

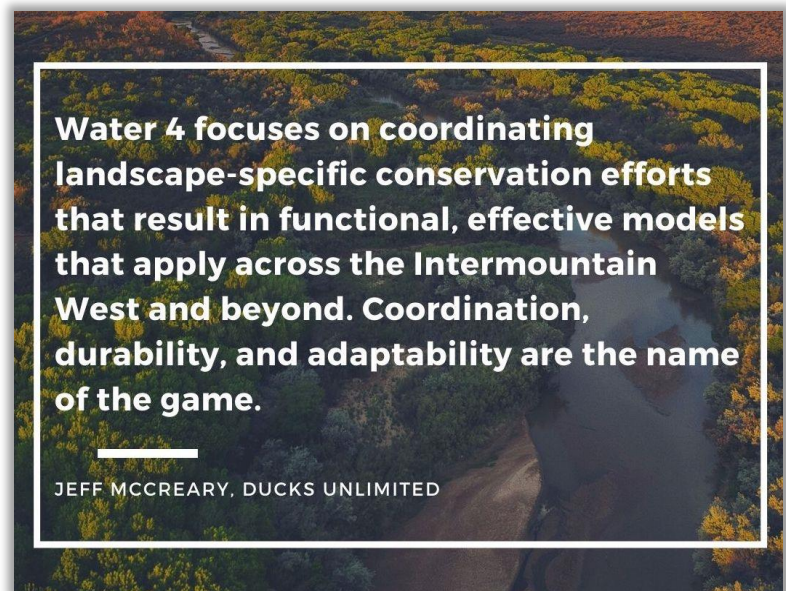
INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
JOINT VENTURE

Water 4 Semi-Annual Progress Report **January 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020**

Conserving wet meadows and water for: agriculture; wildlife and fisheries habitat; groundwater recharge; and landscape resiliency in ways that matter to people.

Water is a common thread connecting wildlife habitat, agriculture, and people in the Intermountain West. The Water 4 Initiative was launched in 2019 to drive conservation action based on two guiding principles: 1) a holistic view of the habitat needs of migratory birds, and 2) the role that key agricultural lands play in creating that habitat. Elevating and better understanding the relationship between publicly and privately managed wetlands, areas of multi-species habitat, and the unique needs of each landscape is central to the Water 4 mission and to effective habitat conservation in the Intermountain West.

Water 4 is built on the principle of achieving conservation win-wins that deliver multiple benefits to people and wildlife. Foremost, consideration of different perspectives, needs, and approaches to habitat delivery is necessary to ensure effective, lasting, and community-based conservation. Science further informs and focuses Water 4 on strategic landscapes that have high value to migratory birds, wetland habitat abundance, key public-private land collaboration patterns, partnership synergy, local leadership, and partner investments.



Thanks to the tremendous contributions of the founding Water 4 investors, we collectively made significant gains during the reporting period in three main areas: people and partnerships, science and technology, and communications and outreach. The following report covers the accomplishments from January through June 2020.

Partner Investments

The entirety of Water 4's work in the first half of 2020 was made possible through partner investments in the initiative. Supporting partners enable the critical boots-on-the-ground field capacity and behind-the-scenes work that helps to spread the Water 4 backing and message. These funding partners include:

- Oregon NRCS
- Montana NRCS
- Colorado NRCS
- FWS Interior Region 10 Regional Director, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Science Applications, External Affairs, and Refuges
- FWS Interior Region 5/7 Regional Director and Refuges
- FWS Interior Region 9 Science Applications, Ecological Services, and Refuges
- New Mexico NRCS
- Mule Deer Foundation
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Partnering to Conserve Working Wetlands

Through Water 4, the IWJV has made substantial investments of resources in four landscapes of importance:

- Bear River Watershed (ID, UT, WY)
- Southern Oregon-Northeastern California (SONEC), including the Klamath Basin
- Rio Grande Corridor (CO, NM), specifically the San Luis Valley and Middle Rio Grande
- Western Montana

Water 4 initially focused in these landscapes as a means of helping partners move the needle on wetland and wet meadow habitat conservation around a theme of relevancy to people. Partner engagement and support has exceeded our first-year expectations and has made it clear that Water 4 will eventually touch many of the key landscapes in the Intermountain West. In 2020, the IWJV is nurturing relationships to support capacity, communications, partnership development, and science in these landscapes to inform management decisions and promote habitat conservation. The IWJV expects to steadily grow the footprint of Water 4 through the transfer of proven conservation models.

