



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Autumn 2019

Augusta Area Flood Recovery Workgroup

Chris Evans, District Administrator

Things are trucking along with the Elk Creek Flood Task Force. In July, a group of agency people and landowners met at the Augusta Senior Center and worked on determining a path forward. After discussion about the issues and some ideas on how to address the short, medium, and long-term problems facing the area, the group came up with a few subcommittees: one on funding for projects, one on communication/process and the last on floodplain permitting concerns for the area within the designated/mapped floodplain.

Part of the discussion centered on the two assessments that are planned for the area. The County has submitted a grant application to conduct an H & H (hydrologic and hydraulic) survey in the area right around and within Augusta itself.

The Conservation District has contracted with Confluence Consulting to do a second assessment on the rural/agricultural land. Mike Sanctuary from Confluence Consulting was in the area the week of September 23 to meet with 14 ag landowners to look at their priorities. Unfortunately, we didn't have the money to have him meet with everyone who had requested it and had to prioritize based on a number of factors. Confluence Consulting's assessment report should be to us in December.

Since the report won't be done until December, we are looking at a meeting in January to follow up with the landowners that Confluence met with, then a general public meeting to follow that for everyone who is interested in updates from the Conservation District and the County.

CD office staff (all one of me!) has been pretty slammed with activities this year so the mailed update that needs to get out to landowners has yet to go out. That should happen this week or next. If you want to see more up to date information, please take a look at the CD Website at: <http://lccd.mt.nacdn.net/index.php/elk-creek-area-flood-task-force/>. This page is designated, for the time being anyway, for updates and reports.



Update on the Sun

SUN RIVER WATERSHED GROUP FALL UPDATE

Since 1994, the Sun River Watershed Group (SRWG) has been working with our partners to protect and restore the resources of the Sun River watershed and its communities.

What began as a working group focused on improving water quality in Muddy Creek has now become a 501c3 organization addressing a suite of resource issues from the Gibson Dam to the city of Great Falls. On August 24, we hosted an event to celebrate the past 25 years and look forward to our future.

The day began in Fairfield with a tour of the Sun River watershed. SRWG took 30 participants to five stops that featured SRWG's history, watershed issues, solutions, and past SRWG projects. Guest speakers on the tour included representatives from Greenfields Irrigation District, Montana State University Extension Water Quality Division, USGS, Montana DEQ, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana House District 17 Representative Ross Fitzgerald and SRWG founding coordinator, Al Rollo. If you missed it, you can still participate in the "virtual watershed tour" at: <https://sunriverwatershed.org/app/25th-anniversary-virtual-tour/>.

Later that evening, SRWG partners and friends met at Sun Canyon Lodge for a BBQ, yard games, silent auction, and live music by the Trent Brooks Band. SRWG shared photos from the past 25 years and presented guests with our new Strategic Plan. SRWG would like to thank the over 30 businesses who contributed prizes for the silent auction, the twelve event sponsors - including Lewis & Clark Conservation District, our outstanding event planning committee, and over 100 folks to attended the event and celebrated with us. We're looking forward to the next 25 years! SRWG's strategic plan is available on our newly rebooted website, www.sunriverwatershed.org.

SRWG's resource improvement programs include weed control, water quality and flow management, and fish & wildlife habitat improvement. In 2020 we'll host our annual Weed Whacker Rodeo the second Saturday in July and hope to have many other projects and opportunities for you to get involved. For more information about the Sun River Watershed Group, contact tracy@sunriverwatershed.org. To learn more about upcoming events, follow us on Facebook or Instagram!

Where Have All the Willow Gone

Jeff Ryan, Chairman and Chris Evans, Administrator Lewis and Clark Conservation District

Gone, Planted, Every One



Just a quick update on projects the Lewis and Clark Conservation District has partnered on - If you remember our December 2018 newsletter "Twas About A Week Before Christmas" we told the story of a willow cutting project at the Helena Regulating Reservoir.

About 5000 willow were cut by volunteers to be used on about a mile-long stream restoration project just south of the Helena valley Law enforcement Academy. That project continued throughout the winter and was finished in the summer of 2019 except for a few minor touchups. The

willow cuttings were used throughout the project, primarily incorporated into woody debris that was used to stabilize eroding banks.

