



**PARTNERS FOR CONSERVATION**

**LITTLE SNAKE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

**U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE PARTNERS FOR FISH & WILDLIFE PROGRAM**



**PRIVATE LANDS PARTNERS DAY 2013  
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS AND SUMMARY**



## Background

In May 2008, the Blackfoot Challenge and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program hosted a Partners for Conservation Conference in Seeley Lake, Montana. The purpose of the conference was to bring together private landowners, conservation practitioners, agency representatives, private foundations, and policy-makers to discuss the future of private land conservation in the West.

The concept of hosting a private lands conference originated from a 2006 Innovations in American Government Award to the US Fish and Wildlife Service Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program for community-based conservation in partnership with the Blackfoot Challenge, a watershed group in the Blackfoot watershed of western Montana. The \$100,000 award from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government was used to transfer the model of cooperative conservation, build trust and partnerships between private landowners and public agency managers, provide consensus-based solutions to natural resource issues, and recommend ways to improve cooperative conservation at local, regional and national scales.



*Partners for Conservation Chair Jim Stone- Montana.*

This first conference resulted in the following key recommendations:

- Summarize the conference with a written report.
- Form an alliance of private landowners to leverage the power of public-private partnerships.
- Demonstrate support of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.
- Host a 2009 conference.
- Seek funding to support private landowners' investment of time and travel.
- Share success stories, solutions, and resources across the partnership.

Strategic action was taken addressing each of these recommendations, with the most important action being the development of Partners for Conservation (PFC) in 2010. PFC is a private landowner organization which communicates and collaborates on conservation partnerships for working landscapes to benefit present and future generations. PFC provides the structure to network and share information, leverage tools and resources, and acquire support at the national scale for local initiatives. PFC currently represents private landowners across almost 20 states who share a vision for maintaining the long-term health and productivity of their working lands and rural communities. PFC's guiding principles revolve around the following five key pillars:

- 1) Landowner-led
- 2) Collaboration gets work done
- 3) Local lessons have national impact
- 4) Flexibility should be policy
- 5) Sustainability is a balance of economy and ecology

After the initial conference in 2008, PFC and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program continued to team up to host a Private Lands Day each year (Colorado-2009; Kansas-2010; South Dakota-2011, California 2012). The conference demonstrates the value of meeting face-to-face to build partnerships and collaborate around private land conservation. Each year the event features field trips to highlight local

partnerships, conservation projects and working ranch operations, presentations from biologists and landowners sharing successes and lessons learned, as well as invaluable social and networking time.

The experiences of landowners, land managers and public partners attending Private Lands Partners Day results in lasting relationships that would otherwise not have formed, and begins the transfer of personal cooperative conservation experience and knowledge to different areas across the country. This “transferability” of the cooperative approach to conservation is a goal of the gathering each year, creating awareness of and momentum for private land conservation across the nation. Following is a report on the most recent conference held in Baggs, Wyoming June 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2013.

## 2013 Partners for Conservation Summer Board Meeting Highlights



*Partners for Conservation Board, Staff and partners touring riparian restoration at Ladder Ranch prior to board meeting*

The 2013 meeting kicked off with a Partners for Conservation Board meeting held at Ladder Livestock Company east of Baggs near Dixon, Wyoming hosted by board member Pat O’Toole, his wife Sharon and three generations of the O’Toole family. The majority of the board was able to make the meeting and with board members, staff and guests there were 15 individuals attending. The meeting began with a round robin of updates from the various landscapes. Landscape concerns expressed included the lack of a new federal Farm Bill, concern with endangered species processes, oil, gas and wind development and their impacts, both good and bad on communities and agricultural operations, changing demographics of landowners and agricultural operations, drought and its impact on communities and operations.