January – June 2020 Highlights:

- Strengthened and developed partnerships in key landscapes.
- Built momentum for a set of conservation practices with high value to migratory birds and agricultural producers—irrigation infrastructure improvements, conservation easements, and watershed restoration.
- Identified synergies with other wildlife focuses, specifically fisheries and big game interests.
- Participated in conferences, meetings, and workshops to draw attention to the importance of working wet meadows, cross-boundary collaboration, and multi-species efforts to expedite conservation.

January – June 2020 Highlights *(continued)*:

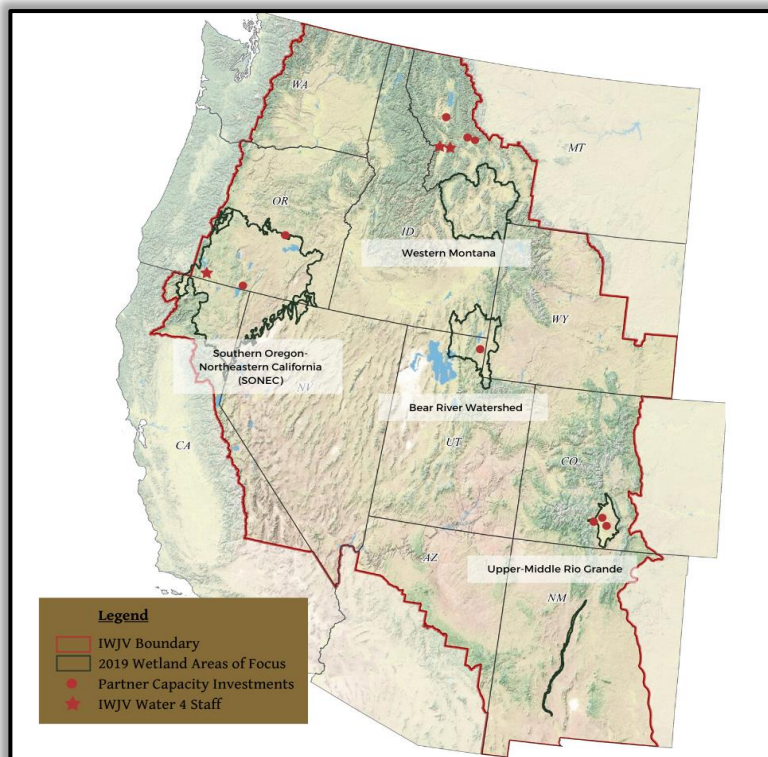
- Increased field delivery capacity for conservation implementation through innovative funding mechanisms and partnerships; to date, Water 4 has established or supported 12 community-based, partner-hosted positions focused on implementing Water 4's objectives in the Rio Grande, Bear River, Western Montana, Upper Colorado River Basin, SONEC, and Klamath Basin landscapes.
- Created opportunities for new collaborations in and across areas of wetland importance through field tours, networking, and information sharing.
- Traveled to Washington, D.C. in February 2020 to meet with key members of Congress and federal agency leadership to share the Water 4 vision, early successes, and plans for the future.
- Developed powerful communications regarding agricultural flood-irrigation, migratory birds, and partnership-driven and community-based conservation, including new content that was shared by partners such as the Family Farm Alliance, Network for Landscape Conservation, and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.
- Completed groundbreaking research led by IWJV and University of Montana that calls out a need to maintain the connectivity of continental waterbird flyways through the conservation of resilient wetland landscapes.
- Supported collaboration across boundaries (e.g., San Luis Valley/Middle Rio Grande) by bringing partners together via field tours, networking, webinars, and information sharing.
- Strengthened relationships between state and local NRCS offices and NGO conservation partners, resulting in new funding sources for habitat conservation and expanded/expedited conservation between organizations.
- Initiated Water 4 "branding" to help partners clearly articulate the Water 4 approach, communicate the importance of sustaining connectivity at the flyway scale across landscapes, and demonstrate that investments in individual geographies can have substantial flyway-level impact.
 - Water 4 is supporting partners who are developing RCPP proposals in key landscapes, through technical assistance and Water 4 branding that includes science and messaging, to strengthen proposals and further elevate Water 4 as a guiding principle.



