Restoring Anadromous Fish Habitat in Big Canyon Creek Watershed

Anadromous Fish Habitat Restoration in the Nichols Canyon Subwatershed

Annual Report
2000

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NICHOLS CANYON SUBWATERSHED STEELHEAD TROUT HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

2000 SUMMARY REPORT

BPA Intergovernmental Contract No. 00000631-00001, Project No. 99-15

INTRODUCTION

Nez Perce Soil & Water Conservation District (NPSWCD) undertook the Nichols Canyon Subwatershed Steelhead Trout Habitat Improvement Project in the spring of 1999 with funding from a grant through the Bonneville Power Administration. The Project's purpose is to install and implement agricultural best management practices (MBPS) and riparian restorations with the goal of improving steelhead trout spawning and rearing habitat in the subwatershed. Improvements to fish habitat in the Big Canyon Creek tributaries enhances natural production of the species in Big Canyon Creek and ultimately the Clearwater River. This report is a summation of the progress made by the NPSWCD in the Project's second year.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Review Project Plans and Modify when needed

Minor modifications were implemented after a review of all the financial, contractual, and administrative aspects of the Nichols Canyon project. Highlights include:

- NPSWCD will continue to require Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standards and specifications for practices undertaken in the project.
- Project applications will continue to be addressed based on the determined NPSWCD ranking- according to proximity to stream, relative benefit of practice to project goals, and practice feasibility.
- 100% cost-share practices will continue to be installed by an NPSWCD-approved contractor. NPSWCD Conservationist retains and supervises contractors for these practices.
- 75% cost-share may be installed by any contractor or the landowner/operator themselves. However, the practice must still meet NRCS specifications.
- Practices with less than 100% BPA cost-share may combined with other funding cost-share opportunities. The total cost-share for a practice may not exceed 100% of the practice cost. NPSWCD Conservationist retains and supervises contractors if the combined cost-share is 100%.

Objective 2: Continue Landowner/Operator Participation in the Project

NPSWCD hired a new person to fill the Nichols Canyon Resource Conservationist position in January. 2000 efforts focused on improving current participant satisfaction with the project by progressing on the backlog of commitments and implementations. In 2001, the Conservationist will re-emphasize initiating new participant participation. All new proposals will be ranked according to NPSWCD's predetermined ranking process.

Objective 3: Complete BMP Plans and Ensure Regulatory Compliance

Status of Project Plans

The Resource Conservationist met with landowners and operators throughout the year to discuss their concerns, projects, and practices. Landowners and operators who previously applied and were ranked were contacted for field inventories, as allocated money became available.

BPA9901 includes repairing and enhancing a riparian corridor in a grazed pasture. A grazing plan was developed, explained, and presented to the operator. The lower creek area has been fenced to exclude livestock. Riparian vegetation was planted in this lower area to shade the creek and strengthen the banks during yearly high runoff periods. The armored livestock crossing and livestock watering facility are designed. Both projects were scheduled for implementation in the fall 2000, but contractor difficulties, then adverse weather conditions, delayed construction until summer 2001. The operator requested the livestock watering plans to be changed from a solar pump to a nose pump design. After the upstream fence construction is completed, riparian vegetation will be planted.

BPA9902 includes pond constructions, fencing ponds, and planting vegetation around ponds. Two ponds were constructed and three ponds were repaired. One last pond is to be repaired in summer 2001. Two livestock watering facilities are partially completed. Fencing, mulching to protect the dam, and critical area planting of grass and shrubs are planned for the early spring 2001. The ponds function to retain water in the watershed, trap sediment before it enters the creek, and provide water to livestock which have historically watered from the riparian corridors.

BPA9903 includes spring development for a livestock watering facility. Riparian vegetation has been planted to stabilize the bank. Construction of the remaining projects is scheduled for summer 2000. The spring development is to provide a reliable and adequate water supply and to ensure the livestock remain off the riparian corridor.

