



MISSOURI RIVER Conservation Districts Council

1101 11th Ave Helena, MT 59601
406-454-0056 missouririvercouncil.info

The River Journal

Volume 16, Issue 1

December 2016

Upcoming Events:

- **01/05/2016:** MRCDC Quarterly Meeting & Milk River Watershed Alliance Meeting

Staying in touch with the MRCDC

www.missouririvercouncil.info

The Missouri River the newsletter along to anyone Conservation Districts Council you think may be interested to has had a successful 2016 and is receive it and be sure and let me committed to a 2017 full of know if you have any suggestions helping districts meet their con- for ways to improve the news- servation needs along the Mis- ter. As always, I look forward to souri River. The River Journal hearing from you at will be a quarterly newsletter mrcdc@macdnet.org or at 406- that provides updates from the 454-0056. Our office is located in Council, the latest progress on the MACD building at 1101 11th conservation projects, and rele- Ave in Helena. For the most current vant news from the state and National level. Feel free to pass information regarding council

activities, visit www.missouririvercouncil.info. The website features a calendar of events, minutes and reports, and news posts for all things Conservation along the Missouri River and associated uplands. Please send links and news items for inclusion in the website and friend us on Facebook at Missouri_River_Conservation_Dis-tricts_Council.

Inside this issue:

Coordinator Cor- 2
ner

Montana Saltcedar 2
Team

Montana Range- 3
lands Partnership

CMR Community 3
Working Group
Updates

Ranching for Riv- 4
ers

Aquatic Invasive 5
Mussels found

Ranching for Riv- 5
ers Video

2016 River Rendezvous: Riparian Conservation on the Missouri River

When willing landowners combine forces with available funding, amazing things can happen for the vegetation and wildlife along the Missouri River. This was the theme of the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council's annual River Rendezvous hosted by the Chouteau County Conservation District on June 9th. Nearly 50 people were treated to a 15



The riparian fence and water gap project visited during the tour. Photo by Rachel Frost

mile boat ride downriver to view first-hand several riparian restoration efforts. The group viewed a fenced riparian corridor and water gap funded by Northwestern Energy. Additional stops provided Joe Offer, Stewardship Director with the Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument and Sean Reynolds with the BLM an opportunity to describe several successful cottonwood plantings conducted by the group and supported through Montana Conservation Corps volunteer teams. Anna Noson with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab spoke of the songbird monitoring they are conducting in partnership with Northwestern Energy along the Missouri River and the importance of riparian restoration to the populations of these birds.



River Rendezvous participants take a lunch break along the Missouri.
MRCDC file photo

Coordinator Corner



MRCDC Coordinator
Rachel Frost



The continued mission of the MRCDC — A united, visible and effective council
promoting work driven by local stakeholders that are vested in the River and the surrounding landscape.

"I believe in the future of agriculture with a faith born not of words but of deeds - achievements won by the present and past agriculturalists through the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us through the struggles of former years.

I believe that to live and work on a good farm, or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuits, is pleasant as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life and hold an inborn fondness for those associations which, even in hours of discouragement, I cannot deny."

How many of you recognize the words in the above paragraphs? If you dredge back far enough, you will recognize it as the first 2 paragraphs of the FFA Creed. While listening to my daughter practice for the FFA Creed Speaking Contest, I was struck again by the significance and applicability of these words to Conservation District supervisors. Here is an elaboration on a portion of the creed with all of you folks in mind:

"I believe (to have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something) in the future (time and people yet to come) of agriculture with a faith (firm belief and allegiance to duty) born not of words (just whistling in the wind), but of deeds (actually serving on the volunteer board) - achievements won by the present and past agriculturalists (those who know the science and art of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock) through the promise of better days (healthy land, stable communities, strong families) through better ways (incorporating the new technology while still respecting the way Grandpa did it), even as the better things we now enjoy (tractors with heaters and air-conditioning!) have come to us through the struggles (to proceed with difficulty and great effort) of former years.

