



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

Volume 54, Issue 3

Summer 2015

Upcoming Dates to Remember

Soil Health Day:

The Lewis & Clark Conservation District Board of Supervisors is co-hosting a Soil Health workshop on September 17 along with the Broadwater Conservation District. Jay Fuhrer from North Dakota's NRCS, who travels all over talking about Soil Health, will be our main speaker. There will be a tour of some cover cropped areas as well as Bruce Seed Farm's factory operation. Lunch will be provided and space is limited since we will be using a bus for the tour. Contact the Lewis & Clark Conservation District at 449-5000 ext. 112 if you would like more information.

Cost Share Program:

July 30th will be the cut-off for sign-ups for the CD's new Practice Cost Share Program. This program is designed to augment a landowner's funds to install new culverts, riparian or cross-fencing, or other projects. For a packet of materials, call the CD office at 449-5000 ext. 112 or see our website at <http://www.lccd.mt.nacdn.org/News.htm>.

Another Stream Project

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We are happy to say that after considerable planning and overcoming a few

obstacles, the construction portion of the Prickly Pear Restoration Project is complete.

The project is located off of Olsen Road and includes the new FWP fishing access site.

The purpose of the project was to reduce the erosion rate to stream banks of Prickly Pear Creek (PPC) by realigning the stream channel, improve stream bank stability through placement of tree revetments, root wads, revegetation transplants and planting. Also improvement of fish habitat through vegetation enhancement and embedding large woody debris in the stream banks and channel. The Project also intended to enhance fish habitat in Kincaid Creek, a spring creek tributary by restoring channel length, improve fish passage, and restoring potential spawning habitat.

Project work on PPC allowed approximately 2,400 feet of stream banks (both sides) to be stabilized with the resulting reduction of erosion, sedimentation, increase floodplain capacity, and protection of site wetlands from impacts from stream avulsion or draining. A water gap was added to the site and the riparian corridor is now protected from livestock grazing.

Kincaid Creek had approximately 700 feet of stream banks stabilized and reconstructed with the addition of about 100 feet of channel length. Efforts to improve Kincaid Creek included restoration of the historic confluence with PPC, narrowing and deepening of the channel, removal of the perched culvert replaced by a pedestrian bridge, and removal of significant amounts of trash and buried concrete and metal debris. All these actions will provide significant habitat improvement and potential spawning opportunities for the fishery.



A significant amount of earthen material estimated at more than 7,000 cubic yards was moved during the project's realignment of the stream channels. These efforts to modify the stream alignment were to improve conveyance of bed load and to improve recruitment of woody riparian vegetation for erosion control as well as provide fish habitat and stream cover. Approximately 5,000 willow sprigs

were incorporated in the stream bank structures constructed with the addition of significant number of trees used for revetments and root wads. Revegetation also included transplanting of willow and other plant clumps placement of sod mats harvested on-site over exposed stream banks with seeding of disturbed areas using native riparian plant seed mix.

The project was a collaborative effort of WQPD, FWP, and the Lake Helena Watershed Group that accomplished a significant effort on PPC to address erosion and sedimentation that was impairing water quality of the creek. Habitat improvements for fish and wildlife are an important result. The intended result of the revegetation efforts are to provide a healthy riparian zone, further long-term erosion protection, and provide shading of the stream to aid in temperature reduction benefiting fish health. The project also provided increased floodplain capacity for this stream reach to minimize downstream impacts.



Cooperative partners and funding for the project were from: MT DEQ 319 Non-point Program; MT DNRC HB223; Pat Barnes Trout Unlimited Chapter; MT Dept. of Fish Wildlife & Parks; Lewis & Clark Conservation District; MT Ducks Unlimited; and the Lewis & Clark County Water Quality Protection District

Design and construction services were provided by PP&L & NorthWestern Energy FERC Conservation Funding (McNeal Resources). In-kind contributions to the project was willow harvesting by Troop 214 of the Boy Scouts and volunteers and by Tri-County Disposal (Dumpsters & trash disposal).

