in solving this problem.

Accomplishments

- * *April 8 & 9 - Salmon Symposium held at Salmon City Center.*
- * *April 29 - Habitat inventory completed on all three rivers.*
- * *May 25 - Swift met with Portneuf River Watershed group.*
- * *June 6 - Tour for editorial staff from The Post Register newspaper.*
- * *June 19 - Watershed featured on "Incredible Idaho" on Channel 3.*

Coordinator Comments

by Ralph Swift

I want to discuss an item that is on my mind. This is the filing of minimum stream flow rights by the tribes. I had two goals when I took on the responsibility of Model Watershed Coordinator; (1) to see the sons and daughters of tribal members and Idaho residents fish for salmon in the Salmon River in the not too distant future; and (2) for those, who wish, be able to pass on a working future to their sons and daughters in the Salmon River Country. These goals are inseparable in my mind.

I have stated in public many times my position on water rights. It is not my place to be for, or against, a minimum stream flow that would be held by the tribes. I could support it if it met goal two above because it would help meet goal one. But in no uncertain terms would it guarantee goal one. In fact I'd lay better than even odds that it wouldn't.

My position is this: if a legal fight over whether the rights of current water right holders are recognized or if one of the tribes filings is granted, then I believe the fish will be the losers. The fish will lose because current water right holders will no longer have any incentive to cooperate managing stream flows or protecting habitat to provide benefits for both fish and agriculture. As this issue evolves and current water right holders are paying legal fees to protect court-decreed rights, they will become bitter toward both the tribes and the fish. Ultimately, the fish will be the losers in this long drawn out process.

There are better ways to provide stream flows for fish and wildlife than to take water rights. We need to explore these as partners rather than battle over who has the right to the water. Loss of water from agriculture to a minimum stream flow does not meet goal two. We must work with the hydrology of the streams. We understand better now than before but still have unanswered questions. The technology to improve management of water is there. It just needs to be tapped. I encourage both sides to exchange shoes and walk a mile in them, then sit down at the table and work out sensible solutions.

I ask for those who are sitting on the sidelines to become involved. We can't depend on those same few from the water right holders and the tribes to always carry the load. Others have to be involved and active to come up with the best solutions.
(continued on page 4)

Advisory Committee Meeting

Are the fish being studied to death? That was the question from Betty Baker of Clayton last January. At the Advisory Committee meeting held June 1 in Challis, this concern was addressed in depth. Through new coordination and cooperation, major steps are being taken to insure this doesn't happen in our watershed areas.

The sixteen committee members present listened to and discussed studies the agencies are conducting on fish in this area.

Mark Shaw, Bonneville Power Administration, said that watersheds are the basis of BPA's ten-year plan. To evaluate progress with fish survival in the hydro-power system, they monitor the basins to see what is happening on the ground. Shaw is enthusiastic about the information and progress in this area.

Onni Perala, Bureau of Reclamation, talked about the Conservation Demonstration Project on the Lemhi River. He gave an up-date on the diversion consolidations and project designs in that area.

Perala, who has been instrumental in the success of this project, is retiring on July 1. The people he has worked with in Lemhi County will miss him. Jack Haynes will assume Perala's responsibilities.

The next Advisory meeting will be held in Salmon in October. The committee will reorganize its members at that time.

(Continued from page 3)

Demonstration projects like the Model Watershed can make a difference. They can provide a forum to solve other conflicts such as tribal fishery rights, range reform and a host of others. We need to make this process work at the local level, and not wait for a court of law or a government agency to decide what is right for us locally.

Project Staff

Ralph Swift Project Coordinator
Katie Slavin Office Coordinator

Coordinated By

Idaho Soil Conservation Commission
Lemhi Soil & Water Conservation District
Custer Soil & Water Conservation District

This *Model Watershed News* is published quarterly by the Lemhi, Pansimeroi and East Fork of the Salmon River Model Watershed Project. All articles and comments should be directed to 206 Van Drell, Suite A, Salmon, Idaho 83467, (208) 756-6322. We reserve the right to edit articles for clarity and length.

Watershed Calendar

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Summer 94 | Draft Watershed Plan. |
| June 27-29 | American Water Resources Association Meeting, Jackson Hole. |
| July 13 | Soil Conservation Commission Meeting, McCall |
| July 25-27 | National Soil Conservation Service Meeting, Boise. |
| October 4 | Model Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting, Salmon. |
| Nov. 7-9 | Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts Convention, Sun Valley. |
| April 1, 1995 | Final Implementation Plan Complete. |