



# Upper Snake Region Conservation Newsletter Spring 2012



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## Upper Snake Region Management Staff

- Steve Schmidt,  
Regional Supervisor  
[steve.schmidt@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:steve.schmidt@idfg.idaho.gov)
- John Hanson,  
Regional Conservation Officer  
[john.hanson@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:john.hanson@idfg.idaho.gov)
- Tom Bassista,  
Environmental Staff Biologist  
[tom.bassista@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:tom.bassista@idfg.idaho.gov)
- Gregg Losinski,  
Regional Conservation Educator  
[gregg.losinski@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:gregg.losinski@idfg.idaho.gov)
- Daryl Meints,  
Regional Wildlife Manager  
[daryl.meints@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:daryl.meints@idfg.idaho.gov)
- Dan Garren,  
Regional Fisheries Manager  
[dan.garren@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:dan.garren@idfg.idaho.gov)
- Terry Thomas,  
Regional Habitat Manager  
[terry.thomas@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:terry.thomas@idfg.idaho.gov)

Contact us at: (208) 525 - 7290  
4279 Commerce Circle Idaho  
Falls, ID 83401

***“IDFG’s Upper Snake region is involved in multiple scales of habitat improvement initiatives that benefit both species prized by hunters and Idaho species at -risk.” see page 5 for more...***



Strutting Columbian sharp-tailed grouse  
Photo by Hubert Quade

This is a special edition newsletter from the Upper Snake Region of Idaho Department of Fish and Game to inform our constituents about a broad range of conservation activities that regional staff are pursuing to better preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage **Idaho’s fish and wildlife resources.**

Why a conservation newsletter?

Fish and Game is probably best known for our population management of game species for hunters and anglers. We are proud of the excellent work of our fisheries and wildlife staff to ensure sustainable populations of the amazing variety of species cherished by our sporting public. However, **challenges to the management of Idaho’s fish and wildlife populations** are increasingly complex, requiring a broader approach to sustaining both our sporting and natural heritages.

State wildlife management agencies, including Idaho Fish and Game, emerged from an era when many once-abundant wildlife species such as elk, pronghorn and waterfowl, were being decimated by unregulated sporting, subsistence and commercial harvest. Early conservation leaders, such as President Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold, led efforts to enact wildlife laws, develop a science-based wildlife profession and create wildlife agencies funded through license fees and excise taxes on ammunition and fishing tackle (Pauley 2011). This new North American Model of wildlife conservation enabled better **stewardship of the nation’s fish and wildlife resources** and is considered one of the great wildlife conservation success stories.

By the early 20th century, many species were rebounding, because of the implementation of the North American Model and increasing public support for wildlife conservation. During this period the human population of the United States was about 80 million, and wildlife habitat was still relatively abundant. Today the world population is seven billion, and the U.S. population has nearly quadrupled to 308 million



An adult bald eagle perches in a cottonwood forest along the South Fork Snake River. The Upper Snake Region of Idaho has the strongest population of nesting bald eagles in Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area with over 80 active breeding territories, Fish and Game Photo.

people. Because of this human population growth and its associated pressures on the land, maintaining functional habitat is now the greatest challenge facing North American wildlife conservation (Pauley 2011). In this newsletter, we hope to update our stakeholders in the **Upper Snake Region about Fish and Game’s** efforts to address the many current challenges to wildlife management and conservation to ensure viable fish and wildlife populations and functional habitats on which they depend.

Recognizing the evolving challenges to modern wildlife conservation and management, Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore is convening a *Wildlife Summit* the weekend of August 25, 2012. Through the Wildlife Summit, Director Moore hopes to check in with the Idaho sporting public and other wildlife conservationists and begin a conversation about the status and direction of wildlife management in Idaho. His hope is that this will help Fish and Game remain responsive to changing needs and interests of Idahoans.

For more information on the Wildlife Summit please see Page 2.

