

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

IDAHO STATE PLAN – FY 2012-2013

WHIP Purpose, Objective, and Eligibility

WHIP offers technical and financial assistance to participants to protect, restore, develop, and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats for non-domesticated birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and mammals on private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Indian land. Lands enrolled in WHIP must be suitable for fish and wildlife habitat development, on which agricultural and forest-related products or livestock are produced or have the potential to be produced. Federal, State, county, or local government-owned lands are not eligible for WHIP. In Idaho, this includes navigable streams below the ordinary high water mark. A list of the lakes and rivers considered navigable for state title purposes can be found at the following link: http://www.idl.idaho.gov/bureau/smr/navwaters/atc_2_navigable_lakes-rivers.pdf

National Priorities

In order to provide direction to the State and local levels for implementing WHIP and achieving its objective, NRCS has established five national priorities:

- (1) Promote the restoration of declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats;
- (2) Protect, restore, develop, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat to benefit at-risk species;
- (3) Reduce the impacts of invasive species on fish and wildlife habitats;
- (4) Protect, restore, develop, or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats; and
- (5) Protect, restore, develop, or enhance important migration and other movement corridors for wildlife.

Additional National priorities are established as mandatory criteria in the WHIP Application and Eligibility Ranking Tool.

Idaho State Objectives

To enhance fish and wildlife habitat in areas of the state that have been impacted by agricultural activities by providing technical and financial assistance through locally led and directed work groups. The major objectives of the State WHIP plan include:

- Focus restoration efforts in areas of the state that will address critical habitat needs for wildlife in riparian, aquatic (streams), wetlands, shrub/steppe and grassland habitats.
- Emphasize wildlife habitat restoration and management that will directly benefit threatened and endangered species and species of special concern.

Meeting the objectives of this plan would enhance riparian habitat and associated aquatic habitat critical for salmon, steelhead, and other native fish species. These aquatic species are either listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or a species of concern in Idaho. Several upland wildlife species (greater sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, Southern and Northern Idaho ground squirrels) associated with shrub/steppe and grassland habitats have had significant population declines and are being considered for protection under ESA. The WHIP program would prioritize riparian, aquatic, shrub/steppe and grassland areas through the ranking process and

priority geographic targeting of habitats to help address wildlife species associated with these habitat types.

This plan revision for the 2012-2013 fiscal years is intended to provide general direction for WHIP implementation in Idaho for the last year of the 2008 Farm Bill until the 2012 Farm Bill and new program rules are in place.

State Wildlife Priorities

- Restoration of native vegetation on riparian, wetland, shrub/steppe and grassland habitats.
- Restoration of habitat for threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and state species listed as “species of special concern”.
- Projects that address multiple species and resource concerns.
- Projects that contribute to landscape scale habitat restoration.

Focal Areas identified in the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy are used to set geographic priority areas for habitat restoration projects, and will help NRCS contribute to landscape scale habitat restoration. The IDFG Conservation Data Center Database to identify threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and state species of special concern in the project area that will benefit from the project.

Focused WHIP funding to restore or enhance shrub/steppe habitats and benefit greater sage-grouse and associated species will be provided through the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI.) SGI projects are prioritized using Breeding Density Areas, which also help NRCS contribute to landscape scale shrub/steppe restoration.

Priority is also given to projects that protect corridors of riparian habitat adjacent to streams used by threatened, endangered, or other native fish species of concern. Stream habitat improvements for native fish and screening of irrigation water diversion are also given priority. This priority supports ongoing partnership efforts such as the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding should usually be used before WHIP funding for eligible, restorable wetland habitats. Restoration Agreements are available for participants not interested in placing a conservation easement on their lands. On Indian lands, 30-year contracts are available which provide payments similar to 30-year easements without encumbering the land. Small inclusions of wetlands in another primary habitat type are more appropriate for WHIP funding.

Partnership Involvement

NRCS will contribute information, education, technical and financial assistance. Technical assistance will be provided through selected field offices in the state. Information and education to promote the program will be through news articles to local newspapers and locally directed conservation committees. NRCS will administer the financial cost share portion of the WHIP program.

The **Idaho Department of Fish and Game** (IDFG) will contribute information, education, technical and financial assistance to the WHIP program. The IDFG will provide technical assistance on request to NRCS field offices and landowners to develop Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP's). The IDFG and NRCS will work under an existing MOU

between the agencies. The NRCS will provide training on the requirements of WHIP to IDFG employees. The IDFG has an existing Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). When a potential WHIP project has mutual benefits, the IDFG will consider partnering on the financial costs of the project. The IDFG has 25 wildlife biologists throughout the state that are available to assist NRCS in the development of WHDP's. Three of these personnel are located in NRCS Field Offices.

The **Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC)** will contribute information, education and financial assistance. The OSC will offer financial assistance directly to land owners on projects benefiting species of concern and Threatened and Endangered species through their own programs. They will offer advice and guidance on species that need assistance.