BPA9904 included several measures to control erosion and prevent sediment from entering the stream. The contract allows provides a watering facility to provide a reliable alternative to the livestock watering out of the creek. Seven water and sediment control structures were designed and completed in the fall of 2000. The structures were also critical area seeded. The three grassed waterways installed in 1999 were interseeded in spots and the weeds controlled. The pond, livestock watering facility, and culvert control structure are all designed. Contractor difficulties prevented their installation in the fall of 2000. The structures will be completed in the summer and fall of 2001. Fencing, mulching, and critical area plantings will be completed after the pond construction.

BPA9905 included means to improve the area's wildlife habitat, as well as to increase water quality due by decreasing erosion. By combining BPA funding with federal Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (WHIP) funding, the small wildlife pond construction, road obliteration, and vegetative plantings were completed. NPSWCD coordinated with the Idaho Department of Correction to utilize prison work crews as a significant labor source for the project.

BPA0006 involves controlling water and sediment towards the bottom of a large drainage area. Coniferous trees were planted this fall along the sides of the draw. A large pond was designed to

trap sediment, retain water, and provide wildlife water. The pond is scheduled for construction in the late spring 2001. After construction, the pond area will be mulched, and planted with grass and shrubs.

BPA0007 is under development. The landowner is interested in installing an excavated pond and shrub plantings to provide wildlife water and habitat. Field inventories were completed in fall 2000. Construction is planned for spring 2001.

BPA0008 is under development. The landowner is concerned with erosion from his crop fields and his wildlife area. Field inventories were completed in fall 2000.

Project Regulatory Compliance Status

To ensure project regulatory compliance, the following has occurred:

- The BPA NEPA Compliance Checklist sent to BPA's NEPA Coordinator in August of 2000 was returned in May of 2001. The supplemental analysis was completed based on concurrence from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) concerning the Big Canyon Creek Biological Assessment. The findings from the analysis require that no further NEPA documentation is needed.
- When required Clean Water Act (CWA) 404 stream alteration permit applications were sent to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR). No projects were impacted by the permits.
- Cultural resource determination requests were submitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for all ground disturbing project implementations. Although several project sites required further field visits, no projects locations were adversely impacted.

Interagency Cooperation

NPSWCD continued coordination and cooperation with several local, state, and federal agencies in proceeding with this project. Agencies include the NRCS, NMFS, US Forest Service, BLM, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, Idaho Division of Environmental Quality, Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), Nez Perce Tribe, Idaho Soil Conservation Commission (ISCC), Idaho Department of Corrections, City of Peck, and Nez Perce County Commissioners.

<u>Objective 4: Supervise and Inspect Installation of BMPs</u>

The NPSWCD's BPA Conservationist supervised the installation of all contractor installed structures. All structures and projects were found to have met NRCS specification and design requirements. The waterways were inspected by the project Conservationist following construction and were found to meet specifications.

Impediments to project installation consisted primarily of contractor difficulties. These obstacles have been alleviated by the addition of new contractors to the contractor list. The contractor bidding process is also currently under review. The limited availability of engineering design assistance was also an issue, but has also now been resolved.

Objective 5: Project Monitoring

The ongoing BMP effectiveness monitoring includes photo documentation of project sites before and after installation. These photos will assist in assessing the long-term success of the installed practices. Annual status reviews are

Cooperative efforts from the NRCS, BLM, Nez Perce Tribe, and ISCC provide water quality monitoring in Big Canyon Creek. In addition, the NPSWCD stream temperature monitoring plan includes collecting stream temperatures in several Big Canyon Creek tributaries including Bear Creek, Six-Mile Creek, and Nichols Canyon. The Bear Creek gauge was installed in July. However, low to no water flows prevented temperature gauge installation in Six-Mile Creek and Nichols Canyon. Gauges are scheduled for installation in these tributaries in March 2001.

Objective 6: Documentation and Report Writing

The project quarterly reports sent to BPA throughout the year will continue through 2001. A year-end report will be completed in January 2002.