# Fish and Game Director Convenes a Wildlife Summit

Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore wants to hear from you. He says it is time to check in with Idaho hunters, trappers, anglers and other wildlife conservationists to facilitate a conversation about the current status and direction of wildlife management in Idaho.

To serve our public, Fish and Game needs a better understanding of what our license buyers and interested Idahoans expect from their state wildlife management agency. To begin this discussion, Director Moore is convening the first ever Idaho Wildlife Summit.

The Wildlife Summit will be an opportunity to have a conversation with Idahoans who care about wildlife. Idahoans enjoy wildlife in many ways and they are deeply interested in how it is managed. Early last year, Moore laid out for his staff the agency's dilemma: legal mandates and public expectations have outgrown funding sources.

Now Moore wants to lay it out for the rest of Idaho. He wants to discuss how to meet those mandates and expectations without infringing on the agency's mission of stewardship of fish and wildlife to provide opportunities for hunting, fishing and trapping. He wants to hear ideas and look for common ground on which to develop a plan for the future. The Wildlife Summit is scheduled for August 24-26 at the Riverside Hotel in Boise with related events occurring simultaneously elsewhere throughout the state.

This conversation is intended to build enthusiasm for **Idaho's fish and wildlife and develop a common understanding** about conservation and management. Agency leaders also hope Summit participants will understand better what Fish and Game **does and how the agency's efforts benefit wildlife and Idahoans.**

Much has changed since 1938 when Idaho citizens created

**the Idaho Fish and Game Commission through Idaho's first citizens' initiative. Our state's population has tripled; two out of three Idahoans now live in cities; and wildlife management responsibilities are much broader than 75 years ago.** For instance, Fish and Game spends a lot of time and resources working in cooperation with the federal government to manage many federally designated threatened and endangered species, and keeping other species from being added to the list. In addition, increased development has affected wildlife, and management of nongame species are important agency responsibilities. Our challenge is to balance our wildlife conservation and management responsibilities with available revenue sources. The Summit will help us define how we address these challenges together.

**Interested individuals or groups don't have to come to Boise to participate. We will use technology to "stream" the Summit live over the internet.** We will also use technology and Fish and Game regional facilities across the state to provide opportunities for Idahoans to participate and interact in the Summit.

The Summit will include speakers, panel discussions, breakout sessions and considerable audience participation. The goal is to involve people at regional locations and over the internet – to interact with those attending the event in Boise. Specific details will follow over the coming months.

The most current information about the Summit is available on the Fish and Game website at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/summit>. Anyone interested may register to receive e-mail updates on the Summit and will soon be able to offer input on topics for discussion.



Young Idahoans taking stewardship responsibility for their natural heritage. Photos from left to right: an Idaho girl releases a banded goshawk (Deniz Aygen), assessing stream habitat health (Friends of the Teton River), learning the right way (John O'Neill).

## Managing and Conserving the Upper Snake Region's Native Trout

Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) is the native cutthroat subspecies of the Upper Snake and Yellowstone watersheds, both of which originate in Yellowstone National Park. YCT are distinguished by two prominent red slashes on the lower jaw, their medium-large, black spots that tend to be more concentrated towards the tail, and their brownish, yellowish, or silvery color (photo at right) that becomes brilliant red during spawning.

YCT prefer to inhabit clear, cold streams with rocky bottoms or deep clear lakes. Due to their habitat preferences, they are an excellent indicator of aquatic habitat quality. They are considered a keystone species in Yellowstone National Park, where they support at least 42 other species including grizzly bears, river otters, mink, osprey, and common loon to name a few (Varley and Schullery 1995).

Historic YCT distribution extended from central Wyoming and Montana, southwest through the Snake River watershed, downstream to Shoshone Falls in Idaho. Like many other native western trout, YCT have experienced declines in abundance and distribution due to hybridization or competition with nonnative trout, habitat alteration, and overexploitation. YCT are currently designated as an Idaho *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* (see <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/cwcs/>) and garner management priority within their native habitat in drainages across the eastern portion of the state.

