

Monday November 14, 2005

Company puts down roots
Rexburg business produces sod for wetlands

By KENDRA EVENSEN kevensen@postregister.com

REXBURG -- It's an environmental elixir -- choking out weeds, preventing erosion and restoring wetlands.

"I'm shocked we don't have stiffer competition," said Jeff Klausmann, co-owner of Native Sod Solutions. He might in Europe, but in the United States, the technique is still catching on.

The three-year-old company specializes in wetland sod -- a coconut fiber mat vegetated with native grasses and grown in water. The mats control the growing conditions and let the grasses mature before rolling them out, which helps the roots spread faster, to choke out weeds and prevent erosion, Klausmann said.

The plants can survive in fluctuating water levels, giving Mother Nature a helping hand in restoring damaged habitats.

"It's good, old-fashioned environmental stewardship," he said.

Although others are using the technique, Klausmann believes Native Sod is the only U.S. company producing the sod on such a large scale. Native Sod sells more than a half-million plants every year, manager Matt Dowdell said.

"It's economy," Klausmann said. "We're really trying to lower the cost and put it in reach of potential customers."

And mass-producing the sod also allows the company to have it more readily available.

The company has sold the sod to customers as diverse as golf courses, homeowners looking to fix their ponds and government agencies -- who've used it for projects such as restoring damaged mining areas and establishing wildlife habitats.

Klausmann came up with the idea after seeing numerous areas damaged by gravel removal, grazing and natural occurrences.



Robert Bower / Post Register Ty Blacker of Native Sod Solutions, which is located west of Rexburg, said he is pleased to be providing materials that are used in reclamation projects. "Our wetlands are important," he said.



Robert Bower / Post Register Ty Blacker of Native Sod Solutions heads out to inspect the water level in one of the company's growing flats west of Rexburg. Shallow ponds of water-loving plants are fed hydroponically at Native Sod Solutions.



INSIDE • Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation hosting symposium / Shoptalk, A6 • This week's Business Calendar / A8

He used a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency and Teton County, Wyo., to study six techniques of establishing native plants in wetlands along the Snake River. He started the company after finding "real promise" in wetland sod.

"There's a lot of land in need of pretty special rehabilitation care," he said. "There's a big opportunity to try and rebuild particular habitats."

And he enjoys seeing the fisheries and wildlife habitats the company has helped create being utilized.

The company is already working in at least five states. It consults colleagues in the different areas to select native grasses that will grow there, he said.

Klausmann established the company in Rexburg so it would be close to his consulting business in Driggs, Intermountain Aquatics. Rexburg provided a longer growing season and more seasonal help, he said.

He's pleased with the results he's seen in the past three years and someday hopes to expand his business.

"I have lots of dreams," he said. "For sure I'm excited to expand. There's a need for this technology in a lot of different places," citing the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast as a particular example.

Upper Valley reporter/editor Kendra Evensen can be reached at the Post Register's Rexburg office at 656-0101.

On the INTERNET

Native Sod Solutions:

- www.wetlandsod.com