Wildflower Seed

The Conservation District has wildflower seed available to landowners. It's 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.

Interesting Readings

Scott Blackman, Supervisor

Over the years I have been known to read all types of books. It was suggested that I write about some of these books, as most are ones that you won't find at the local book store, so here goes.

**Holy Shit
Managing Manure
to Save Mankind**
By Gene Logsdon

This book is both educational and also has a twist of humor thrown in, as you can tell by the title. If you have never studied manure and its uses, this is a good beginner book. It gives information on all types of manure, cow, horse, chicken, bat and yes even human.

It discusses all the waste--no pun intended--that society is losing from having to pay to dispose of manure, to the value of the nutrients that are being lost in the manure that is being disposed of. It also tells about the advantages that the small farms have over the mega factory farms.

You will learn all about pitch forks and their uses, which is a little slow, but after that it is a fast reading book even though it is about 200 pages. So if you are interested you should still be able to purchase from Amazon.com. It used to be sold through HMI, but I see it isn't listed any more.

Happy reading until I tell you about how "Cows save The Planet".

ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, 2014 Farm Bill

Mark Johnson, Area Resource Conservationist-Programs

With the passage of the 2014 Farm bill in the fall of 2014 most of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) easement programs were lumped into one umbrella program ACEP - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. ACEP has two divisions, one dealing with farm and ranch lands, Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and one dealing with wetlands, Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE).

Agricultural easements are one way to protect the long-term viability of our nation's food supply by preventing working lands from being gobbled up by subdivisions and other non-agriculture uses. Wetland easements protect the important habitat for fish and wildlife in Montana, they can improve water quality, reduce the impact of flooding and recharge ground water.

Applications for ALE do not come directly from the landowner, instead they come from a funding partner. An individual cannot apply directly for ALE, they must have a funding partner willing to pay for 50% of the easement value and to hold the easement. Eligible partners are groups that have farm and grassland protection program in place and can be Indian Tribes, State and local governments, non-government organizations (search Montana Association of Land Trusts). These groups have been involved with the easement process and understand what NRCS needs to help a project proposal move forward.

For the WRE, NRCS will work directly with the private landowner or Indian tribe to develop an enrollment option that fits both parties. For land owned by Indian tribes the agreement will be a 30 year contract. For other private lands the enrollment options will vary from a "Permanent" or "30-year" easement. The 30 year contracts are only available to Indian tribes. The length of the easement/contract will determine the payment NRCS and/or the partners will pay towards the fair market value. These payment rates vary from 100 percent for permanent easements, to 50-75 percent for 30 year easements/contracts. NRCS will also pay 50 to 100 percent of the restoration costs based on the length of the easement/contract. The type or amount of restoration will be determined during the evaluation process.

Wetland Reserve Easements, although new in the 2014 Farm Bill have been around for several years through previous farm bills. For example; one land owner that took part in the 2008 farm bill program Wetland Reserve Program, protected approximately 100 acres along the Yellowstone River. Several acres of native woody shrubs were reestablished with the help of the Montana Conservation Corps.



Tree planning on WRP, protected by high deer fence



Montana Conservation Corps hand planting shrubs into weed fabric along Yellowstone River.

NRCS takes applications at any time for these programs, but will advertise a date that applications will be considered for the 2016 ACEP funding. Your local NRCS staff as well as the easement staff in the Bozeman NRCS State Office will be happy to assist you in this process.

Non-Discrimination Policy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

Collaborative Project on Sun River Finalist in Prestigious National Competition

Alan Rollo, Sun River Watershed Coordinator

A collaborative project to restore flows and water quality in the Rocky Mountain Front's Sun River has gained international attention that landed it as one of the top four finalists in the national premiere of the North American Riverprize, a prestigious recognition bestowed by the International River Foundation.