**Idaho's YCT stronghold is the Upper Snake Region.** The aquatic systems most important for regional persistence include the Teton River, particularly the canyon reach and its tributary Bitch Creek; and the South Fork of the Snake River from Palisades Dam to the confluence with the Henrys Fork River.

To ensure a thriving persistence of YCT in the Upper Snake Region, our fisheries staff employs a variety of management and conservation actions, including field surveys, harvest management, habitat protection and improvement, non-native species control, hatchery stock management, and conservation partnerships. The most comprehensive program advancing YCT conservation occurs on the South Fork Snake River, where our regional fisheries staff is implementing a multi-faceted management strategy including:

*Securing public cooperation*—Regional fisheries staff engage the angling community and other key stakeholders to maintain support for YCT-focused management on the South Fork. Much of the success of YCT conservation efforts on the South Fork Snake River hinges on cooperation with anglers and water users.

*Working with water users*—Fish and Game has a cooperative relationship with the Bureau of Reclamation and Idaho water users to allow periodic large-volume water releases from the Palisades Dam that mimic natural spring flooding events. These managed spring flushing flows are timed to inhibit rainbow trout spawning while providing a competitive edge to the later-spawning YCT.

*Non-anglers who wish to support Yellowstone cutthroat trout conservation are encouraged to contact our Regional Fisheries staff to learn more about ongoing efforts. You can also buy a fishing license, and better yet, take a kid fishing.*



Two native Idahoan's bonding on the South Fork Snake River. Photo by Rob Cavallaro.

*Fishing regulations that benefit YCT*—Current regulations on the South Fork prohibit harvest of YCT and allow unlimited harvest of non-native rainbow trout that hybridize and compete with YCT. Non-native rainbow trout in the South Fork pose the greatest threat to the continued persistence of YCT.

*Tributary weirs*—Key YCT spawning tributaries are fitted with weirs, where spawning fish are diverted into a trap box. During spawning season, traps are checked daily; YCT are allowed to pass upstream, rainbows and hybrids are removed to other waters.

*Incentivizing harvest of nonnative rainbow trout*—Anglers are encouraged to harvest rainbow trout through outreach and a lottery system that provides cash rewards (up to \$1,000) for specially marked rainbow trout (marked in the snout with coded wire tags) brought to regional headquarters in Idaho Falls.

Funding for YCT conservation and management comes from fishing license sales, federal excise taxes on fishing tackle and to a lesser degree federal and private grant funding (often secured through conservation partnerships) for habitat improvements. Conserving YCT protects a vital element of our natural heritage for all Idahoans and allows anglers a special opportunity to connect with that heritage. It also helps retain state control of regional fisheries management, thereby protecting part of a cherished eastern Idaho lifestyle.



South Fork Snake River, Yellowstone cutthroat trout stronghold in the Upper Snake Region. Photo by IDFG.

## REGIONAL HABITAT MANAGEMENT

### State Wildlife Management Areas: Hotspots for Hunters and Conservation

**Fish and Game's Upper Snake Region manages seven wildlife management Areas (WMAs) that collectively comprise 85,000 acres of land. WMA management focus is to maintain highly functional wildlife habitat and provide wildlife-based recreation.**

These areas include Tex Creek WMA in Bonneville County, a crucial wintering area for the region's deer and elk; Market Lake and Mud Lake WMAs, two deep marsh units that are vital waterfowl production areas in Jefferson County; Chilly Slough Wetland Conservation Area (WCA), a protected complex of wet meadow and wetland habitats in Custer County; Cartier Slough WMA, a natural wetlands associated with a slough channel of the Henrys Fork River in Madison County; Deer Parks Complex Wildlife Mitigation Units (WMU), managed cooperatively with the BLM and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to restore and protect highly functional habitats along the Snake River in Jefferson and Madison Counties; Sand Creek and Chester WMAs, a mosaic of deep-water and shallow wetlands, wet meadow, marsh and sagebrush-steppe habitats in Fremont County that provide winter refuge for mule deer, elk, and moose from surrounding high-elevation public lands including Yellowstone National Park.

