

Winter 2012



The River Journal

A Missouri River Conservation Districts Council Publication

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Missouri River Conservation Districts Council Members

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 Tim Ouellette, NRCS

Local Common Sense Conservation for our "Mighty Mo"

CMR Tour—June 3, 2010

Please join us for an informative and educational tour of north Garfield County and the adjacent Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. The tour will begin at 9:00 AM at the VFW Hall in Jordan, MT with introductions followed by an overview of grazing management and fire research by Lance Vermeire, Rangeland Ecologist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service. The tour will then visit a privately-owned ranch, the CMR Refuge, and view a grazing allotment as well as portions of the salt cedar infestation that encircles the Fort Peck Reservoir. Transportation and food will be provided. Please RSVP to (406) 454-0056.

Save the Date—July 8th— De'ja' Vu River Rendezvous at Holter Lake

Last year's Rendezvous looked at the effects of wildfires and recreation on the Missouri River—and guess what? More fires went through the area last fall, so let's go back and see what has changed and what land managers are working on now. Call the Council office at (406) 454-0056 for more information.

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Mark Your Calendar:

- May 26—1-4p.m. BLM Meeting to discuss flow modifications at Tiber Dam to support cottonwood regeneration & pallid sturgeon on Upper Missouri River. 701 7th St. Ft. Benton, Mt.
- June 1-2— MACD Spring Board Meeting, Livingston, Mt.
- June 2nd— Missouri River CD Council Meeting, 7 p.m. Hilltop Cafe, Jordan, Mt.
- June 3rd—Missouri River CD Council Tour CMR Refuge & adjacent private lands, Starts 9 a.m. at the VFW Hall in Jordan, Mt. Cont. on pg 5



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Chat with the Chair....

A Note from Chairman Dana Darlington

As the rain and wind woke me up around 3:00 AM this morning, I thought maybe I would catch up on some sleep by sleeping in. Little did I realize my mind had different ideas and started thinking about all of the things I have put off, waiting for a rainy, snowy day, to get caught up on. I remembered that there should be a letter from the Chairman in the next Council newsletter, but instead of waiting till morning my mind kept thinking of all the Council has been involved in during the past year. And so I sit here typing instead of sleeping.

A year ago a group of us traveled to our Nation's Capitol for a series of meetings with the Corps, BLM, USFWS, FSA, NRCS, and some more of the alphabet soup that play politics every day. I, being a newcomer to such things, was very impressed with how the games are played and not so impressed with how slowly some changes are made. After returning home and stepping off the plane in Great Falls and then to the ranch to brand calves the next morning I remembered thinking that the day before I was leaving the hustle and bustle of Washington DC and today I am mounted on my favorite horse, roping calves out of a pen, and doing what needed to be done to ensure a healthy group of calves for fall delivery - all of which couldn't be done without the help of my neighbors. I had been home about a week or so and my cell phone rang and as I looked at the incoming call I saw it was a 202 area code and thought "hmmm..., strange". But as it turned out, it was for me and it was David Hoague with the FSA in Washington DC, wanting to know how to fix the Missouri-Madison Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) so that more producers would enroll in it. Being the cordial person that I am, I told him all of the things that we had discussed in DC with others about CREP. Now - one year, several meetings, and several drafts and rewritten drafts - and the changes necessary to make this program more appealing are nearing completion,

The other areas that we have been working on the past year or more are grazing on the CMR, working with the BLM to help put the Monument Resource Management Plan into play, touring the Granger Ranch and learning about their extensive CREP project, touring the Sterling Ranch and the neighboring Beartooth Wildlife Management Area near Holter Lake, cleaning-up trash and debris from Holter Lake, touring and advocating for a solution to the Whitmore Ravine, and participating in Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) meetings.