The **U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)** will contribute information, education, technical and financial assistance. The FWS will provide technical assistance to NRCS field offices, when requested, to develop WHDP's. The FWS has 4 wildlife biologists throughout the state that will be available on request to assist in development of WHDP's. The FWS has Partners for Wildlife Program available to landowners throughout the state. Projects funded under the Partners Program focus on wetland and riparian restoration on private lands. Opportunities to partner (e.g. financial assistance) on projects that meet WHIP and Partners Program objectives will occur.

The **Farm Services Agency (FSA)** will contribute information and education assistance to the WHIP program. The FSA will provide information to landowners in county newsletters and during USDA landowner meetings throughout the year. The local FSA County Committees also provide appeals process to landowners.

The **Idaho Association Soil Conservation Districts (IASCD)** will contribute information, education and technical assistance. The IASCD will provide information and education on the WHIP program through newsletters to members. The IASCD has employees throughout the state that will promote the program and assist in the development of WHDP's.

The **Idaho Soil Conservation Commission (SCC)** will contribute information, education and technical assistance. The SCC has employees throughout the state that assists landowners in the development of conservation plans. SCC employees will help identify potential WHIP projects and assist landowners in the development of WHDP's.

The **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)** will contribute information, education and technical assistance to the WHIP program through the Idaho Conservation Effort (ICE) and cooperative programs on BLM and private lands for an ecosystem approach. The BLM has 20 wildlife biologists who may provide technical assistance to develop Coordinated Resource Management Plans on public and private lands.

The following groups and agencies play a less active roll in WHIP delivery, but participate via the Idaho State Technical Advisory Committee:

- **Idaho Cattle Association (ICA)**
- **Pheasants Forever (PF)**
- **National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF)**
- **Ducks Unlimited (DU)**
- **The Nature Conservancy (TNC).**

- **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)**
- **Idaho Farm Bureau (IFB)**
- **Idaho Grain Producers Association (IGPA)**
- **Idaho Wool Growers Association (IWGA)**
- **Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)**
- **Idaho Dairy Association (IDA)**

State Ranking Criteria

State and local ranking criteria are reviewed and modified annually by a State Technical Committee subgroup and approved by the STC and posted to the Idaho NRCS WHIP web page [<http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/index.html>]. The criteria emphasize native habitat, T/E species and priority habitat areas in Idaho.

Quality Assurance

The NRCS district conservationist or designee will complete a status review of each contract before the end of the fiscal year noting progress in applying the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP), need for revision, condition of practice installed, and need for technical assistance.

1. Complete a status review each fiscal year until all required practices are installed. Reviews will be conducted with the cooperator, if possible.
2. Status review may be conducted at any time of the year.
3. Expiring contracts must be reviewed at least 90 days before expiration.
4. The district conservationist or designee has the option of monitoring activities as appropriate in conjunction with the status reviews.
5. WHDPs and WHIP contracts will be reviewed by program specialists during regularly scheduled Field Office Quality Assurance Reviews for compliance with policy.

Measuring Program Success

The NRCS or designee will use an approved wildlife habitat assessment procedure (Idaho Biology Technical Notes 19, 29 and/or 32 available at: <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/biology.html>) to evaluate for baseline and applied conditions.

Baseline wildlife habitat assessments will be completed at the time of WHDP development. Follow-up assessments will be conducted the year all essential practices are installed, and the year of contract expiration. The following information will be collected:

1. Maintenance of previously applied practices.
2. Comparison of planned and actual conditions.
3. Evaluation of the wildlife habitat quality as compared to baseline conditions.
4. Photographs of contracted areas in conjunction with monitoring activities.

Program Delivery

Program delivery will include technical training for NRCS field office personnel, and the other agency personnel providing technical support.

Technical assistance to landowners to develop WHDP will be provided by:

- NRCS – 39 field offices, 3 wildlife biologists
- FWS – 4 wildlife biologists
- IDFG – 25 wildlife biologists
- BLM – 20 wildlife biologist
- SCD – 350 staff days-project review, public relations
- SCC – 20 staff days for plan development

Approved Practice List

A list of practices eligible for cost sharing is updated annually with advice from a State Technical Committee and posted to the Idaho NRCS WHIP web page [<http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/index.html>]. Practices are only eligible for cost sharing if they are needed to facilitate installation of an identified priority or associated priority practice listed above (e.g. irrigation for windbreak). Management practices like residue management, prescribed grazing, and forage harvest management, although typically needed in a Resource Management System (RMS) are not be eligible for cost sharing under WHIP.

Development of ponds capable of being stocked with non-native fish is not an approved practice for cost sharing under WHIP.

Priority Practice List (minimum of one in all WHDP):

- 643 Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats
- 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgt.
- 644 Wetland Wildlife Habitat Mgt.
- 395 Stream Habitat Improvement and Management