

Farms and Fish

\$400,000 annually

The Upper Snake River Farms and Fish Program

In the Upper Snake River Basin, agriculture accounts for 90% of water withdrawals. While fish and farms might not seem like a natural pair, bridging the gap between local agricultural producers and the Henry's Fork fishery can bring benefits to water resources and the health of the river at a more significant scale than ever before.

HFF and partners are working with major agricultural producers and landowners in our area through voluntary transactions that compensate irrigators for reducing irrigation demand, thus keeping more water in Island Park Reservoir.

On-Farm Water Management

A key tool HFF can use to influence water use is land-lease agreements, including agreements to not divert water from the river. These agreements are actually simpler and more straightforward legally and administratively than leasing water rights.

Alternative Crops

The program also incentivizes farmers to plant alternative crops that use less water, use water outside of peak irrigation demand, improve soil health, reduce wind erosion and sediment runoff, and benefit water quality.

Aquifer Recharge

Groundwater contributions from the aquifer in late summer provide an important component of baseflows, adding cool, clear water when it is really needed. Recharge of the aquifer has been decreasing with changes in irrigation technology, so HFF is working to support well-timed recharge efforts to benefit flows without significant detrimental impact on the day-to-day fishing experience.

Monitoring

All of these methods depend heavily on the capacity of HFF and partners to monitor water use to verify that the objectives will be achieved and to guard against unintended consequences.

Creating Markets

To be successful into the future, the Farms and Fish Program must be self-sustaining by creating markets for crops that use less water. The program will assist local entities in building infrastructure that could create a market for high-value, low-water-use crops, like reduced-irrigation malt barley and quinoa, without further incentives.