Successes in Key Water 4 Landscapes

Bear River Watershed (ID, UT, WY)

- Developed a [partnership with the Western Native Trout Initiative](#) to incorporate native trout (like the Bear River's Bonneville Cutthroat Trout) conservation into Water 4 efforts. The partnership is designed to accelerate conservation for both migratory birds and native trout fisheries across the Intermountain West, and is focused on the Bear River at present.
- Delivered newly developed wetland resiliency science and practical application guidance to Bear River Watershed partners (see the [webinar](#)).
- Catalyzed partner investments to support a new partner position hosted by the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust. The position will be filled in late summer/early fall 2020 and work across geopolitical boundaries to expedite conservation easement investments, leverage partnerships, and pursue multi-partner funding opportunities.



SONEC, including the Klamath Basin

- Continued implementation of the SONEC RCPP; a notable accomplishment was helping land trust partners [secure a conservation easement on the Elysian Creek Ranch](#) using RCPP ACEP-ALE funding. The RCPP is set to expire in September 2021 and we expect to meet and exceed several goals, including the number of acres in new conservation easements.
- Initiated a communications series focused on collaborative conservation efforts in the Klamath Basin.
- Worked closely with IWJV Management Board members to build new partnerships in the Klamath Basin for communications, science, investments in irrigated agriculture, and expanded coordination between NRCS and FWS.



Rio Grande Corridor (CO, NM)

- Created a [Soil Conservationist/Civil Engineering Technician capacity position](#) within the NRCS Alamosa Field Office to support needed flood irrigation infrastructure projects for farmers and ranchers in the San Luis Valley.
 - Targeted Conservation Project (TCP) funding administered by this position was approved in March for \$200,000. Nine out of ten applicants were pre-approved for TCP funds in June, contracts were created in July, and structure surveys are now underway.
- Brought partners from the Upper and Middle Rio Grande together for a three-day tour to develop relationships, transfer conservation lessons across geographies, and connect the flyway-scale relevance of conservation projects in the corridor.
- Invested in communications—an in-production video series—to elevate the importance of the Rio Grande Corridor on a flyway scale and build a message of connectivity between the Upper and Middle Rio Grande.



Western Montana

- Developed an interagency agreement with NRCS Montana State Office that provides funding for capacity, communications, science, and partnership development.
- Facilitated a new partnership between the Blackfoot Challenge, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, NRCS Montana State Office, and the IWJV to further develop capacity for partnerships between agriculture and conservation organizations and expedite conservation.
- Developed communications highlighting the unique conservation partnerships in the Big Hole Valley.
- Initiated efforts to integrate science into NRCS planning activities and facilitated conversations with partners and NRCS Montana State Office to identify synergies in conservation planning and funding to continue to leverage investments.

Field Delivery Capacity

Field delivery capacity is a conservation bottleneck that has become readily apparent in recent years. In many instances, a lack of capacity means project dollars are left unexpended and conservation goals are unattained. In the first half of 2020, Water 4 addressed this concerning trend by driving funding to support the following full-time capacity:

- Bear River Watershed: Conservation Coordinator (to be filled in late summer/early fall 2020)
- Western Montana: Resource Conservationist, Lake County Conservation District
- Rio Grande Corridor: Civil Technician (partner position), NRCS Alamosa Field Office
- SONEC: [Lake and Harney County Partner Positions](#)

We also strengthened the existing field delivery capacity of key partner organizations to implement wetland and water conservation consistent with Water 4:

- Western Montana: Blackfoot Challenge’s Water Steward, Land Steward, and Resource Conservationist; Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited’s Coordinator
- Rio Grande Corridor: Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project’s Intern; Wetland Dynamics LLC’s Focal Area Committee Coordination



In the Bear River Watershed, the IWJV cultivated a new model of capacity investment in which a set of funders provided money directly to Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust to establish a Conservation Coordinator position. The IWJV created the relationship between the funders and Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust for this long-term partnership. In the future, the IWJV anticipates using this model more frequently in other geographies where there is an identified cross-boundary need.

