



# The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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## The 2018 Winter Grazing Seminar

The Lewis & Clark CD is hosting the Winter Grazing Seminar. Addressing current issues from across the state, we anticipate a lively crowd and packed agenda. Some of the topics include Grazing after Fire by Jeff Mosley, Conifer Encroachment in Upland and Riparian Areas, Young People in Ag, Grazing Leases and more.

Please plan on joining us February 6 and 7, 2018 in Helena! For more information contact Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 112 or via email at [lccd@mt.net](mailto:lccd@mt.net).

## Successful Fuel Mitigation through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Diane Fitzgerald, NRCS

We recently passed the landmark of one million acres burned in 2017. So far. We have been choking on smoke for months now, and are unable to see our beautiful mountains. The loss of 2 firefighters, homes, livestock, wildlife, historic structures and damage to grazing lands, forests, streams, and national parks is beyond disturbing.

A recent epidemic of forest pests resulted in high mortality in both the pine and Douglas-fir forests. With some of the dead trees still standing, some on the ground and in various stages of rotting and falling, many of our



Figure 1 Overstocked Forest Site

forests on both private and public land are a dry, tangled mess and combined with drought, a severe fire hazard. With many houses built in the forest now, some forest management practices like prescribed fire and timber harvest are unusable in these inhabited areas.



**Figure 2 Fuel Break-Before**

developed through our technical services can go through a competitive ranking process for financial assistance through the EQIP program. EQIP is not a “grant”, but rather it is a program where NRCS shares in the cost of installing these fuel-reducing practices at a flat rate per acre.



**Figure 3 Fuel Break-After**

accomplished through the EQIP program in all private forested areas of the county, from Wolf Creek and Craig to Rimini to York. Two homes in the Scratchgravel Hills survived the Corral Fire, and the owners had recently completed fuel breaks through EQIP.

The Helena NRCS field office welcomes the chance to come out and look at your property with you, discuss your goals, and help you lay out a plan to achieve them. If you are interested in funding for your plan, we can help you with the application and eligibility for that process. We can also show you completed practices on the ground to give you an idea of what the property could look like, post-treatment. If you are interested, please contact the Helena NRCS office at 406-449-5000 extension 3.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help private landowners plan a strategy to protect their property and homes, improve forage for livestock, or accomplish wildlife goals. The practices used to help landowners develop these plans can create defensible or survivable space around structures, create fuel breaks in the forest, thin and prune precommercial sized trees, dispose of slash and control weeds. These plans, based on landowner goals and

Fuel reduction measures will not stop a fire, but are intended to keep a fire on the ground, giving firefighters a chance to control it, instead of in the crowns of the trees where it cannot be fought. Precommercial thinning is intended to improve the health of the trees remaining on the site through reduced competition for light, moisture, nutrients, and space. Maintenance is needed for all practices, to continue the crown or stem spacing achieved with the work. Scouting for and controlling noxious weeds must be done for several years after fuel reduction treatment. Grass seeding is also needed sometimes in disturbed areas.

Successful forestry work has been

## Stewardship Part 4: Forestry

The preceding article gives good background on good stewardship practices on forested property. Part of living in forested land, whether it's in a truly rural setting, or in the Wildland Urban Interface (which Lewis & Clark County has so much of), is learning what is a healthy forest. The forests we live near (and in) have evolved with fire as part of the overall "management". Along with precipitation and temperature, fire is a part of the balance within forested environments.

As the county has allowed for subdivisions in these forested areas, landowners have learned – some to their own detriment – that management of forested land will always be necessary. Since we cannot allow fires to just burn in developed property, landowners need to understand the need to manage their trees to mimic what a fire would do. Removal of understory, management of new trees, thinning of trees (200 or so per acre) and removal of lower limbs all help to reduce the risk of a catastrophic fire.

A lot of people who live in the trees worry that their view will change or that the current population of animals will change and both things are true. What they don't always realize though is that in most areas around here, we're not seeing the forests as they would be if they were allowed to just exist naturally with periodic fire. The suppression of fire means that plants that would normally burn frequently are allowed to grow and create ladder fuels for fire to climb into the crowns of the trees, which leads to a crown fire on top of a ground fire. That type of fire causes the most destruction and takes longer to heal up after the fire is out. It can cause the soil to not effectively absorb water which can increase flooding risks. Any trees that are left are more susceptible to death from the aftereffects of the fire.