Issues that were identified for evaluation and potential engagement by PFC included Farm Bill, endangered/threatened/rare species management processes, ecosystem services markets and mitigation and finally expanded outreach to organizations such as state fish and wildlife agencies. The board directed that the organization would focus on three priorities for the next 12 months: 1. Continue to provide input into the development of a Farm Bill with a robust Conservation Title, 2. Continued expansion of membership particularly in states without landowner participation, and 3. Seek to engage conservation partners in a constructive discussion regarding the endangered/threatened species issue in a format similar to the well received Farm Bill Forums of 2011-2012. Finally the board formally expressed support for Private Lands Partners Day 2014 to be held in Mississippi in September 2014



*Wyoming sheep camp in the Little Snake River watershed.*



## 2013 Conference Summary

The annual conference titled Private Lands Partners Day was held June 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> in Baggs, Wyoming. The event was organized by the Little Snake River Conservation District, headquartered in Baggs, along with U.S. Fish and Wildlife-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Partners for Conservation and Ladder Livestock Company, represented by Pat and Sharon O'Toole and their family. In addition to the support provided by these partners Trout Unlimited and the Intermountain West Joint Venture provided financial support. Devon Energy generously provided the meeting space used for the presentation sessions and the Valley Community Center provided space for meals and evening events.



*Jack Cobb, Chairman Little Snake River Conservation District*

The purpose of the event was to bring private and public partners together to learn about innovative approaches to community-based land conservation to sustain healthy landscapes, ecosystems, and the communities that depend on them. A total of over 100 public and private partners representing 21 states attended *Private Land Partners Day*, 44 of whom had never attended a Private Lands Day event previously.



*Steve Guertin, USFWS Deputy Director, Policy*

A focus of this year's event was to learn of the broad range of collaborative work that has been accomplished in the Little Snake River watershed primarily through the organizational efforts of the Little Snake River Conservation District (a unit of local government led by local stakeholders) working collaboratively with landowners, local, state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations including conservation groups and land trusts. Field trips highlighting these local successes as well as presentations and discussions with regional and national emphasis, demonstrated to attendees that improvements in ecological condition can go hand in hand with improvements in productivity and economic viability through public-private partnerships at multiple scales in many areas of the country.

### Day One Highlights

Partners Day began on June 19<sup>th</sup> at the offices of Devon Energy where participations were welcomed by Bob Dunkley of Devon Energy and Steve Guertin U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Director for Policy. Partners for Conservation Chair Jim Stone, Board Member Pat O'Toole (local landowner host for the event) and PFC Executive Director Steve Jester welcomed the attendees and provided updates on Partners for Conservation activities and results from the board meeting the previous day. Jack Cobb, Little Snake River Conservation District (LSRCD\_ Chairman and Larry Hicks, LSRCD also welcomed the attendees and gave a brief overview of the Little Snake River watershed and the conservation districts collaborative conservation approach. By 9:30 AM, the group departed for an all day field trip to visit instream, riparian and upland conservation projects that landowners, the conservation district and their partners have completed or that are in progress. The field trip started at a fish passage and irrigation water supply project near downtown Baggs and then proceeded by bus upstream to a series of sites

further up the watershed on both private and publicly owned land. At each stop, the attendees heard the story of that specific project from the landowners and the project partners that worked together on the individual sites. These partners included landowners, a broad range of federal, state, local units of government as well as nonprofit organizations. Partners were diverse depending on the specific project, but all efforts had been integrated and planned through a landscape approach to benefit both natural resources and the sustainability of the local economy and communities. The day concluded with a social and Wyoming BBQ supper, complete with live music, hosted at the Little Snake River Museum in the community of Savery, Wyoming.



*Mindy Meade Vohland USFWS and Larry Hicks  
Little Snake River Conservation District.*

## Day Two Highlights



*Tim Griffiths USDA-NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI)  
National Coordinator.*

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, the morning session opened with a recap of the previous day's tour. Little Snake River Conservation District Natural Resource Coordinator Larry Hicks provided a presentation on the history of the Little Snake Valley and the importance of public lands to the livestock operations in the valley. Larry provided an overview of the accomplishments of the conservation district and its partners and spent some time relating information on projects that were not visited during the field trip. One such project is the 1,300-acre wetland development along Muddy Creek, a tributary of the Little Snake which provides important stopover habitat for migratory birds in the otherwise extremely arid basin. Attendees also heard from Tim Griffiths and Dave Naugle with the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI). SGI has emerged as one of the largest scale collaborations ever attempted involving private and public partners across 11 states. The SGI has featured agency partnerships with over 700 ranchers and has resulted in 2.1 million acres of grazing systems, almost 500 miles of fence modification, marking or removal, brush management on over 195,000 acres of conifers and the establishment of conservation easements on 242,000 acres of important sage grouse habitat. The group also heard

