



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Stewardship: Part 2 of 4

Grazing stewardship

In the world of range management there is a great deal of debate as to what “proper use” of an operation is. Some graze as a function of “if it’s green, it’s grazable” and others see it as a function of intense planning, implementation, and monitoring. In truth proper use is about allowing plants to grow in a manner that sustains a healthy plant community while allowing a livestock operation the ability to make a profit and maintain the standard of living they aspire to have.

In reality, managing the grazing of an operation is about mimicking nature and utilizing the tools we have at our disposal to do that. Livestock afford us the opportunity



Fenceline contrast showing overuse to the left of the fence. 8/12/1960, Lewis & Clark County, Photo credit: B.C. McLean

to produce a product that gives our livestock growers the opportunity to make a living while being stewards of their resources through grazing. The question is, how to best manage that.

Grasses in Lewis & Clark County, on range areas, are dominated by “bunchgrass” communities, Blue bunch Wheatgrass, Rough Fescue, Idaho Fescue, etc. These communities are 100% dependent on

producing seed for reproduction, and will reduce in stature (get smaller) as they are continually and heavily grazed. But, does that mean “no grazing” is the answer for these communities? No, it just means a thoughtful grazing system is needed to maintain a healthy & productive community over time. The bunch grass

community evolved with fire and wildlife grazing for eons and disturbance assists in keeping the grass stand “fresh” and lush over time. But like any resource, excessive use, over long periods of time, can cause a decrease in productivity and eventually, a loss of the resource if not properly managed.

There are many organizations that can help you as a producer look at your grass stand and figure out where you’re at, and where you’re going. The state of Montana has the Rangeland Resource Program. Our conservation district, in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), has opportunities to assist you in improving your operation. It’s just as simple as picking up a phone and giving us a holler.

The first & last thing to think about is this, what are your goals and objectives for your operation, and what do you feel would be beneficial to assist you in moving your operation in a positive direction. You may know your cattle linger along the creek while they won’t go to the top of the hill to eat on all that grass up there. Maybe a cross fence on top of the ridge and a couple of strategic stock tanks are needed to keep them up top. Maybe you have your grazing system set up, but that one spring pasture is still looking “rough” and you can’t figure out why. The groups previously mentioned can give you some suggestions and ways to possibly start fixing the problems you see. But the key is knowing where you’re currently at, what your ground will give you, and where you want to be down the road.

Some folks simply want to start with a cross fence and a stock tank with some suggestions on tweaking timing of grazing and see where that goes, others, want a fully laid out plan of how to attack the issues and go all in on addressing issues. Those decisions are yours and yours alone, we simply want to make sure you are aware of the opportunities available to you, and know that there are people available to you, throughout Montana and in Lewis & Clark County willing to help if you need it.

Please feel welcome to give the Conservation District a call at 406 449 5000 x112 or the NRCS at x101 to see where they can help.

Flexibility in Grazing Plans

Diane Fitzgerald, NRCS Soil Conservationist

A grazing plan is described as multiple pastures (3 or more is best) used in a planned sequence to provide plant rest and recovery. Grazing plans must always be based on the rancher’s goals and resource concerns, or they are not likely to be successful.

Once we understand the rancher’s goals, forage data is measured or estimated for each specific site and an estimated initial stocking rate is used as a starting point for each pasture. The animal unit factor is determined by livestock numbers, age and size. Animal demand and forage available

need to be in pretty close balance. Not perfect, but close.

Sometimes, spring developments, stockwater wells or fences are needed to facilitate a grazing system. These practices can be very useful to “bait” cattle away from a riparian area or from other preferred grazing spots to provide the rest they need after grazing. Providing water in uplands can draw cattle to unused or underused areas.

Limiting time in each pasture will cut down on regrazing preferred plants. Enough leaf tissue should be left, followed by rest

from grazing, for continued photosynthesis and root recovery.