The CMR is a vast stretch of land - nearly 1.1 million acres of eastern Montana, including the UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge - all managed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Being that the council is made up of people from 15 Conservation Districts from the headwaters to the border, we discussed some of the issues facing the ranchers in those counties that border and depend on the CMR for economic survival. We decided that with the loss of grazing that seems to occur on an annual basis, we should learn more from the producers who depend on it for survival. So we traveled to Jordan and met with many of the permittees and producers in that area. The meeting was also well-attended by our state and federal legislative representatives as well as other community members. The Council has one seat on the CMR's Planning Team. We just received a copy of the draft alternatives for their new management plan and only have a couple of weeks to get through them and submit comments.

The tours of the Granger Ranch have provided great insight to the CREP and have helped us make decisions regarding changes that need to be enacted to make the CREP a more usable program for the rest of the Missouri River corridor up to the Fred Robinson bridge. Jeff Laszlo, Rob Hazlewood and many others who have done the work and have seen first-hand what works and what doesn't need to be commended for their efforts.

Working with the BLM on insuring grazing in the Monument and the rest of their plan goes into effect has been hampered by a couple of different lawsuits.

Council seeking to form Stakeholder Group for the Charles M. Russell Refuge



The Missouri River Conservation Districts Council, working with the Garfield County Conservation District and the Eastern Plains Resource Conservation and Development Council, is helping form a Stakeholder Group specific to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. The goal is to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss management of the Refuge, identify conflicts among user groups, agencies, and others; identify potential solutions to the conflicts; work to resolve conflicts; and provide a forum for increased understanding, cooperation, and partnership among the user groups, agencies, and others. Some of the issues that the group might delve into include: livestock grazing, hunting and wildlife management, access roads, wildfire concerns, and any other issue brought to the table. The group would likely include local landowners, grazing permittees, agency representatives, county commissioners, local business owners, outfitters, wildlife organizations, environmental groups, noxious weed experts, and others.

The Council was inspired during their tour of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Areas last summer, where they heard from Council Member Scott Blackman who owns land adjacent to the WMA and grazes livestock in the area. Scott stated "Years ago we didn't want a Wildlife Management Area next to us, now we consider them one of our best neighbors." Much of that increased goodwill is the result of 20 years of conversations and problem solving accomplished through their stakeholder group, the Devil's Kitchen Working Group. The group includes area landowners, recreators, sportsmen, agency representatives, and anyone else who wants to come to the meetings. They have no formal membership list and include anyone who is interested. Additionally, they have no formal ground rules or voting provisions - decisions are made and recommendations provided to agencies only when everyone at the table agrees. It may sound impossible, but this model works! For example, one of the group's early goals was to reach specific elk herd numbers in the area. Winter elk surveys now indicate that they are rapidly approaching those numbers. After discussion on all sides, the group agreed to pursue damage hunts in specific areas to lessen the impact of the herds on private lands.

Based on the success of the Devil's Kitchen Working Group, the Council hopes to form a similar group specific to the CMR Refuge. Thanks go to the Garfield County CD for sponsoring the project and to the Eastern Plain RC&D for agreeing to pursue it. The next step is to identify interested parties and hire a facilitator. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact the Council office at (406) 454-0056 or mrcdc@missouririvercouncil.info.

Blast from the Past....

Inspiring words about the Council from Dale Marxer...with introduction from Vicki Marquis, Council Coordinator

Two years after his passing, I'm cleaning my desk (a rare event) and I come across some small yellow papers full of thoughtful scribbles – I knew immediately the treasure I'd found was Dale Marxer's speech from the 2007 MACD Convention. Dale Marxer was a beloved Cascade County Conservation District supervisor for more than 50 years and one of the Council's "Founding Fathers". Here are the Council's humble beginnings, in Dale's words...



I was asked to give you a little insight about the Missouri River Council since I was one of the original Council Members. We first came up with a purpose:

We didn't want this to be a guessing game, we wanted any decisions we made to be based on the best scientific information available.

We felt that all Districts should be working together, sharing information. These 15 Districts cover a lot of different entities and concerns between here and the North Dakota border. We felt a unified approach was needed to accomplish this.

A unified approach is the only way we could get technical and financial assistance.

By Districts working together across boundaries, they can help a District solve a local problem.

