This project was initiated by a class field trip to the Lapwai Watershed on Oct. 2. The trip, which included students from two other University of Idaho College of Natural Resources classes, was guided by Dr. Brian Kennedy, of CNR’s department for Fish and Wildlife Resources, along with WR 506 professors Dr. Jan Boll and Barbara Cosens. The field trip started at Spalding, where Lapwai Creek cuts through the Nez Perce National Historical Park, about one-quarter mile upstream of its confluence with the Clearwater River. Kennedy gave a brief overview of the watershed as well as an historic backdrop.

From there the group traveled approximately five miles south to a field-study site on Lapwai Creek located between the towns of Lapwai and Sweetwater. The group observed UI graduate students conducting surveys of juvenile steelhead located in an approximately 100-stretch of Lapwai Creek. The graduate students displayed their various methods—capturing the fish and isolating the fish, flushing their digestive contents, implanting a microchip for tracking purposes, and returning the fish to the stream. Students also examined the geological, ecological, and biological contours of Lapwai Creek, viewing alluvial deposits in cut banks of the stream, habitat in the floodplain, and aquatic life in the streambed.

The last stop was at the Bureau of Reclamation/Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District diversion site, located approximately 10 miles south on Sweetwater Creek, a tributary of Lapwai Creek. The nearly century-old diversion, a concrete structure spanning Sweetwater Creek, feeds a gravity-flow system that is the primary source for one of LOID’s three reservoirs, Mann Lake. Kennedy explained how the diversion, which was built without fish passage, had eliminated a significant portion of the watershed’s steelhead habitat while affecting both streamflow and water temperature.