"I believe that to live (365 days a year, through winter's blast and summer's heat) and work (sunup to sundown, then attend a Conservation District meeting till midnight) on a good

farm (or ranch), or to be engaged in other agricultural pursuits (everything from fence builder to feed salesman), is pleasant (no better life exists) as well as challenging (darn tractor won't start....again, 3 heifers calving at once and all needing help), for I know the joys (a gangly newborn calf, the thankful handshake of a neighbor for help branding and shipping) and discomforts (you know that distinctive squeaking sound that hoofs make on snow when the temperature is below zero?) of agricultural life (it is not an occupation, it is a way of life), and hold an inborn (it's in your blood) fondness (deep love) for those associations (green grass coming on in the spring, the way the sun hits that hill on a summer evening, the orange and gold leaves of fall, and the steaming breath of cattle coming to feed in winter), which, even in hours of discouragement (that gangly newborn calf just died), I cannot (and will not ever) deny."

I hope you all have a Merry Christmas and wishing you a Blessed New Year!

Montana Saltcedar Team

The goal of the Montana Saltcedar Team (MST) is to build a comprehensive Saltcedar management strategy by involving all relevant land management agencies, private landowners, and weed control professionals. The Team identifies priority areas for control, supports funding acquisition, and promotes the coordinated management of weeds.

Accomplishments: We have completed the GIS database of current Saltcedar infestations in Montana along with development of a simple process to use smart phones to capture and send infestation information to the database. Rachel presented on the Team and its efforts to the Montana Weed Control Association in January 2016, the Tamarisk Coalition in February 2016, and the Montana Invasive Species Summit in April of 2016. We contributed to several inventory efforts along the Missouri and Musselshell, helped support the capture and rearing of *Diorhabda* spp. Beetles in Montana, and have hosted a Big Sky Watershed Corps Member. Plans are underway to produce an educational video on Saltcedar identification and control that will be aired on several hunting programs nationwide.



Saltcedar saplings.
MRCDC file photo.

Montana Rangelands Partnership



The Montana Rangelands Partnership is a statewide, public-private, collaborative partnership comprised of more than a dozen local, state and national organizations. The Montana Rangelands Partnership currently coordinates four main programs: 1) Rangeland monitoring technical assistance; 2)

Montana Rangeland Monitoring Program; 3) Certification of grazing management plans and Certified Grazing Land Stewards; and 4) Education. The purpose of the Range Technician Program is to help ranchers and other landowners to: 1) initiate and sustain rangeland monitoring, 2) develop certified grazing management plans, and 3) identify appropriate voluntary conservation programs that are available to help ranchers and other landowners sustain and enhance their rangeland management efforts.

Two full-time technicians have been hired and

are currently working with landowners to initiate monitoring on their ranches. To date, they have helped initiate or revive rangeland monitoring on over 130,000 acres. Cheryl Schuldert serves Valley, Garfield, McCone, Custer, and Prairie Counties, while Emily Standley serves Fergus, Blaine, Phillips, and Petroleum Counties. The technicians are also seeking willing conservation districts to host monitoring workshops within the next 3 years.

For more information, contact:

Emily Standley (406-396-5418, estandley@macdnet.org)
 Cheryl Schuldert (406-945-0404, cshuldert@macdnet.org)
 Stacey Barta (406-444-6619, sbarta@mt.gov)

Miles City based Rangeland Technician Cheryl Schuldert demonstrating some range monitoring techniques.
 MRCDC File Photo



Charles M. Russell NWR Community Working Group Updates

For the past five years, the MRCDC has been an active supporter and participant in the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Community Working Group (CMR CWG). Comprised of a variety of stakeholders, such as World Wildlife Fund, National Wildlife Federation, CMR Staff, BLM staff, Montana FWP staff, Montana Wilderness Society, conservation district members, grazing permittees, local residents and those representing the interests of recreation, sportsmen, and just a love of Montana's great outdoors and the CMR, the working group focuses on maintaining the ecological, economic, and social viability of the six-county region surrounding the refuge.