This brings us to our Mission Statement:

To represent natural resource and environmental interests on the Missouri River. The Council believes the conservation of the river and the sustainability of its various uses can best be accomplished through grassroots collaboration, education, incentives, and voluntary action.

I look at this country as a living thing. Compare it to the human body – the Missouri River from here to St. Louis is a main artery through which the blood of agriculture, industry, municipalities, transportation, recreation... the list goes on and on....travels. If the Missouri at Three Forks would go dry, a huge segment of this country would wither and die.

Chat with the Chair Cont....

The Council has written letters of support standing behind the plan. We believe it is a very doable plan with such a vast array of interests for a multiple use area, there is something for all interested parties. There was a lot of give and take and countless Resource Advisory Council (RAC) and sub-RAC meetings to come up with the management plan. It should be put into place and see what comes out the other side.

The tour of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (WMA) last July was very impressive. It was spearheaded by Council Member Scott Blackman, who neighbors the area. We had a great day with Federal and State Legislators represented, as well as DNRC, FWP, BLM, USFWS and a host of other interested parties. We learned how coming to the table and talking about new ideas of working together and working for common goals can really happen. The Beartooth WMA allows cattle grazing and managers have found that since implementing some grazing techniques, the elk numbers have started coming back to levels before fires had pushed the elk off the area and onto private ground. We toured the Sterling Ranch and learned how managing timber harvest can help control the spread of fire as well as bark beetle infestations. When two vested interests join borders and decide to make a plan and follow through with the plan and after years of working together can stand up and say that each is their best neighbor, habitat is restored, timber saved, and cattle grazed, I would have to say that is conservation at its finest.

Whitmore Ravine has been a long time project of the Cascade County Conservation District and this Council has stood in support of their efforts to stop the erosion. When PPL Montana did some repairs on their dams near Great Falls I had a chance to see first-hand the ravine and the sediment that has been dumped into the Missouri River. It was really unbelievable to see that much sediment. The Cascade County Conservation District, Malmstrom Air Force Base, and the adjacent landowners have agreed on a plan to stop the erosion and we will continue to support and applaud their efforts.

The Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) eats a lot of Council Member Buzz Mattelin's and our Coordinator, Vicki Marquis' time. MRRIC meets quarterly to provide guidance and advice to the Army Corps of Engineers on their current and future recovery and restoration plans for the entire Missouri River basin. Of interest to Montanans is MRRIC's role in the Intake fish passage project on the Yellowstone River. The project is funded with Missouri River recovery funds and Buzz, Vicki, and the other Montana MRRIC members work hard to ensure that the project is not negatively impacted by MRRIC recommendations. Additionally, MRRIC will have a role in prioritizing the flow modification plans at the Fort Peck Dam as well as cottonwood regeneration projects throughout the corridor.

In January, Dean Rogge, Vicki Marquis, and I traveled back to DC for a series of meetings - 14 in three days to be exact. Once again, we met with some of the same people we met in 2009. Hopefully we are building relationships that will be beneficial to the Council and our local Conservation Districts, making sure the folks in DC don't forget about all of us at the grassroots level.

In a note of great sadness to all Council Members and others who have had the pleasure of working with and getting to know Vicki, she has decided to leave us this fall and enroll in Law School. I remember when I got elected Chairman, the nervousness and feeling of being overwhelmed must have been written on my face - Council Member, Buzz Mattelin said to me "don't worry Dana, Vicki will make you look good." Vicki is much appreciated and will be greatly missed, thanks for all you have done.

Last but not least there are a lot of groups who call themselves conservationists but really are nothing more than preservationists. A true conservation program involves using and managing the resources that are there, not setting them aside.

Thanks again to all Council Members who generously donate their time and effort to making life better for all to enjoy and make a living along the Missouri River.



