

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Twin Falls County, 208.734.9590, Fax: 208.734.9591
630 Addison Ave. W., Suite 1600, Twin Falls, ID 83301

Working together to improve water quality

The Situation

A Confined Animal Feed Operation application was made by a sturgeon farm to the Gooding County Planning and Zoning Commission to increase their permitted animal units from 30,000 pounds to 200,000 pounds. This occurred after the transfer of the aquaculture facility from one lease to another and from rainbow trout to sturgeon. At the time of the application, the sturgeon was producing about 200,000 pounds. The application was opposed by neighbors who objected based on poor effluent water quality from the farm that contributed to sedimentation in the creek. At a public hearing, neither side could come to an agreement, and the Planning and Zoning Commission felt it did not have sufficient information to make a decision. The Planning and Zoning Commission decided, and all parties agreed, to have University of Idaho Extension conduct an assessment of the situation and to submit a report with recommendations to resolve the situation.

Our Response

The watershed in question, with associated properties, is a complex system with regard to water diversions. Several site visits were made to assess the situation on the sturgeon farm and within the watershed. A University of Idaho Extension Educator collected data from the farm and watershed that included water quality, water flows, and water diversions. During the site visits, the Extension Educator met with all parties to discuss the situation. Following the collection of information and data analysis, a report of recommendations for improved water quality regarding modification of the existing aquaculture CAFO that included an assessment of the farm and watershed was produced and distributed to all parties including the Gooding County Planning and Zoning Commis-



Photo by Brad Beckman.

sion. After distribution of the report, all parties and the Planning and Zoning Commission attended a tour of the farm and watershed, where the Extension Educator explained the report and provided information for an informed decision by the Planning and Zoning Commission. After the tour, a public hearing was held to make a determination on the request by the sturgeon farm for a 200,000 animal unit CAFO permit.

Program Outcomes

The Planning and Zoning Commission approved the CAFO modification for 175,000 pounds with the requirement that the farm implement the recommendations for improving effluent water quality from the farm. This included construction of a by-pass to divert flow, better management practices for improved maintenance, and cleaning of the settling pond and installation of a settling basin to settle and capture solids in a rearing pond.

Implementation and Improvements

Implementation of the recommendations, as required by the Commission, will improve water quality on the farm and in the watershed. Improved water quality in the watershed maintains property values and enhances recreational usage. Improved water quality on the farm promotes fish health and production. An indirect economic benefit is that the approved CAFO modification allows the farm to retain the same number of employees.

Economic Impact

The direct economic impact to the sturgeon farm as a result of being permitted for 175,000 pounds versus 30,000 pounds is estimated at \$3.68 million gross revenue from meat and caviar production.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Gary Fornshell, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Twin Falls County
630 Addison Avenue West, Suite 1600
Twin Falls, ID 83301
Phone: 208.734.9590
Fax: 208.734.9591
E-mail: gaforsh@uidaho.edu

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