Generally meeting five to six times per year, the group has grown in trust and mutual respect for each other's views and provides a place for people to come together and discuss the tough issues facing the region

and try to develop solutions born of compromise that work for the region as a whole. To facilitate these discussions, invited speakers present on topics relating to the CMR and surroundings. In 2016, the group enjoyed presentations regarding Black-footed Ferret reintroduction, regional economics and demographics, community resiliency and landscape geography, weeds, tourism, Big-horn Sheep conservation, and more. One of the highlights was hosting a regional activity update and Q&A session with Noreen Walsh, Regional Director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's eight-state Mountain-Prairie Region.

In the five meetings held in 2016, the group accomplished a great deal. After brainstorming numerous projects, ranking them, and collaborating to come up with tasks and outcomes, the group produced the 2016-2017 CMRCWG Work Plan outlining six projects to focus the efforts of the group over

the next year. A bison committee was formed to facilitate the discussion on bison by the group, and this committee was a direct product of a project from the work plan. Additionally, the group now has its own dedicated website to house all information related to the CMRCWG. The web address is <http://www.cmrcwg.org>.

Check www.cmrcwg.org for updates.

A partnership of diverse interests working to ensure the vitality of both the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding communities.

For more information
 Contact Rachel Frost
 406-454-0056
mrcdc@macdnet.org



2016 CMR CWG Meetings.
 MRCDC file photos.



Ranching for Rivers: Riparian Pasture Fencing & Water Development Cost-Share Program

The purpose of this voluntary program is to provide interested landowners a cost-share to install fences and water development that better enables them to manage their riparian areas to meet the unique needs of that plant community, while also increasing management flexibility on associated uplands.

The fences are not intended to create riparian exclosures, rather the program encourages the creation of riparian pastures that can still be grazed according to the landowners goals for livestock and natural resources. The cost-share covers up to 50% of the cost of fence construction or off-site water development and can be paired with other funding sources to further reduce the out-of-pocket cost to landowners.

A Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Application to fund the continuation and expansion of this program has been submitted and will go before the Legislature for approval during the 2017 session.

For more information:
Call Rachel Frost
406-454-0056
mrcdc@macdnet.org



Riparian pasture on the Missouri River near Ulm, MT.
Photo by Travis Wilson.

The program allows flexibility for managers to implement grazing practices that complement their natural resource goals, and to install the type of fencing that best fits their landscape and livestock management goals. Photo monitoring is conducted to help demonstrate the value of the projects and their benefit to the riparian resources.

Current Status: A total of 5 projects received ~ \$42,000 in cost share funding from a pilot-project conducted by MRCDC and SWCDM in 2016. Projects were located in *Cascade, Phillips, Broadwater, and Richland Counties*. Landowners voluntarily entered the program with a variety of natural resource goals ranging from reducing bank sloughing and sedimentation to protecting cottonwood saplings.



An area of severe surface erosion (left) and the newly constructed cost-shared fence (right) which will help restore this riparian corridor near Ulm, MT.
Left photo by Travis Wilson, Right photo by Dr. Rob Neill.

Aquatic Invasive Mussel Larvae Detected in Montana

Borrowed from the Montana Mussel Response website (musselresponse.mt.gov):

"Governor Steve Bullock issued an executive order November 30, 2016 declaring a statewide natural resource emergency for Montana water bodies due to the detection of invasive aquatic mussel larvae.



Comparison of quagga (left) and zebra (right) mussel. Michigan Sea Grant.

The State of Montana's Mussel Response Team was formed to rapidly assess the extent and severity of the mussel incident impacting Montana's waterways. The team is working to develop a coordinated response and long-term strategy in order to mitigate economic and ecological damage.