The risk of fire is real, as we all saw in the past several months. Please take the measures necessary to protect your home and lives from catastrophic fire.

### Some Fire Recovery Information:

The Lewis & Clark Conservation District has a couple of Cost Share Programs available to landowners/managers in the County.

The first is the Weed Cost Share Program which has been available since 2011. Next year's applications will be prioritized for those who experienced fire this summer. Weeds usually multiply quickly after a wildfire so it's important to get control as soon as possible.

The second program that the CD offers is a "practices" cost share program. This was originally designed as a pilot project and has never been utilized. We will be adding some extra funds to this program to help with fire recovery. This program can help with the costs of fencing, irrigation systems,



**Figure 4 Five years post treatment**

re-seeding, and many other projects. Projects will be prioritized for those who experienced fire this past season.

For application information, call the CD office at 406-449-5000 ext. 112, or email [lccd@mt.net](mailto:lccd@mt.net). We obtained some additional information from the company we do some accounting work with, WIPFLI CPAs and Consultants. They gave us permission to reprint that information here.

## Disaster Recovery Tips for Montana Farmers and Ranchers

In the aftermath of recent wildfires in northeastern Montana, farmers and ranchers are picking up the pieces and rebuilding. During this process, it is important to remember to keep records of losses and expenses, including receipts, pictures, and logs to substantiate losses that may be eligible for disaster assistance programs, as well as to report tax losses on state and federal returns. A number of relief and assistance resources are available to those affected by fires and drought conditions throughout Montana. The Department of Revenue and the Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture offer a variety of assistance programs and tax relief opportunities for individuals affected by the disasters.

### Documenting Losses

Verifiable evidence of losses and expenses incurred due to a disaster must be documented to qualify for assistance programs and to provide support for tax return preparation.

Documentation should include but is not limited to:

- Inventory supported by calving/birth books or purchase receipts
- Livestock death losses, including the number, average weight, and type
- Picture or video evidence to support ownership, damage, and loss
- Substantiation of eligible losses from sources such as the USDA disaster declarations
- Feed purchased to replace destroyed grazing pasture
- Number of gallons of water transported to livestock due to water shortages
- Equipment and supplies purchased to repair damaged property
- Insurance proceeds received
- Basis of damaged property
- **Farm Service Agency**

The FSA website is a great resource for disaster designation information, including:

- USDA disaster declarations
- Disaster area maps and tables
- Disaster assistance program fact sheets

Disaster assistance programs include:

- ELAP - Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish
- EFRP - Emergency Forest Restoration Program
- LFP - Livestock Forage Program
- LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program
- NAP - Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program
- TAP - Tree Assistance Program

Producers must notify their local FSA office within 30 calendar days from when the loss is apparent. Program and specific requirement information is available online or at local FSA offices. To locate the nearest FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

## Montana Department of Revenue

The Montana Department of Revenue offers tax relief and assistance to Montana residents whose business equipment or property has been lost or damaged due to natural disasters such as flooding, wildfires, and drought. Eligible property must be deemed unsuitable for its previous use, and the relief value will be prorated for the number of days the property was rendered unsuitable for its previous use. To receive tax relief, an income tax filing extension, Form AB-25, Natural Disaster Application, must be completed by the taxpayer and submitted to the Montana Department of Revenue. More information is available at:

[https://revenue.mt.gov/home/businesses/taxrelief\\_naturaldisaster#Overview](https://revenue.mt.gov/home/businesses/taxrelief_naturaldisaster#Overview).

## Federal Income Tax Deduction

Casualty losses of property may also be eligible to be deducted on federal personal or business tax returns based on the difference between the adjusted basis and the decrease in the fair market value of the property after the disaster. Deductible losses may be subject to limits and adjustments for insurance proceeds received for damages.

In addition, income deferral options are available to defer gains on the excess number of livestock sold due to drought conditions over the number normally sold in a business year. Income deferrals allow producers to replace livestock in future years to reduce the amount of the gain recognized.

## Montana Department of Agriculture

The state of Montana has temporarily suspended and waived some of the permit, fee, and transportation requirements. Brand inspection permit and fee regulations requiring inspection prior to transport of livestock have been suspended temporarily by the governor. However, permits prior to transport and point-of-destination brand inspections are still required. In addition, the Montana Department of Transportation has waived several interstate requirements for trucks transporting supplies to areas affected by Montana wildfires. Visit the Montana Department of Agriculture's website for more information: <http://agr.mt.gov/Fire-Drought-Assistance-2017>.

