

People & Places

Software aids wildfire recovery plans

Keith Weber uses satellite photos to help planners develop strategies

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Thanks to an advanced mapping system called RECOVER, fire recovery specialists were already developing rehabilitation plans for Idaho's massive Soda wildfire while it was still burning.

Keith Weber, director of Idaho State University's Geographic Information System Training and Research Center, was the lead investigator in developing the cloud-based software, which quickly assembles satellite imagery and informational "layers" from several sources to overlay on a fire map.

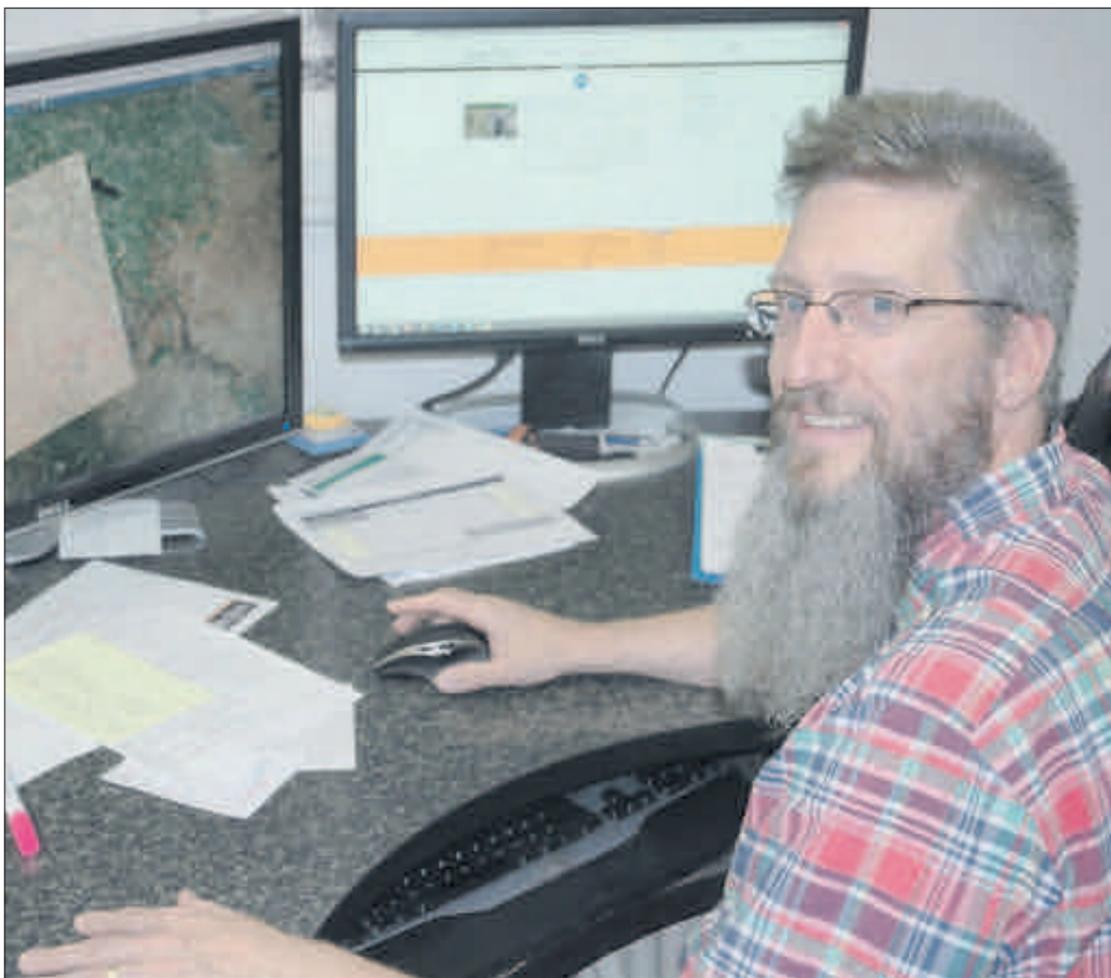
RECOVER's 21 existing datasets cover critical topics for fire restoration such as soil type, wildlife habitat, vegetation and topography.