To accomplish this, the team is collecting data and information in order to make informed decisions, contain and control affected areas, and develop procedures to prevent future contamination risks. Providing the public with accurate and timely information is a priority of the

response team.

The team has prioritized the processing of water samples not yet analyzed, including increasing the capacity of the state lab as well as sending several to a Colorado lab. On-ground surveys for adult mussels have been conducted at both reservoirs using specially trained mussel sniffing dogs. The dogs alerted to mussel scent at both reservoirs, but divers and snorkelers have not found any adult mussels to date.

Multiple task forces have been formed as a result of the response including an inspection station and decontamination task force, a closure and restrictions task force, a control task force, a monitoring and sampling task force and an economic impacts task force.

The response team is working closely with experts who have an extensive scope of knowledge and experience. It is reaching out to and talking with local, state and national officials to gather input and inform decision making.

What Can You Do?

Aquatic invasive species (AIS), including diseases, are easily spread from one water body to the other. Anglers, boaters, construction workers, pond

owners, gardeners, seaplane pilots, field workers - virtually anyone who works or plays in or around water can unknowingly transport these pests on their boats and equipment or allow them to spread via improper management practices. It takes only one mistake to potentially infest a new water body."

ALWAYS REMEMBER TO:



For more information, visit:
<http://musselresponse.mt.gov/FAQs>



Video Highlights Ranching for Rivers Project

Sponsored by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM) and the MRCDC, with funding supported by The Wetland and Riparian Strategic Funding Program and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the video "Ranching for Rivers: Using Riparian Pastures to Conserve Montana's Streams and Rivers," was produced to highlight this new riparian pasture infrastructure cost-share program.

You can currently view the video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sICbNmWHfs>), and soon you will be able to borrow a DVD copy from your local conservation district office.

FEATURED INTERVIEWS

Rick Anderson
Landowner

Anna Nason
Research Biologist,
University of Montana
Bird Ecology Lab

Rick Caquelin
Area Rangeland
Management
Specialist, NRCS

Rachel Frost
Missouri River Conservation
Districts Council Coordinator

RANCHING FOR RIVERS

RANCHING FOR RIVERS

Using Riparian Pastures to Conserve Montana's Streams and Rivers

FUNDING SUPPORTED BY
The Wetland and Riparian Strategic Funding Program
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Captured by bank.com

SPONSORED BY
Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana
Missouri River Conservation Districts Council



MISSOURI RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS COUNCIL

1101 11th Avenue
Helena, MT 59601

Phone:
406-454-0056
E-mail:
mrcdc@macdnet.org

Sign up for electronic communications from MRCDC at:
missouririvercouncil.info



Autumn in the Breaks, Northern Petroleum County. Photo by Travis Wilson.

MRCDC Elects New Executive Committee

Chairman - Jim Beck, Broadwater CD

Vice-Chair - Steve Wanderaas, McCone County CD

Past Chair - Dean Rogge, Garfield County CD

Agency Partners:

DNRC - Karl Christians

MACD - Elena Evans

NRCS - Joe Little

Upper Reach - John Chase, Cascade CD

Middle Reach - Bruce Anderson, Blaine County CD

Reservoir Reach - Laura Kiehl, Petroleum County CD

Lower Reach - Dick Iverson, Richland County CD

**Executive Committee Calls are held each month on
the 3rd Tuesday at 7:30 AM**

Member Conservation Districts

Upper Reach

Broadwater Conservation District
Cascade Conservation District
Gallatin Conservation District
Lewis and Clark Conservation District

Lower Reach

McCone County Conservation District
Richland Conservation District
Roosevelt County Conservation District

Middle Reach

Big Sandy Conservation District
Blaine County Conservation District
Chouteau County Conservation District
Fergus County Conservation District



Reservoir Reach

Garfield County Conservation District
Petroleum County Conservation District
Phillips County Conservation District
Valley County Conservation District