

## WYOMING LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

# Group ensures healthy fish, wildlife populations in southwest Wyoming

ROCK SPRINGS — The Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative has had several accomplishments during the past year.

These include expansion of the WLCI boundaries, setting priorities for the four Local Project Development Teams, hosting a Science Workshop to present scientific findings related to southwest Wyoming, developing stronger partnerships with industry and nongovernmental organizations, completing 27 conservation projects, and providing funding for additional projects that are currently in progress.

The WLCI is a long-term, science-based program, announced in 2007, to assess and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming, while facilitating responsible development through local collaboration and partnerships.

The essence of the WLCI program is ensuring healthy fish and wildlife populations across southwestern Wyoming. The current WLCI boundaries cover all of Carbon, Lincoln, Sublette, Sweetwater, and Uinta counties, as well as portions of Fremont County in the Green River and Great Divide basins.

## LOCALLY-DRIVEN CONSERVATION

Local Project Development Teams were created in 2008 to identify local issues that are important to southwest Wyoming and cooperatively create projects to address identified needs for local wildlife, habitat and other resource issues. These teams gained a greater role in 2009 as they developed projects for geographic areas and defined priorities for conservation.

Each team includes local biologists, range managers, conservation districts, landowners, county commissioners, and multiple other interested parties. Project proposals are heard at quarterly team meetings.

The four Local Project Development Teams are encouraged to look beyond traditional administrative boundaries, but they are organized in Carbon County, Lincoln County, Uinta County, Sublette County and Sweetwater County.

For example, a project may focus on a watershed that is located in multiple counties.

"This locally-driven structure makes sure the WLCI is tapped in at the ground level to the years of experience and observation that are provided by local landowners and local agency

staff. We are integrating this experience with the scientific information being provided to make a true difference at the landscape level," said Renee Dana, WLCI coordination team lead.

## CONSERVATION PROJECTS

WLCI funding and coordination provided support for more than 30 on-the-ground projects on public and private lands in 2009.

Project types include fencing, wetland creation, prescribed burns, riparian enhancements, weed treatments, and river restoration.

Treatments in 2009 helped create or protect 1,000 acres of wetlands/riparian areas, restore 6 miles of stream, enhance or conserve 1,100 acres of uplands, treat weeds on more than 7,500 acres, and improve 26 miles of fencing. Projects should benefit multiple species, including sage grouse, trumpeter swans, cutthroat trout, various warm water fish, various migratory birds, and big game species.

Federal funding for projects and other work is provided by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey. For every dollar of WLCI funding, partner contributions and value in-kind services generate \$5 or more.

In March 2009, the WLCI signed an agreement with the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming to allow for outside contributions to WLCI work. Visit <http://www.wlci.gov/get-involved.html> for more information.

## SCIENCE-BASED APPROACH

One of the most unique features of the WLCI is the application of science to decision-making processes.

In the 2009 field season, the USGS conducted research on wildlife responses to energy development and climate change. Studies involve sage grouse, songbirds, pygmy rabbits, and small mammals as well as developing an understanding of habitat treatments at individual sites and evaluating their effectiveness in meeting landscape-level conservation goals.

The information gathered may help clarify which issues are most problematic for wildlife in areas with energy development.

On May 12-14, 2009, a WLCI science workshop was conducted in Laramie, to discuss new science findings made since the initial science workshop conducted in May 2007.

Approximately 115 people at-



PLANTING TIME — Local volunteers plant cottonwood trees at Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge on May 2, 2009.

tended the three-day workshop.

The focus of this workshop was to show how science is being incorporated into on-the-ground activity.

Both presentations and poster sessions were included in the workshop.

Portions of the presentations can be accessed through the WLCI Web site under the meetings tab.

## WLCI ORGANIZATION

The WLCI partnership formally includes the BLM, USGS, FWS, U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, six county commissions, and nine conservation districts. Other organizations cooperate with the WLCI and provide support as needed, including the National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Wyoming State Land Board, and Jonah Interagency Office.

The WLCI seeks to develop new partnerships that will provide support through information sharing, funding, and project development.

In March 2009, the WLCI conducted an event to develop stronger relationships with industry and NGOs, and the WLCI continues to seek approaches that involve all groups and individuals that have a stake in the southwest Wyoming landscape.

The WLCI Executive Committee elects a chairman and two vice chairmen who serve one-year terms. In April 2009, Sublette County Commissioner John Linn was selected as the chairman.

FWS Wyoming Field Supervisor Brian Kelly and WGFD Director Steve Ferrell were respectively chosen as first vice chairman and second vice chairman.

The WLCI's strategic plan identifies six goals designed to support wildlife populations, sustainable agriculture, scientific understanding of the area, improved communication, effective relationships, and information sharing. In addition, fragmented habitats, invasive species, and water quality and quantity are recognized as three basic priorities for WLCI work.

More information about this program, including semi-annual newsletters, can be found at [www.wlci.gov](http://www.wlci.gov).