The grazing plan should provide for a change in season of use for each pasture. Where this is not possible, grazing should be alternated between early, mid- and late-season use. Sometimes that is not possible either, due to things like poisonous plants, seasonal leases, and water availability.

Due to all of the variables, which can change from year to year, or even within one grazing season, the plan absolutely must be flexible. Unforeseen events can disrupt the most well thought out plan. Droughts, fire, floods, grasshoppers, hail, and wildlife damage to name a few, are game-changers that can show up with little or no warning. A contingency plan is needed to adjust and provide for the economic needs of the ranch and still strive for resource protection.

A grazing plan should be revisited, and adjustments made if needed, every fall, to plan for the following growing season. We

left the cattle in a pasture a little longer than we should have? It's not the end of the world. Maybe we can give that pasture some extra rest next year. The pasture sequence can't be followed because a spring went dry? Let's skip that pasture, and maybe we can use it last if we get some fall rain.

Grazing plans are not rigid documents that are set in stone. When changes are needed, the whole idea is to recognize a problem in the early phases and do our best to offset and minimize deterioration of the livestock, economics of the ranch business, and the grass resource.

For more information or to get assistance on a grazing plan--formal or informal--contact the Helena Field Office at 406-449-5000 ext. 3.

It's time to think about the Summer Irrigating Season!

If you need to do ANY work in or near a stream, contact the Conservation District Office to see if you need to obtain a 310 permit. A permit takes 30-45 days to obtain. Failure to obtain a permit could result in a violation of State Law and fines for the violator. Streams covered under the law include all perennial streams including the Reservoirs on the Missouri River (Canyon Ferry, Hauser and Holter).

If an emergency occurs and you need to work in the stream (if Life, Crops or Property are at imminent risk), please contact the Conservation District Office about filling out an Emergency Notification form. **These forms are required in the CD office no later than 15 days after the work is started.**

The office can be reached by calling 406-449-5000 ext. 112, or by emailing at lccd@mt.net.

Possible Insect Opportunity

There's an organization which is working to increase the insects that fight noxious weeds. They are seeking large infestations of spotted knapweed, St. Johnswort and Russian knapweed to do mass releases of insects on for the next 2 years to make them collectible sites for the future.

They are also seeking sites for Dalmation toadflax, leafy spurge, and yellow toadflax insect releases but don't need these as badly.

The land owner needs to be willing to allow collection days in the future (1-2 a year) that agency folks or the public will be invited to (we can definitely limit the number of participants). They also will need to allow annual monitoring of the site for the next 3-5 years.

If you would like to find out more, please contact the Conservation District at 406-449-5000 ext. 112.



“Ask Not” - A Great Story on Prickly Pear Creek

Jeff Ryan, Supervisor Lewis and Clark Conservation District

Many many years ago I was watching my folk’s brand new little Crosley black and white television and I saw President Kennedy make his famous statement - “Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country”. That statement came to mind recently with my involvement with willow planting on Prickly Pear Creek at Fish Wildlife and Parks fishing access site a few miles east of Helena.

A couple of years ago about 2000 feet of the stream had been restored and we (Eagle Scouts) had cut about 5000 willow for incorporation into the restoration structures. Unfortunately due to an incredibly time consuming (four months) and expensive (\$19,000)



floodplain permit process, many of our willow cuttings dried out and died before the floodplain permit was approved. This current project was to insert new willow cutting on the restoration project. It was a joint project between the Lewis and Clark Water Protection District, the Lake Helena Watershed Group, Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Lewis and Clark Conservation District.

Several hundred willow cuttings were cut and inserted into the stream banks with a hydraulic planter to make the holes (like a pressure washer on steroids) and the old fashioned way using breaker bars to jamb holes in the bank and then insert cuttings. And that's where this project really became great. Not just getting new viable willow on the stream banks to provide more bank stability and shade to cool the creek water, but by the generous time donation of the dozens of volunteers (including the greatest grandson on earth - Drake) that not only cut the willow, but literally provided the back breaking work to manually jamb holes in the banks for willow planting. Without their help projects like this don't happen. These folks gave the most precious thing we possess - our time and yes - "did for their country".



