By STEVE STEUERNER Life on the Range

The Lemhi River meanders for 60 miles through a big valley in this quiet corner of Eastern Idaho before it flows into the Salmon River. Motorists on Idaho Highway 28 might marvel at the wide-open spaces and peaceful, bucolic scenes, with sp indlers watering hay fields, cattle grazing and sandhill cranes roaming in tall grass meadows.

Here, local ranchers have been working closely with fish experts and conservation professionals for more than 25 years to improve fish habitat for salmon and steelhead, migrating fish that travel more than 800 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Even before the fish were protected under the Endan-

gaged Species Act in the early 1990s, Lemhi ranchers wanted to do their part to save the fish.

“We used to go down to catch salmon all the time,” says Don Olson, a Lemhi rancher who has been involved since the beginning. “It was a big deal when we kids. We used to come down to this pool here, and the salmon would lodge in here, and man you’d ride ‘em and chase ‘em, and do all kinds of fun stuff.”

Over the last 25 years, Lemhi ranchers have teamed up with state and federal agen-
cies to create primo spawning and rearing habitat for these magnificent fish. Major mile-
stones include:

• 130 conservation projects and counting
• Minimum stream flows for fish passage at L-6, the main Lemhi River diversion.
• Preserving working lands and open space forever — nearly 30,000 acres of prime spawning areas protected via conservation easements.
• Over 50 miles of riparian fencing.
• Restoring water flows to 12 tributary streams, opening up 50+ miles of spawning habitat for Chinook salmon and 40+ miles of spawning habitat for steelhead.
• Installing 110+ fish screens at irrigation diversion to keep coho salmon in the river.
• Replacing 50+ water transactions that restored water to tributary streams in the main Lemhi River.
• Dozens of water efficie-
cy projects to save precious water for fish, increase crop yields and reduce labor.
• Installing 40+ irrigation diversions with fish-friendly weirs.
• All this, while ensuring that working ranches remain viable.

Major funding from the Bonneville Power Admin-
istration, Pacific Coastal Fish Specifications, Bureau of Reclaim-
ation, Idaho Fish and Game, and many others has been instrumental for the conser-
vation investments. At least an estimated $75 million has been invested in conservation projects basin-wide.

Everything starts with the tremendous cooperation be-
tween ranchers in the valley and conservation profes-
sionals who coordinate projects. All of the conservation work is voluntary. With 90% of the spawning habitat located on private lands, cooperation with landowners is vital.

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By SALLY KRUTZIG Soup Kitchen

Every year, both the Salvation Army and Soup Kitchen put on Thanksgiving meals for the community. This year, the organi-

tions saw their highest turnout yet. Both saw a more than 30% increase in people looking for a warm Thanksgiving meal.

“It was a lot more than we usually have,” said Orpha Moody of the Salvation Army. Last year, the Salvation Army served approx-
imately 700 people. This year it served 927. “This was also the first time it didn’t rain or snow, a perfect day for outdoor dining.”

In 2019, tables were set inside the Elk Lodge for indoor dining. In contrast, this year the Salvation Army handed out dinners to people in vehicles.

“A patron receives a Thanksgiving day meal from the Idaho Falls Community Outreach Center on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020.”

“It was the first time we did the drive through, and that was pretty suc-
cessful. … When we first started, there was a long line, but then we figured out how to do it more efficiently so it wasn’t too long a wait,” said Moody.

Much of the food was donated by the Idaho Falls community. Re-
tailers held a turkey drive that raised nearly 60 turkeys. Shari’s Cafe and Pies, Perkins and First Presbyterian Church don-
ated the pumpkin pies.

However, the Salvation Army did see a decrease in the number of vol-
unteers it usually has on Thanksgiving, with most volunteers citing COVID-19 as the reason for their staying away. “These volunteers were willing to do anything. They knew they didn’t have as many people as usual, so they stayed all day. Some stood out in the cold. They were amazing,” Moody said.

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By KYLE PFANNENSTIEL

A push for people to become pen pals of long-term care resi-

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ing across the state. The state Commission on Aging put out a call last week asking people to write to letters to nearly long-term care centers addressed to “Any Resident.”

“Although most centers here had virtual visitation with family since the beginning (of the coro-
navirus pandemic), and many have begun gaundered in-person visitation, many residents have not seen a face without a mask in months,” agency spokesperson Janet Miller wrote in a news release.

The call for letter-writing comes three weeks after the Post Register published a story about how assisted living centers and nursing homes in eastern Idaho have begun similar pen pal pro-

gram.

“It’s very hard mentally to be in our room,” a one of the first residents who signed up for the program said. The pandemic news, this week, in eastern Idaho.

1. BY THE NUMBERS

Hospitalizations reached new highs this week for COVID-19 patients being treated in eastern Idaho hospitals on Wednesday; 65 were eastern Idahoans.

Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center was treating 50 virus patients on both Tuesday and Wednesday.

Our hospital continued to op-

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* More COVID | A3

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