Please feel free to contact your Wipfli relationship executive or one of our Wipfli offices with any questions or for assistance. We will be happy to help you.



## Update-Ladies Day on the Range

By Maryann Quinn, NRCS

On July 26, the Lewis and Clark Conservation District (CD) hosted Ladies Day on the Range. The event was held at the Dearborn Community Center and the Bay Ranch. Chris Evans from the CD and Darcy Goodson, Soil Conservationist in the Helena field office, organized the event. Personnel from the Bozeman area office and the White Sulphur Springs field office were on hand to help out. Eight participants met at the Community Center then carpooled to the Bay Ranch to discuss soil health. Nikki Rife, Bozeman area Range Management Specialist, discussed how soil type, topography, and

land management can influence range health. Two soil pits were examined to show how dramatically different types of soil can occur in close proximity to each other.



**Figure 5 Nikki Rife speaking to the group**

The group then moved to plant identification. Nikki and Jenney Paddock, District Resource Conservationist in the White Sulphur Springs field office, identified 14 different species of grasses and plants in a small area. Unique properties of the plants were pointed out, as well as their contributions to the plant community.

The group headed back to the Community Center for lunch, which was provided by the CD. Next was a presentation by Laurie Wolf from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks on grizzly bear management. The presentation included information on

efforts to track grizzlies, and up-to-date guidelines for livestock owners and

homeowners on grizzly bear caught-in-the act deterrence methods issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Participants had an opportunity to practice deploying bear spray using training canisters.

The final presentation of the day was by Susan Tallman, Bozeman area Agronomist. Susan gave a rainfall simulator demonstration that was a real eye opener for participants. The visual effect of seeing how healthy soil maintains moisture was dramatic. All in all it was a great day and the feedback was very positive. Kudos to all who organized and participated in the event.

*Editor's Note: Over the years the CD has hosted numerous workshops. I've found a few interesting photographs taken of those events. Here is a photograph taken in about 1953 of a similar event and was actually very close to this year's event. Written on the back of the photo is: Taken 10-1-1953 discussing different grasses in the area. Location up on Deadman Road. Left to right, Adolf Burggraff, Emil Rittel, Art Murphy, Mike Jackson, Don Hilger. Frank Thompson in the middle, Joe Williams with his back toward the camera. Speaker M.D. Burdick*



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## **PARTNER NEWS**

### **2017 Disaster Recovery Assistance Available**



#### **2017 Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) for Fire:**

The Lewis & Clark County Farm Service Agency (FSA) is holding a signup from October 2 to December 1, 2017 for ECP Fire assistance. The purpose of the signup is to assist with restoring permanent *fencing* or conservation structures such as *livestock watering* facilities. The cost-share rate for fencing is 75% of actual cost not to exceed \$2.06/foot.

To be eligible for assistance, practices must not be started until all of the following are met:

- An application for cost-share has been signed.
- Onsite inspection of the damaged area and an environmental assessment is conducted.
- A needs determination is made by the technical agency.

#### **2017 Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP):**

Eligible losses related to livestock include grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible disaster condition. A Notice of Loss is required to be filed with the FSA Office within 30 days of the loss becoming apparent and an Application for Payment is required to be filed for FY 2017 (ending September 30, 2017) no later than November 1, 2017.

#### **2017 Livestock Forage Program (LFP):**

LFP provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land or for fire on federally managed land. Lewis & Clark County (as well as many other Montana counties) has triggered for 3 monthly payments based on the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Livestock producers may be eligible for benefits on dryland grazing acres. To be eligible, livestock producers must ensure they have: completed a 2017 acreage report for all land that is grazed no later than the late-filing deadline of November 15, 2017; completed a 2017 LFP Application; provided all required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2018. Required supporting documentation may include information related to grazing leases or federal grazing permits, contract grower agreements, information to support livestock inventory, and more.

Please contact the Lewis & Clark County FSA Office at (406) 449-5000 for further information or to schedule an appointment to complete an application.

## **NRCS**

The Helena Field Office Staff continues to take applications for EQIP, including applications that relate to fire recovery programs. Please contact the office at 406-449-5000 ext. 3 for more information.



# LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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