Filling these positions helps IWJV partners support and expand conservation efforts that align and fulfill the Water 4 mission. Furthermore, the IWJV’s adaptability is a resource for partners facing funding uncertainty in the pandemic. New digital methods to provide science and support are emerging rapidly, and the IWJV’s flexibility allows it to be quick to adopt many of these tools to assist partners in pursuit of funding.

FY 2020 conservation delivery accomplishments will be rolled up and reported in the next semi-annual report, completed in January 2021.

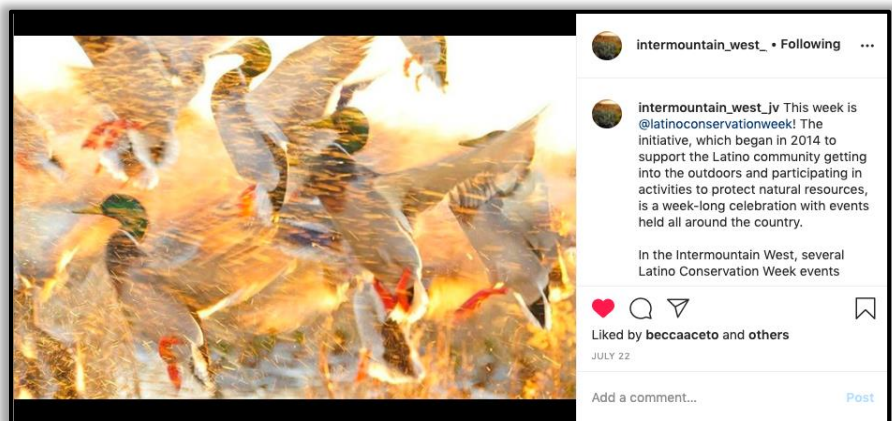
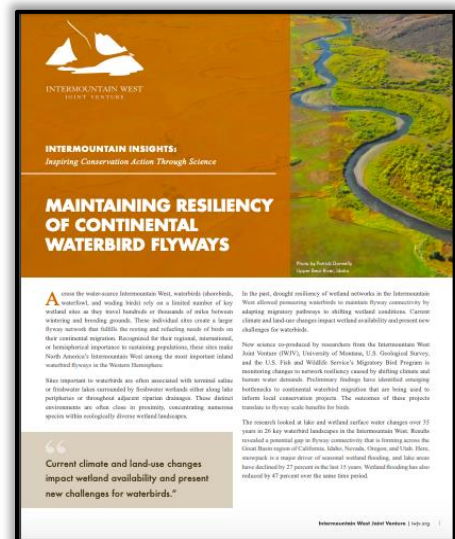
Communications & Outreach

Water 4 strives to develop effective communications to help the agricultural community tell the story of the value of working wet meadows in the Intermountain West and destigmatize flood irrigation practices. Ultimately, Water 4 communicates the stories of local conservation successes, challenges, and opportunities on a flyway scale.

Successful communications initiatives in the first half of 2020 have included:

- **Klamath Basin Series**
 - These articles are intended to highlight the partnership of agriculture and the FWS refuges in the Klamath Basin, from programs like co-op farming, leased lands, and Walking Wetlands; to irrigation cooperation among water users; to the links between the Klamath Basin, California’s Central Valley, and the SONEC landscape; to the importance of all three areas as critical habitat within the Pacific Flyway.
 - The ultimate goal of these articles is to focus attention on collaboration among both local farmers and land managers in the Basin and policy makers outside of the Basin.
 - The three published articles, [“Back from the Brink,”](#) [“Farming and Wetlands Coexist in the Klamath Basin,”](#) and [“Woven Together by Water: Ecosystems, Communities, and Irrigation in the Klamath Basin”](#) reached target audiences via the IWJV website, social media accounts, and e-newsletters, as well as partner organization email announcements.