"Although not the winner of the award, it was great to be one of the top four", "said John Chase, the Sun River Watershed Group's president. "The Sun River as we know it now has been a long time in the making and the teamwork behind it deserves such recognition; the health of the Sun River is due to all the people who worked so hard to find the solutions to meet so many needs - from irrigation to angling."

The Sun River and many irrigators had been chronically water short for many decades, and its tributary-- appropriately-named Muddy Creek---had been one of Montana's largest sources of sediment pollution. The two decades of work by the Sun River Watershed Group and its partners have made great strides in reducing sediment from Muddy Creek and coming close to meeting all water demands by pursuing collaborative riparian restoration and irrigation infrastructure projects.

"Getting all the construction done to improve the District's water delivery system has been crazy sometimes," said Rich Boyle, the Fort Shaw Irrigation District's Manager. "But in the end the effort is worth it. The District benefits, the producers benefit, and the River benefits. When you get the chance to be part of something bigger than yourself, and you can trust your partners, then you have a win on your hands. We couldn't have done this on our own," added Rich. The Coca-Cola Company joined in the Watershed Group effort, providing matching funds to the Fort Shaw Irrigation District's infrastructure projects and support for flow monitoring and management. The Coca-Cola Company has a goal of replenishing through flow improvement projects all the water the Company uses in its products by the year 2020. This project netted nearly 3 billion additional gallons of water in the Sun River every year, bringing the Company that much closer to its sustainability goal. The Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSmart program and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation also contributed significant funding.

The Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks will be monitoring trout populations in three different reaches of the Sun River in the coming months. "Our agency has participated in the Sun River Watershed Group for many years, and it is so rewarding to see some of the long-planned projects come to fruition in such a collaborative way," said Jason Mullen, Regional Fisheries Biologist. "We look forward to monitoring what we expect to see in terms of improved river health with the improved flows."

The North American Riverprize, an initiative of the International River Foundation, is a demonstration of outstanding, visionary and sustainable programs in river management, restoration or protection. Projects were submitted, regardless of the size of the river or the scale of the project and judged by an independent panel of experts drawn from all three countries and across a range of river management fields.

The other three finalists were the Connecticut River (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire), the Niagara River (New York) and the San Antonio River (Texas).

The winner of the North American Riverprize announced in New Mexico was the Niagara River (New York). For the Sun River and its partners, it was meaningful to celebrate their achievements for a moment, while in the next breath making plans for future Sun River restoration and watershed improvements.

Water Well Test Cost-Share

The Lewis & Clark Conservation District is helping to off-set the cost of well testing in the Conservation District. Pick up your test kits at the Water Quality Protection District or County Extension, get your water tested. Then when you get your results, **mail a copy of the test results to the Conservation District at 790 Colleen Street, Helena MT 59601** or email them to lccd@mt.net and you will be reimbursed \$25 for at least the minimum test. We will reimburse the first 100 tests for which we receive results.

A Friendly Reminder...

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.

District Report--Chris Evans, District Administrator

Unfortunately the May Flood Awareness Day was cancelled this year due to cold temperatures. We plan to be back at East Valley Middle School in 2016!

In the past quarter the Conservation District has been working on the upcoming Soil Health Day in September. Administration of a number of grants and other special projects has been on going.

The Conservation District is submitting a pre-proposal to NRCS in their RCPP program that would dramatically increase funding for EQIP forestry relate projects, and would include Broadwater and Jefferson Counties as well. Over 800,000 acres in the 3 counties are in the high and severe risk categories for fire hazard due to beetle kill of trees, drought and overcrowded trees.

Also in the last quarter we reviewed and funded 44 new Weed Cost Share program applications, allotting around \$44,000 for 50% cost share to landowners in the county. If you are interested in participating in this program in 2016, please call the CD office at 449-5000 ext. 112 to get on the mailing list.

Our pilot project for the Practices Cost Share program is underway. We're going to do a continuous sign up with the next cut-off for funding July 30. If you are interested in looking into participating in this program, give us a call.



LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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