WEEDS, RANGELAND—Tim Prather uses high tech to help weed warriors streamline battles

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IDAHO WEED WARRIORS, when shown photos of new weed threats to Idaho, rarely ace Tim Prather’s test to identify Idaho’s newest noxious weeds. But, last week his well-attended weed-photo-quiz at the Idaho Weed Conference in Boise proved again to be a popular way to learn of Idaho’s newest and most worrisome noxious weed threats.

Professor of weed ecology at the University of Idaho, Prather doubles as the UI Extension scientist responsible for sharing the newest weed-fighting strategies statewide with weed associations and public agencies that spend some $300 million a year fighting Idaho’s invasive weeds. More than 60 noxious weeds degrade Idaho’s wildlife habitat and agricultural and recreational lands.

Prather’s design of computer models to strategically battle invaders recently won him induction to the Idaho Weed Control Association’s Hall of Fame. Their tribute credits Prather’s technology with “showing us all how to think about weed inventory in a new way. How does the weed seed travel? What is the likelihood the weed is adapted to the site? How likely is it that the weed will spread and how fast? All this can be explained through computer models,” the tribute continues. Prather’s focus on new weed threats “is a great resource. Tim does the hard work and can show us (teams on the ground) a map of where to look first.”

Prather also helped research Ventenata dubia, a wiregrass now degrading Idaho’s pastures and hayfields statewide. Infested timothy hay fields are excluded from export markets and devalued at home from $350 per ton for pure hay to $150 per infected ton. Prather and colleagues have found herbicides that kill Ventenata, but approval for their use in hay may still be 2 years away.

Meanwhile, Prather is assisting a Nez Perce tribal team of weed warriors to try to hold a barrier within the Frank Church Wilderness, preventing rush skeletonweed from crossing into Idaho’s Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and Montana. Prather helps the team to locate infestations and estimate where the weed will spread, based on wind currents and susceptible plant communities.

“Supporting Tim is money well spent,” says U.S. Forest Service’s Lynn Burton, Grangeville, who hired the Nez Perce team. “We spend $1 million a year just in Nez Perce National Forest fighting weeds. We hope Tim can help us hold the line. If this weed spreads into Montana, there’s nothing stopping it from reaching even the Dakotas.”

Where UI Rangeland Center members and Idaho ranchers meet on critical issues

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The University of Idaho Rangeland Center, formally established in August 2011 with 23 faculty members participating, is still in launch mode. But already faculty and staff have hosted dialogues between the center’s staff and area ranchers in five locations—Moscow, Boise, Twin Falls, Idaho Falls, and Salmon.

“Those seem to be a good mix for connecting with ranchers statewide,” said Karen Launchbaugh, center director and College of Natural Resources professor, who partners with scientists from her college plus the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and UI Extension.

“Rangeland research is ongoing, but we’re still getting infrastructure in place so our collabora-

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