from David Spicer, a Nevada landowner who had managed to develop a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program along with other organizations to conserve habitat for the Amargosa Toad. His organization, Saving Toads thru Off-road racing, Ranching and Mining in the Oasis Valley ([www.storm-ov.org](http://www.storm-ov.org)) has initiated a broad range of projects to conserve habitat for the toad to achieve high quality outcomes, for both toads and the community, in a voluntary fashion. Mr. Spicer talked at length about the challenges of initiating and sustaining the public-private collaboration. Landowner Jim Ham from Georgia provided an overview of his family's hay and cattle operations and the vast array of partnerships and projects he and his brother have established to address natural resource concerns. Partners include local, state and federal agencies such as USDA-NRCS, conservation districts, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Both Mr. Hamm and Mr. Spicer have gone much further than just implementing conservation projects, also providing educational opportunities for youth and adults in their communities.

The day also included a presentation from Heather Johnson, Region 6 Coordinator USFWS – Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program, on the National Cattlemen's Association Beef Association (NCBA) Environmental

Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). ESAP was established in 1991 by NCBA to recognize beef producers who make environmental stewardship a priority on their farms and ranches while also improving production and profitability. Several current PFC board members are recipients and after a video was shown those award winners in attendances shared their thoughts on the award program and how it had helped spread awareness and interest in stewardship in their landscapes. Heather and Mark Hogan, Wyoming State Coordinator for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provided an overview of priorities and recent accomplishments as well as relating how the program fills a number of different roles working with a host of partners to accomplish conservation projects. This assistance can range from design or permitting to stand alone projects from initiating landowner contact, through design, construction and cost-share. The program strives to be flexible and assist however possible in good projects located in priority areas.

Joe Milmoie, national Outreach Coordinator for USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, led a two-hour workshop on developing an outreach effort focused on large-scale public-private conservation partnerships focusing on developing a brand, a message that sticks and a communication plan.



*Mark Hogan USFWS-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Wyoming State Coordinator, Pat and Sharon O'Toole, Wyoming Landowners and Mindy Meade Vohland, USFWS- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Wyoming.*

The evening featured a closing reception and dinner with a keynote from A.G. Kawamura, former California Secretary of Agriculture and urban farmer who is currently the co-chair of Solutions from the Land, an effort to develop a roadmap for agricultural systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mr. Kawamura spoke about how ranchers, farmers, foresters and other landowners can enhance productivity and ecosystems benefits at the same time using a collaborative toolbox that is tailored regionally or even at the watershed scale. Pat and Sharon O'Toole were recognized by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program as a part of the closing dinner.

Throughout the two-day conference, participants were able to both share and hear success stories as well as lessons learned from other public and private partners practicing private land conservation. By “transferring” these experiences, local, regional, and national participants learned information about specific management tools, techniques, funders and technical resources that will benefit their partnerships and efforts at home. (See the Appendix for a detailed agenda)

PFC continued its annual tradition of hosting a conference to build trust and relationships, and transfer experiences and lessons learned in collaborative, community-based conservation.



*A.G. Kawamura former California Secretary of Agriculture and current Solutions from the Land Co-Chair*



## Final Notes

The relationship shared between PFC and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is serving to pave the way for expanded relationships of a similar nature with other public agencies such as the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service. As a strong partner, PFC has and will continue to support critical federal programs and agencies including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Bill programs. In 2014, PFC will remain engaged in reauthorization of the Farm Bill and appropriations for conservation programs that support working landscapes.

It is clear that landowners and partners attending from across the country have networks and relationships that are working collaboratively on conservation. What may be seen as a unique partnership or relationship to one geographic community may be occurring elsewhere. Although landscapes are as diverse as people, the challenges, obstacles and solutions to implementing sustainable conservation can be remarkably similar.

The Board of Partners for Conservation wants to recognize the generous and ongoing support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, which continues to provide critical funding for Private Lands Partners events each year. The USFWS-PFW program is an invaluable partner exemplifying the model for supporting relationships with landowners that lead to lasting achievements for working landscapes. Additionally, a number of local partners played a critical role in delivering Private Lands Partners Day in Baggs. Many partners have been mentioned already but to recap include: Little Snake River Conservation District, Valley Community Center, Devon Energy and the Little Snake River Museum. Particular thanks goes to the staff of the Little Snake Conservation District (particularly Dawn Arnell and Kelly Kudera) and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Wyoming (particularly Mark Hogan and Mindy Meade Vohland) for their tireless work in planning and overcoming major logistical challenges. Thanks also to Pat and Sharon O'Toole and their family for their tireless efforts in coordinating the PFC Board Meeting and in planning for Private Lands Partners Day 2013.