- **[Beyond the Banks: Collaborative Conservation in Montana's Big Hole Valley](#)**
 - This article frames Arctic grayling conservation efforts in the Big Hole Valley as a landowner- and agency driven collaborative conservation effort. The article elevates the voices of landowners and local partners working on multi-species conservation and whole-ecosystem conservation that benefits agriculture.
 - The goal of this article is to portray a local conservation success story as a model for any community in the Intermountain West.
 - The article continues to reach target audiences via the IWJV website, social media accounts, and e-newsletters, as well as in various partner newsletters and social media feeds. Two months after its release, it remains the most viewed article on the IWJV website.
- **[Private Lands Conservation: Success Stories & Tools](#)**
 - This webpage on IWJV.org provides a round-up of private lands conservation resources offered by the IWJV and partners.
- **[Intermountain Insights](#)**
 - The IWJV distills conservation-relevant science for practitioners through its *Intermountain Insights* series. These brief publications summarize and contextualize studies published by the IWJV's science team and research partners, and explain the science's application.
 - Recent Intermountain Insights include:
 - ["Maintaining Resiliency of Continental Waterbird Flyways,"](#) which breaks down a study on wetland resiliency in the Intermountain West;
 - ["Digging Deeper into Flood Irrigation,"](#) which explores a human dimensions study of ranchers' perspectives of flood irrigation;
 - and ["Working Science for Working Landscapes,"](#) explores the importance of synchronizing private and public wetland management to enhance seasonal availability of water for migratory bird habitat.
- Maintained a social media presence on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to draw attention to IWJV and partner communications efforts, with an average of five posts per week on each platform highlighting IWJV/partner successes and relevant information.



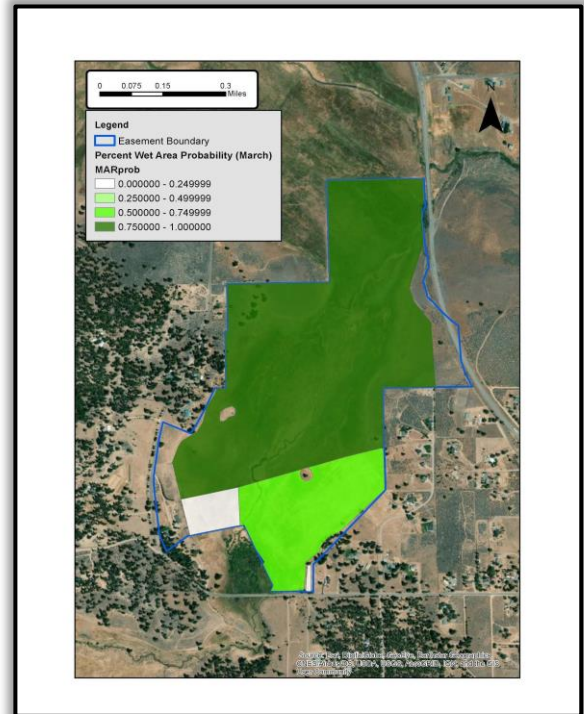
Above: An example of a wetland-themed Instagram post on the IWJV account (@intermountain_west_jv).

Science & Technical Transfer

IWJV wetland and waterbird science continued to inform and accelerate conservation in early 2020, with long-term research investments poised to pay partner dividends in the coming months. Emerging science includes insight into the values of private lands when considering public lands management, a road map to conserving flyway resiliency, quantifying wildlife benefits on private land, and the development of tools to improve conservation outcomes.