Management of these areas involves a combination of restoring and maintaining important natural habitats to contribute to landscape-level habitat function (such as sage-steppe and slough wetlands), and creating hyper-productive habitats (food plots, impounded wetlands) to enhance the carrying capacity for selected wildlife species.

WMAs often abut other protected lands such as National Forests, BLM lands, or private lands protected by conservation easement. Due to the wildlife-focused management, WMAs often serve as highly productive core areas of the landscapes in which they exist.

Researchers from the University of Idaho and The Nature Conservancy evaluated the value of Idaho's WMAs to wildlife. They found the WMA network, created to support game species, "also conserves the full range of

Idaho's wildlife and other ecological features" (Karl et al. 2005).

Surveys and monitoring work conducted by Fish and Game biologists on Upper Snake Region WMAs confirms their value to big game, nongame, and many at-risk species **identified in Idaho's State Wildlife Action Plan. In many cases WMAs provide the principal habitat for at-risk species in the Upper Snake Region.**

Examples of at-risk species partially dependent on **WMAs include Ute ladies' tresses orchid, St. Anthony sand dunes tiger beetle, northern leopard frog, greater sage-grouse, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, greater sandhill crane, trumpeter swan, lesser scaup, northern pintail, white-faced ibis, long-billed curlew, and yellow-billed cuckoo.**

All regional wildlife areas (WMAs, WMUs and WCAs) are funded through a combination of hunting license dollars, appropriations from federal excise taxes derived from the sale of ammunition, and funding provided by the Bonneville Power Authority and Bureau of Reclamation to mitigate habitat loss from construction of various dams in the region.

Hunters pay a large portion of the management tab, and they are rewarded with habitat management areas that **sustain many of the region's big game herds and provide consistent waterfowl and upland game bird production and hunting opportunities.** Non-hunters, who value the varied **benefits provided by the Upper Snake Region's WMAs, can support ongoing WMA management by purchasing a hunting license, a specialty vehicle wildlife license plate, or donating to the Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund by checking the appropriate box on your state income tax return.**

Please visit: <https://fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/portal/form/2012-wildlife-management-area-public-opinion-survey> to review the current management plans for any Idaho WMA or to participate in the 2012 Wildlife Management Public Use and Opinion Survey.



Ferruginous hawk nestling on Mud Lake WMA, Photo by Rob Cavallaro: Elk wintering on Tex Creek WMA, Photo by Eric Anderson: White faced Ibis colony at Market Lake WMA, Photo by Rob Cavallaro.

## HABITAT CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

**The Upper Snake Region is active in multiple scales of habitat conservation and improvement initiatives that benefit both species prized by hunters and Idaho species at-risk. Following are some highlights:**

### New Conservation Partnership

The Henrys Fork Legacy Project is a collaborative effort comprised of local organizations and agencies (including Fish and Game) dedicated to conserving working farms and ranches, wildlife habitat and world-class recreational opportunities of the Upper Henrys Fork watershed. The Henrys Fork Legacy Project works with willing private landowners in Fremont and Clark Counties, west of Yellowstone National Park, providing landowners with resources and financial incentives to conserve working farms and ranches and the rural lifestyles they sustain. The project also works to help people protect wildlife and restore important habitat.

Recently, the Henrys Fork Legacy Project announced that significant wildlife habitat and two important migration corridors have been protected through a permanent conservation easement on the 711-acre 2-Lazy-2 Ranch at Henrys Lake. Conservation easements are permanent legal agreements that protect important habitat from development, while ensuring that traditional ownership and land uses like ranching may continue. The 2-Lazy-2 Ranch lies north of Henrys Lake at the crossroads of two major wildlife migration corridors **on Raynold's Pass in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. An** estimated 300 pronghorn from the Madison Valley herd migrate over the pass every spring to spend summer on ranches around Island Park, returning via the same route to Ennis, Montana, each fall. This among the longest terrestrial migrations of any animal in the lower 48 states. The ranch is also used by elk, moose, mule deer, grizzly bear, wolverine, cutthroat trout and many other wildlife species.

