

Conserve

News from Lemhi Regional Land Trust and Salmon Valley Stewardship

A Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2012

Did Hughes Creek Treatments Make a Difference During the Mustang Fire? Firefighters Say Yes

A community-driven forest health project in Lemhi County gave firefighters a critical edge to limit the danger and damage done by this summer's Mustang Wildfire, according to firefighters on the ground.

Long before the late July electrical storm sparked what would eventually become the 340,000-acre Mustang Wildfire Complex, the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group had worked with the Salmon-Challis National Forest to complete a forest-thinning project in the Hughes Creek drainage, about 5 miles north of North Fork.

Danny Montoya, Mustang Fire Team Operations Chief, said of the thinning and other work done in Hughes Creek before the fire, "I firmly believe that they provided us with the opportunity to steer the fire away from the Highway 93 Corridor and the Lost Trail Ski Area."

Fire Operations Chief Russ Long, who was assigned to the Mustang Fire



When the smoke finally cleared, observers could see that the Mustang Fire burned in a mosaic pattern, with a combination of light, heavy and mixed intensities rather than the massive forest mortality that was feared at the height of the fire. (Michelle Tucker Photo)

as it moved into Hughes Creek, confirmed that when crown fire hit some of the units in the 13,000-acre Hughes project area, the fire dropped to the ground — which was exactly the intent of the treatments. According to Long, the thinned units gave firefighters options to help guide the fire away from Gibbonsville and lower Hughes Creek where the majority of the residences are.

According to the Forest Service, efforts to corral the Mustang Complex cost some \$38 million. At the peak of activity, some 1,100 fire fighters worked on fire lines.

The Lemhi County Sheriff's office had to evacuate some residents when fire approached, but no houses were lost.

"The success of Hughes Creek drives home the importance of doing what we can to safeguard communities and waterways and decrease the risk of losing property, wildlife habitat, and other important assets," said Gina Knudson, Salmon Valley Stewardship director.

David Allen, CEO and president of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation said, "Not only did the project have a positive impact for firefighters this past summer, but the on-the-ground work itself improved vital habitat, travel corridors, and forage for elk and other wildlife."



The Mustang Fire is the type of fire scenario considered by the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group and the Salmon-Challis Natl Forest as they started designing the Hughes Ck project in 2006. (USFS Photo)

Community-Based Conservation Road Show

Those working in conservation at the community level believe in sharing and learning from other communities and networking our efforts whenever possible. Here's what SVS and LRLT have been doing -- and where they've been -- this fall.



SEELEY LAKE, MONTANA -- Kristin Troy, Gina Knudson, Rancher Mary Cerise, and Wildlife Researcher Toni Ruth attended a workshop sponsored by the Blackfoot Challenge. Landowners and other conservation reps gathered together in late September for a week to discuss challenges and what's working in community-based conservation.



SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH -- Kristin, Charli Williams, and Katie Hoffman of LRLT, and Michelle Tucker of SVS attended the 2012 Land Trust Alliance Rally.

Kristin and colleagues Mike Stevens of Pioneer Mtn. Group and Gary Burnett, Executive Director of Blackfoot Challenge led the workshop "Beyond Saving the Ranch: Current Successful Strategies for Landscape Scale Conservation in Western Ranchlands."



SHOSHONE, IDAHO -- Tom McFarland, LRLT Chairman; Toni Hardesty, The Nature Conservancy Idaho State Director; Joselin Matkins, Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts Chair & Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust Executive Director; Mike Stevens, Pioneer Mountain Group Managing Member & Co-Founder.

Tom traveled to Shoshone to tour Fred and Judy Brossy's farm with the Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts and Congressman Mike Simpson. Tom had the opportunity to give a brief presentation on the value of conservation easements and the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs.

"I am a strong believer in the need to protect and preserve our farm and ranch lands to ensure that rural families are able pass their operations onto future generations," said Congressman Simpson, chairman for the Subcommittee on Interior and Environment, which has jurisdiction over funding for a number of programs critical to Idaho. "I believe the public-private partnerships that are helping to protect these lands are important moving forward and I was pleased to hear firsthand from those who have seen these partnerships work effectively."



SARATOGA, WYOMING -- Gina traveled to Saratoga, Wyoming to visit with a group called Voices of the Valley. As Platte Valley residents face change because of large-scale wind development, they are trying to chart a path that maintains their community values. Gina shared experiences from the Salmon Valley.

"I was struck by how similar Saratoga and Salmon are -- small, isolated towns surrounded by incredible natural beauty. I shared with Voices of the Valley some of the inspirational stories of the people of Salmon, who have done such a remarkable job coming together and standing for what we are for, not what we are against," Gina said. (Above Photo and "Aspen Alley" to the left courtesy of Pam Meyer, Saratoga)

Stewarding Conservation Easements

Lemhi Regional Land Trust holds six conservation easements totaling 7,478 acres. LRLT Stewardship Director Breann Westfall is responsible for annual monitoring of these easements. Based on the values protected in each individual easement, the Land Trust documents the state of the easement property, including taking photos at specific points every year.

Visiting the properties provides convincing evidence of the value these private working lands have for fish and wildlife in our area, Breann reports. "This was an amazing year to be out monitoring. The elk herds in Bohannon Creek on the Eagle Valley Ranch; multiple moose on both Hayden Creek properties; more whitetail deer and heron than we could count on the Cole Ranch; a beautiful mama black bear on the Kenney Creek Ranch; and mule deer, whitetail, and elk on the Carmen Creek McFarland property -- these were just some of the highlights."

What a great time to mention the Land Trust needs volunteers to help monitor in 2013. Give Breann a call at 756-8879.



Mama Bear on the Kenney Creek Ranch, owned and operated by Fran Tonsmeire and family as a working cattle ranch. Photo by Breann Westfall.



The Cole Ranch south of Salmon has nearly 3 miles of Salmon River frontage under easement and is home to one of the largest cottonwood galleries and heron rookeries in Lemhi County. Photo by Breann Westfall.



Moose calf on the Upper Lemhi. Photo by Breann Westfall

Three's Company -- SVS joins Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy at South Center Location

Since November 2011, board and staff of Lemhi Regional Land Trust and Salmon Valley Stewardship have been discussing how we can work together in the smartest and most efficient way.

One of the first possibilities we explored was sharing office space. With much help from one board member with commercial real estate appraisal experience, we analyzed the pros and cons of several downtown office spaces.

The boards agreed that the mostly unused space adjoining the Land Trust office at 105 Center Street was the best

option. The Land Trust was already sharing space with The Nature Conservancy's Central Idaho staff.

After more than 8 years at 513 Main Street, SVS made the move to the more spacious office in late October.

Many thanks to the dozens of people who helped paint the new space, move furnishings, clean, and put us back together.

Both organizations are already seeing the benefits of the arrangement, both in our bottom line and the way we conduct our work.



SVS has a separate entrance to the south of Lemhi Regional Land Trust's main entrance. Our new sign is coming soon. Stop by and say hello!

Meet Us for Lunch!

Salmon Valley Stewardship and Lemhi Regional Land Trust invite you to the third of in our series of casual luncheons.

SVS and LRLT will provide homemade soup and give you a first chance to see our new shared office space.

When: Wed, Nov 14, Noon - 1 p.m.



Where: LRLT/
SVS offices at 105
South Center
Street

Cost: Nada, Zero,
\$0



"Brewing at Home"

Thursday, November 29, 2012, 6-8 p.m.

Sacajawea Center

Cost \$10

With Guest Instructors from the:

SALMONID



HOME BREW CLUB

To register, please call 756-1686 or email
rachellayman@salmonvalley.org

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