Science and technical transfer in the first half of 2020 has included:

- **Groundbreaking research** with University of Montana scientists that calls out a need to maintain the connectivity of continental waterbird flyways through the conservation of resilient wetland landscapes. The results of the research provide decision support tools to Water 4 which will, in turn, allow partners in key landscapes to improve long-term resource investment strategies. IWJV science and Water 4 staff are developing workshops to put new information in the hands of partners. Web-based conservation planning tools linked to this work are anticipated in 2021.
- **A five-year sandhill crane ecology and conservation study** led by IWJV scientists and flyway partners (Jeff Knetter, Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Jim Gammonley, Colorado Parks and Wildlife). Outcomes will be integrated into state and flyway level planning and directly address [Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies](#) science objectives that inform conservation in 10 western states.
- **Intermountain West white-faced Ibis research** under the leadership of Master's student Shea Coons and the advice of University of Montana faculty and IWJV science staff. Coons presented an update of her research during an Idaho chapter of the Wildlife Society session moderated by Idaho State Conservation Partnership (SCP) Co-Chair Jay Carlisle of Boise State University.
- **A science partnership** between the University of Montana and the IWJV that connected students to state wildlife agencies. By acting as a faculty affiliate to the UM Wildlife Program, IWJV science staff are leveraging new capacity by delivering science through student-led research. This approach allows the IWJV to meet a growing request for science and provide opportunities for students. Students are currently working with Wyoming Game and Fish (Ian Tator, SCP Co-Chair) and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (Russ Norvell, Pacific Flyway Nongame Technical Committee) to develop wetland resiliency data that informs state habitat management planning in Wyoming and improving web-based waterbird tracking and habitat tools in Utah, respectively.



Above: A decision support tool showing wetland change on a Northern California ranch was made possible by science analyzing wetland change over three decades. The property was secured by a conservation easement through use of this data.

Science & Technical Transfer *(continued)*

- **A wetland ecology and monitoring analysis** that will help close the gap on wetland conservation throughout Oregon. The report and research data are to be finalized late summer 2020.
- **A proposal for [New Mexico wetland ecology and monitoring](#)** was approved by NRCS New Mexico State Office and implementation began in June 2020.
- **Development of a wetland toolbox** (web application) and state-level workshop(s) was identified by Nevada science partners as a priority. The potential for further collaborative opportunities is ongoing.

Looking to the next six months

As the IWJV develops its 2021 Annual Operational Plan, Water 4 anticipates expanding into new areas of work in the coming year. The strategies include:

- Build capacity, leverage resources, and engage diverse partners in geographies of significance.
- Drive conservation delivery funding to Water 4 landscapes by sharing a larger flyway connectivity story.
- Expand wetland dynamics science and facilitate technical transfer of decision-support systems.

A note on adaptation in the time of COVID-19

The pandemic necessitated that the IWJV consider its operations in a virtual world, for both the immediate future and as an evolutionary outcome of advances in technology. Meetings and conferences immediately went virtual, so we quickly took to new tools, forums, and virtual ways of doing business. We recognized the loss of “meeting people where they are” in the field, but strived for advances in innovation, acknowledging that we are still “meeting people where they are” in their conservation needs.

As a result, Water 4 staff has had an unexpected opportunity to explore new projects that would not have been prioritized without the emphasis on digital communications and remote networking created by the pandemic. These projects have included:

- Framing the Water 4 branding to better align with sagebrush conservation efforts to emphasize the importance of whole-landscape conservation.
- Doubling down on Water 4 support of on-the-ground partners.
- Identifying new funding opportunities in focal areas and sharing these opportunities with partners.



Above: Exploring the incorporation of technologies like Zoom into our partner outreach has been an exciting challenge for the IWJV in the first half of 2020.

- Expanding Water 4 reach in Colorado through attending Colorado Basin Roundtables and investing in Ducks Unlimited efforts in the state.
- Experimenting with and adopting new tools and technologies for communicating with IWJV partners and staff, as well as for sharing stories of Water 4 partner successes.

We anticipate exploring and implementing new methods of delivery to our partners in the second half of 2020 for the benefit of our partnership and for collaborative migratory bird conservation in the Intermountain West. A few of the things Water 4 looks forward to in the second half of the year include:

- Adopting innovative virtual tools and technologies to bring partners together for sharing new information, resources, and science across boundaries.
- Incorporating new voices and partners in discussions at local and state levels.
- Transferring current technology and science to on-the-ground practitioners and land managers.
- Emphasizing communications that seek common ground, as well as stories of transferring lessons across geographies.