The Bureau of Land Management and The Nature Conservancy, both members of the Henrys Fork Legacy Project, worked closely for two years to facilitate the conservation easement on the 2-Lazy-2 Ranch with the Steinke family, who has owned the ranch since the 1970s. The 2-Lazy-2 will remain a private working ranch. Funding came from a Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) disbursement and a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriation. These federal land acquisition programs work with willing sellers to acquire conservation lands in or adjacent to federally designated areas with exceptional natural resource values. The 2-Lazy-2 owners want the easement to be managed to conserve open space and wildlife habitat and for cattle ranching.



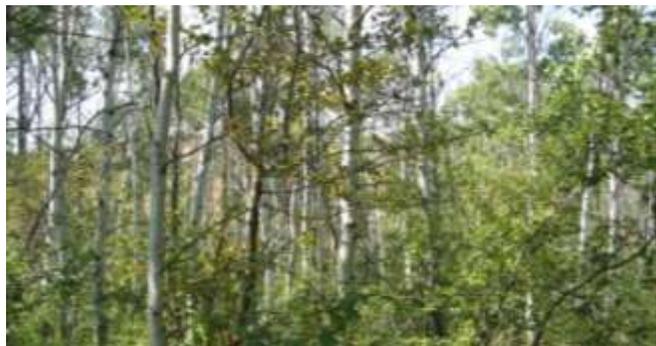
Henrys Lake Flats in Fremont County Idaho is a Conservation Focal Area in the Island Park area of the Upper Snake Region. Photo by Chet Work.

### Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group

Aspen is considered a *keystone species*, meaning it plays a crucial role in sustaining many other plants and wildlife. However, for aspen to yield maximum benefits to other species it must exist as a healthy, functional forest community. **An aspen stand is considered "healthy" when you can't see through it.** In other words, the stand is composed of trees, shrubs and forbs of various ages and heights that create complex understory structure. Aspen stands can produce as much as 1,000 to 2,500 pounds of forage per acre – three to six times more than is produced by conifer stands! Many wildlife species take advantage of the forage and cover provided by healthy aspen stands including bear, calving elk, fawning mule deer, grouse, songbirds and bats.

Historically, aspen stands occupied approximately 43% of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Forest research and monitoring reveals that aspen communities are declining in vigor and extent on the Caribou-Targhee. Factors contributing to this decline include encroachment by conifer trees that shade out aspen saplings, wildfire suppression practices, heavy browsing by wildlife and livestock, and loss of habitat from human development. Aspen forest occupies about 18 percent of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. This decline represents a potentially significant reduction in quality habitat for a variety of wildlife species in eastern Idaho.

To address aspen decline and its implications on many wildlife species, the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group (EIAWG) formed in 2006 to foster recovery and enhancement of aspen communities in forest and rangeland ecosystems of eastern Idaho. EIAWG is a collaborative effort supported by Fish and Game, Bureau of Land Management, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Agriculture and Idaho Parks and Recreation. Key strategies pursued by EIAWG to address aspen declines include coordinating restoration and conservation activities among land management agencies; developing partnerships with non-governmental organizations and landowners; and increasing public awareness and support for aspen recovery and conservation. Working group efforts may be monitored at [www.eiawg.org](http://www.eiawg.org).



High quality aspen habitat with a structurally complex understory on private land along the Fall River. Photo by Matt Lucia.

## Greater Yellowstone Area Mountain Ungulate Project

**Fish and Game's Upper Snake Region** is an active partner in the *Greater Yellowstone Area Mountain Ungulate Project* (Mountain Ungulate Project).

The Mountain Ungulate Project is a collaborative research initiative to study the ecology and population dynamics of bighorn sheep and mountain goats throughout the Yellowstone ecosystem; and specifically to collect critical information on these two regal mountain ungulates for applied conservation and management by wildlife and natural resource agencies.