Ladies Day on the Range

The NRCS will be hosting a Ladies Day on the Range. It will be held July 26th in the Wolf Creek area and July 27th in White Sulphur Springs.

Join us for presentations and discussions about herd and rangeland management, soil health and more!

There will be some classroom presentations and then some time spent out in the field. Lunch will be provided by the Conservation District. For more information contact Jenney Paddock 547-3521 or Darcy Goodson 449-5000.



A Different Book to Read

By SCOTT BLACKMAN

QUENCH YOUR OWN THIRST

Business Lessons Learned Over A Beer Or Two

By Jim Koch

Founder & Brewer of Samuel Adams

This book combines two of my favorites, micro beer and finances. This is an easy to read book even if you don't drink beer, it has a lot of good business experiences that one can learn by.

Jim Koch goes into detail on how and why he started the Boston Beer Co. He tells about being basically laughed at for trying to get a loan from a bank to brew beer, how he got his start up money, to why he took the business public and now controls one percent of all beer sales in the United States. It even tells why a Samuel Adams glass is shaped the way they are.

Happy Reading!!!

Wildflower Seed

The Conservation District has wildflower seed available to landowners. Fall is a great time to seed this mix! It is a mixture of native and non-native seed and costs \$35 per pound. While not all the seed is native, it's a nice mix that many people have had good luck with in the area. For more information, contact the District office at 449-5000 ext. 112.



An additional source for wildflower seed is Valley Farms or Agri Feeds for a seed mix or mixes through Treasure State Seed in Fairfield.

PARTNER NEWS

USDA Farm Service Agency Youth Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is \$5,000.

Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements:

- Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien
- Be 10 years to 20 years of age

- Comply with FSA's general eligibility requirements
- Be unable to get a loan from other sources
- Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above
- Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project advisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

Contact the Helena FSA office at (406) 449-5000 for further information. For online information, please visit: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/index>.

USDA is an equal opportunity employer, provider and lender.

From the Lewis and Clark County Weed District:

The growing season is fast approaching and that means "noxious weeds" will soon be in full bloom early this spring.

The spread of noxious weeds are a threat to pastures, crop lands, wetlands, private and public lands and recreational areas of Lewis and Clark County. Noxious weeds are a common problem to all lands of the county and state of Montana and the environment.

Currently in Montana, noxious weeds infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of the state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list. Lewis and Clark County has added five – Black Henbane, Common Burdock, Common Mullein, Musk Thistle and Garlic Mustard through resolution as agricultural concerns of the county.

"NOXIOUS" is a legal designation for many kinds of weeds. The designation is determined by a weed's potential threat ecologically, socially or economically and varies by county. Species of noxious weeds are legally mandated by the state and counties for management by landowners.

WHY CARE? Weeds displace native plants, reduce habitat for native and grazing animals and threaten diversity of wild lands and waterways. Weeds spoil pastures, rangelands, cropland, and property values, alter soil fertility, dry up water supplies, poison animals, decrease agricultural production, clog rivers and reduce the recreational value of open space of the county, state and federal lands.

Weed control is extremely expensive and will continue unless landowners – public and private – manage existing and new infestations. In Montana noxious weeds are spreading and invading private and public lands at a rate of 12-14 per cent a year. Crop losses are estimated at over \$42 million plus a year in Montana.

CONTROLLING AND MANAGEMENT OF NOXIOUS WEEDS IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY. NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST INVADERS!

For more information on the Weed District, see their website at <https://www.lccountymt.gov/weed-district.html> or give them a call at 406-447-8372.



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Contents:	Pg.
Stewardship pt. 2	1
Grazing Plans	2
Prickly Pear	4
Range Day	5
Book Report	6
Partner News	6/7

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LCCD SPONSORS- "Those who assume responsibility."

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- Bridger Veterinary
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To update your mailing address, contact Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 112 or email lccd@mt.net.