Weber started work on RECOVER in 2012 with a grant from NASA's applied sciences program, which seeks to find practical uses for its satellite and computer technology to benefit the public. Working closely with the Bureau of Land Management and the Idaho Department of Lands, he tested RECOVER on six Idaho fires in 2013. This summer, in the first season of a three-year NASA grant to further refine RECOVER, Weber's system was used on its first large wildfire, the 283,000-acre Soda fire in Western Idaho.

"What we've learned is even with a fire of that size, RECOVER can easily handle that," Weber said.

On such large fires, he estimates RECOVER can save land managers up to four days of work assembling data and maps from a host of different sources, making certain all of the information is up-to-date and in a common format.

Michael Kuyper, a BLM supervisory natural resource specialist in southeast Idaho, said his agency has three



Keith Weber, Idaho State University's Geographic Information System director, shows maps of the recent Soda wildfire using RECOVER computer mapping technology he developed for use by agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management in more quickly developing fire recovery plans. The technology was funded by a NASA grant.

Western Innovator Keith Weber

Age: 49

Family: Wife, Soo, and son, Dustin

Hometown: Chubbuck, Idaho

Occupation: Director of Idaho State University's GIS Training and Research Center

Education: Bachelor's degree in environmental science, field biology and ecology from the University of Wisconsin and a master's degree in wildlife biology from the University of Montana

Innovation: The RECOVER mapping system, used by the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies to more quickly assess wildfire damage so rehabilitation plans can be developed



weeks to submit a rehabilitation plan and make funding requests after a fire is extinguished. Kuyper, who has worked closely with Weber on fine-tuning RECOVER, said the technology stands to help the agency meet report deadlines more easily and more quickly get seed and straw on the ground in prior-

ity areas.

Kuyper hopes Weber will add additional RECOVER layers for grazing allotments and rangeland improvements. He's particularly eager for Weber to complete a reporting function, which should provide land managers instant statistics, such as miles of fence line and num-

bers of cattle troughs within a burn area, simply by checking boxes, rather than cutting and pasting from GIS images to obtain figures manually. Kuyper said having access to RECOVER on hand-held devices will also enable BLM workers to update recovery maps while in the field, rather than taking GPS data back to the office to be uploaded.

Kuyper said RECOVER maps upload much faster than the current system, can be used by employees who aren't experts in GIS software and can be accessed from the "cloud" — the term computer experts use to describe applications and data kept on large computer servers linked to the Internet — by devices without downloading software.

Weber said RECOVER will also be used to evalu-

ate fuel loads in burn areas during the months preceding fires and for long-term monitoring of rehabilitated areas.

John L. Schnase, Weber's co-investigator at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, said RECOVER was developed for fire rehabilitation, but agencies have recognized it has applications before, during and after fires.

"Right now, we've been focusing on Idaho, but over the next three years we want to use this in other Western states," Schnase said.

Schnase emphasized RECOVER fills a niche and will likely be among many data systems used by fire managers.

Schnase also hopes to use climate model data in RECOVER to predict precipitation, temperature and soil moisture over time.

Montana lawmakers press federal agencies to explain road closures

By ALISON NOON
Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — Montana lawmakers prodded federal officials Wednesday for facts and reasons explaining the closure of roads on public lands around the state.

Members of the Environmental Quality Council took their first look at data detailing road access at a quarterly meeting in Helena.

Information from the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service shows a significant portion of the roughly 32,000 miles of federally controlled roads in

Montana are closed to cars, trucks and snowmobiles.

Sponsor of the legislative study, Rep. Kerry White, was concerned the road closures total more than 9,000 miles, an estimate that was confirmed by legislative researcher Joe Kolman.

White and other Republicans on the council contend the agencies are mismanaging public roads. But federal officials who attended the meeting said the roads are closed for routine reasons ranging from wildlife preservation to the protection of water quality.

"I can say no roads have

been closed for the sole reason of inability to maintain it," said George Bain, a regional director at the Forest Service. "They're purposefully closed."

Road access may be increased if competing conservation and recreation industries could strike a balance, Bain said.