The Mountain Ungulate Project is currently undertaking a collaborative, landscape-scale research effort to study various ecological attributes of bighorn

sheep and mountain goats across the entire Yellowstone ecosystem.

During August 2011, Fish and Game wildlife biologists conducted mountain goat capture operations in the rugged Palisades Range southwest of Grand Teton National Park.

Biologists first completed ground reconnaissance to locate goat herds and then set up field camps nearby to facilitate capture operations. Darts with immobilizing drugs were used to capture the goats and allow biologists to safely fit them with radio-collars.

The mountain goats will wear two collars around their necks for the first two years of the project (one GPS and a second collar with a VHF tracking de-

vice). The GPS radio-collar will fall off after two years then the smaller micro-VHF collar will turn on for 4 more years of data collection. To date, three female mountain goats have been fitted with radio-collars in the Palisades Range. We **hope to have a total of 12 goats "on the air" by fall 2012.**

This project will provide valuable information on mountain goat habitat use and kid production in the Palisades Range. It will also enable a greater understanding of mountain goat dispersal throughout the Greater Yellowstone Area. Please visit <http://www.gyamountainungulateproject.com/> to learn more about the Greater Yellowstone Mountain Ungulate Project.



Regional Wildlife Manager Daryl Meints packs a camp into a mountain goat capture area of the Palisades Range. Photo by Hollie Miyasaki. Regional Wildlife Biologist, Hollie Miyasaki, led Fish and Game's capture efforts, Jory Zollinger. A newly collared mountain goat moves back into the high country, Photo by Hollie Miyasaki.

## Conservation Officers: Still on the Front Lines

Recent assessments from Colorado and Oregon estimate that illegal harvest (poaching) of some game species is roughly equivalent to the level of legal harvest by ethical hunters. Similar data are not available for Idaho, but maintaining the **integrity of Idaho's wildlife laws remains the top challenge facing modern conservation officers.**

Fish and Game officers work in concert with other state and federal law enforcement personnel to ensure that fish and wildlife resources that belong to all Idahoans have a high measure of protection from illegal harvest and other improper use.

The Upper Snake Region is divided into 11 Conservation Officer Patrol Districts. A Senior Conservation Officer operates within each of these districts. All enforcement activity is coordinated by the Regional Conservation Officer. Conservation officers spend much of their time in the field patrolling their respective districts and, as a result, they develop a singular knowledge of the fish and wildlife resources that occur there. This knowledge is critical to performing their enforcement duties, and allows them to provide valuable technical and logistical support to other fish and wildlife management activities.

In the Upper Snake Region, Conservation Officers have recently been involved in: capturing grizzly bears for population monitoring in the Island Park area; maintaining spawning weirs to benefit Yellowstone cutthroat trout; guiding biologists con-

ducting rare species surveys along several of the region's rivers; assisting population biologists in capture-related management activities for mule deer, elk, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, and trout.

Conservation officers are funded by revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. In some cases they receive project-related funding from fish and wildlife management activities if their contributions are extensive.



Regional Carnivore Biologist, Bryan Aber and Senior Conservation Officer, Charlie Anderson, monitor a sedated grizzly bear that will be fitted with a radio-collar. This activity is part of a Greater Yellowstone Population monitoring effort, Photo by IDFG.

## Environmental Staff Biologists: Engaging With Partners and the Public

**Monitoring Idaho's wildlife and fish populations** requires extensive staff time. This leaves many Fish and Game field biologists with little opportunity to provide detailed and thorough feedback to members of the public requesting information or comments on proposed projects that may impact fish and wildlife.

