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Written by Jeremy Bennett

Water Knows No Boundaries

MOSCOW, Idaho – Mark Solomon's passion comes to the surface when the topic of jurisdictionally complex water basins comes up. He's been working on water issues in Idaho and across the nation for more than 30 years, and now is part of a UI team focusing on the Lapwai Creek watershed on the Nez Perce Reservation.

Solomon, a University of Idaho graduate student, has taken his academic research into water issues to the next level through the unique Waters of the West program, known as WoW. The UI program is revolutionizing the management of water issues by blending engineering, science, management, policy, law, philosophy, social science, and other disciplines to both define a basin problem and identify solutions. Not only are graduate students being taught how to effect this interdisciplinary approach but WoW faculty and students are teaming with communities to help solve real and pressing water challenges.

One faculty member has observed that he has never seen any program in the country with the level of interdisciplinarity present in WoW. It is the only program in the nation to offer concurrent J.D. and Ph.D., or J.D. and master's degrees in water resources and one of few to offer master's and doctoral degrees in water resources in multiple fields..

Solomon recently received a \$31,000 per year fellowship from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) program to help his studies on minimizing jurisdictional barriers of water basins with complex ownership.

“Waters of the West allows me to research the complex issues of water resources from a true interdisciplinary approach,” Solomon said. “My research focuses on developing transferable tools and skills necessary to help stakeholders achieve the goals of the federal Clean Water Act, so all of the nation's waters are fishable and swimmable, particularly when jurisdictional goals differ within a given watershed.”

Solomon is part of a WoW team of faculty and students from across disciplines who are helping stakeholders in the Lapwai Creek watershed. As a member of the team, Solomon will be involved in face-to-face meetings with watershed landowners and managers to hear their views and concerns of what should be done. He and team members will also be reviewing local laws, regulations and programs to identify jurisdictional barriers and explore areas of compromise across those jurisdictional lines.

The team will gauge the knowledge of those living on the river as a path to finding the best way to bring about a unified vision to protect it.

“The WoW team, led by UI law professor Barbara Cosens and UI professor of fisheries and aquatic science Brian Kennedy, was invited to work on the Nez Perce Reservation because of the issues arising between tribal and non-tribal owners living on the reservation,” Solomon said. “Tribal members have sustenance and spiritual issues tied to the waters and non-tribal entities need to divert water for irrigation of crops and residences. I hope that the team's work can help bring together a unified vision to protect the water and the people, fish, plants and animals that depend on it.”

More information about Waters of the West is available online at <http://water.uidaho.edu> More information about Solomon's GRO fellowship is available online at http://es.epa.gov/ncer/fellow/recipients/gro_fellow08.html.

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