Welcome to the Council

The Council welcomes the following new members:

- **Dennis Mitchell with the Blaine County Conservation District.**

Dennis Mitchell was born in Havre, Montana and attended school in Cleveland and Chinook. He was raised on the family ranch outside of Chinook where he is a 3rd generation rancher. Dennis and his wife of 19 years Tami and their 3 children, son Rusty and 2 daughters Jaycie and Dariane still reside there today. Dennis has served on the Cleveland school board and has been a member of the Blaine County Conservation District board since 2009. In addition to serving on the Missouri River CD Council, Dennis is also a member of the Milk River Conservation Board.

- **Dick Iversen with the Richland County Conservation District.**

Dick Iversen was raised on a grain-cattle ranch near Fairview Montana. He received a degree in Range Management from MSU Bozeman and worked for 35 years with NRCS in Dillon, Glasgow, Scobey, Culbertson, and Chinook. Dick began farming in 1983 and enjoy spending more time on the farm since retiring from NRCS in 2009. Dick works cattle and hay land. His irrigated farms rely 100% on the Missouri River to provide water to five pump site serving 950 acres of mostly center pivot irrigation. Dick currently serve on the Governor's Private Lands Public Wildlife Council, is an alternate to Buzz Mattelin on the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee, and is an Associate member of the Richland County Conservation District, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Foundation for Community Care in Sidney, Mt. Additionally, Dick remains active in the Lower Missouri River Coordinated Resource Management Group, a group he was involved with during his time with NRCS and was instrumental in helping the group achieve permits for Montana's first approved river dredge. Dick is and his wife Connie, who is also active in the community, have somehow also managed to find time to raise two successful children.

- **Tim Ouellette with NRCS.**

Tim Ouellette is currently the Assistant State Conservationist for Operations with the NRCS and brings 31 years of experience to the table. He has worked at 5 locations in Kansas, 2 in Idaho, 3 in Montana, and 3 in Colorado where he also farmed for 6 years. He has been married for 27 years and has 2 grown children. Tim enjoys outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping.

Missouri River Noxious Weed Mapping



June 26th, 2010

Join Missouri River Fly Fishers, the Pat Barnes Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Center for Aquatic Nuisance Species (CANS) in mapping the Missouri River for noxious weeds. **Volunteers and boats are needed** to float the Missouri and map problem weeds from the boats using handheld GPS units. This mapping information will be used to map and to track current weed infestations and to provide the data necessary for control measures. In addition all GPS data points will be added to the statewide river mapping page provided on the CANS website.

The mapping will take place on June 26th and volunteers will meet at the Craig fishing access site at 10 a.m.

This program is as much of an education program as it is a conservation program. Our hope is to help make folks realize that weeds are not only an agricultural issue, but they are everyone's problem. Noxious weeds threaten the fragile diversity of riparian ecosystems, native plants, water quality, and even fish spawning habitat.

We look forward to you joining us for a day of floating, learning, and improving the Missouri River!



Contact:

Matt Wilhelm, Center for Aquatic Nuisance Species
406-222-7270, matt@stopans.org



Mark your Calendar continued...

June 8-10—Bison on the Edge Conference, Big River Saskatchewan

June 13- 16—NACD Northern Plains Regional Meeting, Wichita, Kansas

June 14—MACD Conference Call

June 14— 6:30- 8:30 p.m. Proper Functioning pre- assessment meeting for Upper Missouri River, BLM Office, Lewistown, Mt.

June 15—8a.m - 5 p.m. Proper Functioning pre- assessment meeting for Upper Missouri River, Winifred Town Hall, Winifred, Mt.

June 15— Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study (MRAPS) Scoping meeting, 5- 8 p.m. Ft. Peck Interpretive Center, FT. Peck, Mt.

June 16— 6:30- 8:30 p.m. Proper Functioning pre- assessment meeting for Upper Missouri River, Ag Center 1205 20th St., Ft. Benton, Mt.

June 17—8a.m - 5 p.m. Proper Functioning pre- assessment meeting for Upper Missouri River, , Ag Center 1205 20th St., Ft. Benton, Mt.

July 6-16—Proper Functioning Condition Assessment along the Upper Missouri River

July 20 -22—Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) meeting, Sheridan, WY.