The second project on Seven Mile Creek, just east of Fort Harrison and west of Helena, involved adding additional willow cuttings on the outside bends of new stream banks constructed last summer. About 2000 willow were cut in early April, for this half mile long project, by numerous



volunteers. About a week later the willow was planted by many volunteers using breaker bars and a hydraulic sprigger. The willow was cut on site in the Fort Harrison sewage lagoons abandoned in 2001 when the fort hooked up to the Helena system. Our thanks to the Veterans, they not only protect us, but also grow some great willow!

Our other project relating to

willows was done in June this past summer on Spokane Creek. A landowner had come in for a 310 permit and as part of the onsite inspection, a discussion about willow sprigging started up. He and his kids, Valerie Stacey, Jeff Ryan and Jeff's grandson Drake sprigged the leftover willows from the Sevenmile project. They sprigged willows using post pounders and breaker bars to improve shade on the deeper portions of the creek for improved fisheries habitat. They also sprigged willows where they've had some erosion from recent high-water events. Even if only 50% of the willows take hold, the habitat will be greatly improved!





District Report

It has been a busy quarter for the folks with the Conservation District. With the 2nd flood in as many years in the Augusta area, supervisors have been really busy with stream permit inspections and visits to emergencies. In addition, the individual board members all serve as representatives of the Conservation District to several other organizations. These groups include the Water Quality Protection District, the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council, the Lake Helena Watershed Group, the Sun River Watershed Group, and the Rocky Mountain Front Weed Roundtable.

We have also been involved in working with the Stream Restoration Committee, which is a collaborative group including representatives from DNRC's Floodplain and Conservation District Bureau. This group is working toward finding a way to make floodplain permitting more affordable to landowners so that stream restoration projects can be completed without an added \$20,000-\$30,000 on top of their regular budget.

In late September, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts Area 6 CDs had their area meeting in Alder, MT. Several from the CD will be attending the MACD Convention in Kalispell in November.



The CD was invited to participate in the Lewis & Clark County Disaster Preparedness fair in September. We had the Rolling Rivers Trailer there to demonstrate proper installation of bridges and culverts and the importance of keeping culverts and other stream crossings clear of debris.

In October, the CD was part of the NEA's Big Read Kid's Fall Fest at the Lewis & Clark Library. As part of the event, district administrator Chris Evans read the book *Lab Girl*, by Hope Jahren.



The author is a geobiologist and the book is largely about plants and soil. Evans had a booth at the Fall Fest, showcasing a rainfall simulator with 2 different local soils and activity handouts for kids of all ages (and grownups!). There were over 1000 people who attended Fall Fest this year.

For the next quarter, we'll be wrapping up some of the summer craziness with permitting and will be moving into our budgeting and planning meetings in November and December. We are also going to be required to update our 310 permit rules, hopefully by February, so will

be having a public hearing about those soon.

NEW WEBSITE FOR LANDOWNERS

Just recently, a new website was launched for landowners who live near rivers and streams, or for those who are considering buying property with rivers and streams.

Living on the Bank has been a collaborative project with a number of Conservation Districts, the Yellowstone and Missouri River Conservation District Councils and the DNRC. The site provides information to help landowners protect and enjoy their property and includes guidelines on:

- Buying land and selecting construction sites
- Floods, erosion and fire
- Property improvements
- Protecting the land investment
- Stream dynamics (not as scary as it sounds!)
- Invasive species
- Permitting
- And more!

For more information go to www.livingonthebank.org.

Changes in Helena NRCS

Like the leaves changing, so is the staff in the Helena Field Office. Jim Williams Technician left in May to a position with the agency in Missouri, then Darcy Goodson Soil Conservationist moved on to MDOT in July. On November 1st John George District Conservationist will be moving on to Eastern Washington as the Area Conservationist. With this transition Diane Fitzgerald will be the consistent foot hold in the Helena Field office. Backfilling John's position will be sometime in the next few months, 6 to 8 months. In the meantime Paula Gunderson from Choteau will be the acting Supervisory District Conservation for the Helena/Choteau/Whitehall field offices.

Contact points for the Helena field office will be:

Diane Fitzgerald - diane.fitzgerald@usda.gov , 406 449 5000 x 3887

Paula Gunderson - paula.gunderson@usda.gov , 406466 5722 x 116



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To update your mailing address, contact Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 5 or email lccd@mt.net. If you would rather receive this via email, let me know!