Cover photo generously provided by Tuda Libby Crews. Other photos provided by Heather Johnson, USFWS.



*Little Snake River instream and riparian restoration site. Logs from upland forest fuel reduction projects have been strategically placed to enhance quality of aquatic habitat. Willows have also been planted on this site*

## **Private Lands Partners Day June 18 – 20, 2013 Final Agenda**

### **Tuesday – June 18, 2013**

Travel Day

5:00 p.m. Welcome to Wyoming Reception (Valley Community Center)

Social Hour – Food and Drinks (No Host/Cash Bar)

6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Registration

- Shuttles available to provide evening transportation to hotels and lodges

### **Wednesday – June 19, 2013**

6:30 – 7:00 a.m. – Shuttles from hotels and lodges to Valley Community Center

7:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m. Continue Registration

7:00 a.m. – 7:45 a.m. Breakfast at Valley Community Center

7:45 a.m. Walk to Devon Energy

8:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions -- Devon Energy, State and local dignitaries

8:20 a.m. Deputy Director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- Steve Guertin

8:30 a.m. Partners for Conservation Updates & Annual Highlights -- PFC Board

9:00 a.m. Overview of Little Snake River Basin Issues & Activities -- Jack Cobb, Chairmen, LSRC

BREAK

9:15 a.m. Walk to Ready Diversion (Fish passage) and Oxbow Restoration Project.

9:45 a.m. Load buses

10:05 a.m. Purple Sage River Restoration -- Lower Little Snake River Watershed Partners

10:45 a.m. Break and Load buses -- Travel to Battle Creek Overlook

11:30 p.m. Battle Overlook -- O'Toole Family Operation & other Conservation Activities (Lunch at site)

1:00 p.m. Load buses

1:30 p.m. Upper Savery Creek (Forestry and Upland Projects) – Watershed Partners



2:45 p.m. Load buses  
3:15 p.m. Savery Creek Cooperative Stream Project -- Landowners and Cooperative Partners.  
4:15 p.m. Load buses for travel to Cottonwood Creek Overlook  
4:45 p.m. Cottonwood Creek Overlook -- O'Toole Family Operation and Conservation Partners  
5:15 p.m. Load Buses travel to Savery Museum  
5:30 p.m. Happy Hour (No Host Bar)  
6:30 p.m. Savery Museum -- Wyoming BBQ Beef Supper  
Shuttle to lodging available from 8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.

**Thursday – June 20, 2013 (Facilitator – PFW )**

6:45 – 7:30 a.m. Shuttles from hotels and lodges to Devon Energy Facility  
7:30 – 8:15 a.m. Breakfast at Valley Community Center  
8:15 am Walk to Devon Energy  
8:30 a.m. Recap of Tour - Larry Hicks, Little Snake River Conservation District, Manager  
9:00 a.m. Sage Grouse Discussion – Dr. Dave Naugle, Tim Griffiths - NRCS SGI Coordinator, Bob Budd - Executive Director, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust  
10:30 a.m. BREAK  
11:00 a.m. David Spicer -Nevada Landowner  
11:30 a.m. Environmental Stewardship Award Program – Heather Johnson and ESAP Landowners  
Noon – Walk to lunch at the Valley Community Center (Italian Buffet)  
1:00 p.m. Afternoon Workshop at Devon Energy  
1:00 – 1:30 p.m. Jim Ham - Georgia Landowner  
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. PFW Program Overview – Mark Hogan & Heather Johnson  
2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Outreach Session – Joe Milmoie (Will include a Break in the middle)  
4:00 p.m. Onward and Upward – PFC Executive Director Session – Steve Jester  
4:30 p.m. Closing Session  
5:00 p.m. Happy Hour Reception – Valley Community Center  
6:30 p.m. Dinner Banquet - Valley Community Center (Shuttles provided all evening to hotels and lodges)