To help bridge the gap between field-level science and proposed land and water developments, the Upper Snake Region employs an environmental staff biologist (ESB). The ESB provides technical assistance to private entities, local governments and agencies, regarding proposed land and water developments and management activities. The ESB evaluates

impacts of development proposals on aquatic and terrestrial resources, and recommends actions to avoid or mitigate adverse effects to wildlife, fish and their habitats. The ESB ensures a coordinated response from Fish and Game to requests for information from the public or project proponents with a potential to **impact Idaho's fish and wildlife resources**. About 80 percent of the funding for the **region's ESB is from appropriations from federal excise taxes on fishing tackle and ammunition**. The remaining 20 percent comes from Idaho hunting and fishing license dollars.

The Upper Snake Region ESB is involved in several high-profile land and

water developments in sensitive wildlife and fish habitats. One is the Chester Diversion Hydroelectric Project and Ashton Dam Remediation; this effort requires careful ESB oversight because of the proximity of the projects to sensitive aquatic habitat and the high level of in-stream construction. From the terrestrial side, wind turbines and transmission lines are being proposed or installed with no state siting authority, making it very challenging to ensure adequate wildlife protection. By engaging relevant partners and the public, we are making recommendations to decision makers that we hope will benefit society and the natural resources we cherish.



The Upper Snake Region Environmental Staff Biologist works with public and private partners to identify key natural resource issues that require special consideration in planning. Frequently, ESBs focus on important regional habitats, big game, fisheries, and species at-risk. Photos from left to right: bull moose (Rob Cavallaro), nestling black-crowned night herons (TomVezo.com), elk in the Sand Creek Desert (Josh Rydalch), South Fork Snake River (Teton Regional Land Trust), trumpeter swans (Wendy Brockish).

## Conservation Education: Communicating With Our Public, Investing in the Future

The focus of the Upper Snake Region conservation educator is **to make our public aware of Idaho's variety of fish and wildlife**, and give residents an understanding of how species interact with each other, the landscape they inhabit, and how they are affected by people.

Requests for presentations come weekly and vary from speaking to a *Head Start* Program to making a presentation for employees at the Idaho National Laboratory. Interests range from learning about the species we hunt to those we love to watch. In addition to numerous school programs on critters as diverse as bats and grizzly bears, the region is a leader in **teacher education**. We offer basic "**Project WILD**" workshops to teachers, scout leaders and home-schoolers. Extended workshops expose teachers to Idaho natural heritage concepts.

**This summer the first ever "WILD About Bears" teacher workshop** was offered at Harriman State Park. The *Trout in the Classroom* program educates school children about fish biology in a way that integrates math and art concepts. A traveling Bear Education trailer brings full-sized black and grizzly bear mounts to public events to educate residents of the Upper Snake Region about living in bear country.

**Our region's conservation educator frequently contributes** informational stories to the local print, radio, TV, and internet media about the most important fish and wildlife-related stories of the day. Basic conservation themes are interwoven into most contributions to educate the public about the complex challenges facing wildlife managers.

The conservation education program includes oversight of

our hunter safety classes, which provide aspiring hunters with training to advocate safe, ethical behavior in the field. The regional conservation educator coordinates volunteer programs, such as the *Idaho Master Naturalists*, and helps local residents become involved in the conservation and management of their fish and wildlife resources.

The overall goal of the regional conservation education program is to expand awareness, embodying an old maxim from **African conservationist, Baba Dioum, "In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught."**



Regional Conservation Educator, Gregg Losinski, teaches the basics of aquatic education to a group of future anglers and conservationists. Photo by IDFG.

## Wildlife Diversity Program: Conserving Some of Idaho's Most Vulnerable Species

Fish and Game strives to maintain viable, self-sustaining populations of all native wildlife to benefit all Idahoans.

Harvest management is a prominent means of maintaining populations of game species, but many other activities are integral to meeting this mission. Fish and Game provides information, technical support and expertise to resource management partners to create and maintain quality habitat through land management activities. The resource management community served by Fish and Game includes public lands and private land-owners interested in providing habitat for wildlife. Through this network, Fish and Game supports sustainable use of natural resources while accommodating the biological resources that are the essence of the state's cultural heritage.

Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity Program provides support to resource managers with emphasis on *species at-risk* and *priority habitats identified in Idaho's State Wildlife Action Plan* (see <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/cwocs/>). Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity staff implements conservation programs and provides technical assistance to local governments, private landowners and public land managers on conservation measures for at-risk and federally-listed species.

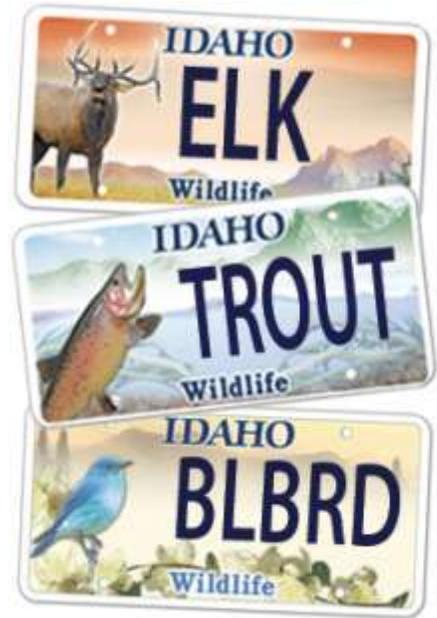
In the Upper Snake Region, Wildlife Diversity staff:

- Conducts surveys and monitors for wildlife species at-risk.
- Provides support and leadership to partners for delivery of on-the-ground conservation action.
- Provides technical input and environmental document review on projects and issues potentially affecting species at-risk.
- Participates in planning and policy development for species at-risk.

- Communicates to partners and the public about issues facing Idaho species at-risk.

The Wildlife Diversity Program uses funds from federal grants, nongame trust funds composed of specialty vehicle wildlife license plate sales and Idaho income tax check-off moneys, and private and local sources. Per Fish and Game **Commission direction, no sportsmen's dollars are directed to these programs.** But activities related to at-risk species conservation frequently provide indirect benefits to species that are vital to the hunters and anglers of Idaho.

*A Wildlife License Plate purchase and/or renewal supports Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity Program.*



## Long-billed Curlew: Catalyst for Conservation

An elegant herald of spring in the Upper Snake Region is North America's largest shorebird, the long-billed curlew. Curlews, designated as a species at-risk in Idaho, arrive on their nesting grounds sometime in April, where males begin raucous vocal and aerial displays to establish territories and attract mates.

The most important breeding habitat in the Upper Snake Region is in mountain valleys, primarily on private lands that have a combination of wet meadow/wetland habitats, open space and moderate livestock grazing.

Curlews nest on the ground, preferentially on flat, grazed grasslands. But once their chicks hatch, these grazed nesting areas are often too exposed for safe brood-rearing. To avoid predators, curlew parents move their chicks to adjacent dense cover provided by wetland and riparian habitats. Therefore, long-billed curlews breed successfully in a

mosaic of habitat types, which in many areas includes active ranchlands interspersed with fresh water and cover for brood-rearing. Primary threats to long-billed curlew include loss of open breeding habitats, disturbance during breeding, and loss or degradation of wet meadow and wetland areas.

To protect important curlew breeding habitats, Fish and Game is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Teton Regional Land Trust to develop a pilot program of the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in the Upper Snake Region. WRP is a Farm Bill program offered to private landowners who voluntarily protect, via conservation easement, and restore wetland habitats.

The twist to the proposed program is that it also allows livestock grazing in key areas to benefit nesting long-billed curlews. Partners are identifying priority areas for conservation and developing

program guidelines.

The project goal is to benefit ranches and wildlife. Ranchers receive financial incentives to protect and restore important meadow and wetland habitats, while keeping them available for grazing, and long-billed curlews get the habitat mosaic they need. Additionally, many other wetland-dependent wildlife species benefit from restored and protected wetlands, and Upper Snake residents benefit from protected open space, clean water, and abundant wildlife.



*A long-billed curlew on her nest in Island Park. Photo by Chris Little.*