Representatives of various wilderness organizations suggested the federal agencies need financial or tactical support. Bain disagreed.

"It's not a budget problem. But there are budget considerations in there — trade-offs like which roads

are to be closed when," Bain said. "We have to close that gap of what we want to have, need to have and can afford to have."

For White, a closed public road is oxymoronic. "I don't think the public knows the extent of what they've lost," he said.

White said his constituents have voiced anxiety over accessing public lands for hunting, fishing, berry picking and firewood collection. He said he worries the road closures could affect wildfire management.

"I'd like to see the state partner with the federal agen-

cies to try to keep some of these accesses open," he said.

White said the inquiry into road access is unrelated to other proposals of his aimed at transferring federal lands to state control.

Committee Chairman Sen. Gene Vuckovich has said the Environmental Quality Council will not take up the issue of federal-to-state land transfers during his tenure.

The roads study will continue through 2016. Any resulting bills would have to pass the Legislature as a whole and receive the governor's signature.

Calendar

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www.capitalpress.com and click on "submit an event." Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301.

Saturday, Sept. 19

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Mount Angel Oktoberfest, 11 a.m.-11:55 p.m. Mount Angel, Ore. 1-855-899-6338. Mount Angel's Oktoberfest celebrates 50 years, bringing together 350,000 people to celebrate the harvest.

Pendleton Round-Up, all day, Pendleton Round-Up Grounds, Pendleton, Ore.

Sunday, Sept. 20

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Mount Angel Oktoberfest, 11 a.m.-11:55 p.m. Mount Angel, Ore.

Monday, Sept. 21

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Tuesday, Sept. 22

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Small-Scale Equipment Field Day, noon-6 p.m., Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture, Corvallis, Ore. 541-766-3556. This event will allow participants to connect with multiple toolmakers and suppliers, try tools out, see equipment in action and ask questions.

Wednesday, Sept. 23

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Thursday, Sept. 24

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Friday, Sept. 25

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events

Center, Puyallup.

Saturday, Sept. 26

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Sunday, Sept. 27

Washington State Fair, 10 a.m., Washington State Fair Events Center, Puyallup.

Saturday, Oct. 3

Alpaca Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, Sherwood, 503-628-2023. Two farms, one convenient location.

Sunday, Oct. 4

Alpaca Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, Sherwood, 503-628-2023. Two farms, one convenient location.

Wednesday, Oct. 7

Trailing of the Sheep Festival, 9 a.m., Sun Valley, Ketchum and Hailey, Idaho.

Thursday, Oct. 8

Trailing of the Sheep Festival, 9 a.m., Sun Valley,

Ketchum and Hailey, Idaho.

Friday, Oct. 9

Trailing of the Sheep Festival, 9 a.m., Sun Valley, Ketchum and Hailey, Idaho.

Saturday, Oct. 10

Trailing of the Sheep Festival, 9 a.m., Sun Valley, Ketchum and Hailey, Idaho.

Sunday, Oct. 11

Trailing of the Sheep Festival, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, Sherwood, 503-628-2023. Two farms, one convenient location.

Friday, Oct. 30

Washington State Sheep Producers Annual Convention, 8 a.m., Marriott Courtyard, Walla Walla.

Saturday, Oct. 31

Washington State Sheep Producers Annual Convention, 8 a.m., Marriott Courtyard, Walla Walla.

Thursday, Nov. 5

American Agri-Women National Convention, DoubleTree Hotel,

South Portland, Maine.

Friday, Nov. 6

American Agri-Women National Convention, DoubleTree Hotel, South Portland, Maine.

Saturday, Nov. 7

American Agri-Women National Convention, DoubleTree Hotel, South Portland, Maine.

Sunday, Nov. 8

American Agri-Women National Convention, DoubleTree Hotel, South Portland, Maine.

Thursday, Nov. 12

Oregon Water Law Conference, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hilton Executive Tower, Portland, Ore.

Friday, Nov. 13

Oregon Water Law Conference, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hilton Executive Tower, Portland, Ore.

Friday, Nov. 20

Denim & Diamonds Auction, Dinner & Awards, 5-10 p.m. Oregon Convention Center, Portland, 503-595-9121.

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