



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Autumn 2020

New Conservation Planner-Lewis & Clark CD



Given the ongoing need for assistance in Lewis & Clark County, last spring the CD applied for a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts. We were successful!

The purpose of this grant was to hire a temporary employee to add capacity to the CD and to NRCS for a year, possibly 2 years. Andrew Kretschmer, currently working for the Sheridan County CD, has been hired on to assist us!

Andrew's priority will be the north Lewis and Clark County area, and he will be doing outreach to landowners on Conservation

Technical Assistance and CSP primarily. While his main focus will be in Lewis and Clark County, Andrew will be also be putting in some time in Teton and Jefferson Counties. Paired up with NRCS programs and the Elk Creek Assessment, which the CD had done in late 2019, we anticipate that Andrew will be helping landowners initiate some project planning on their properties.

In Andrew's words: "I grew up in central Iowa within the community of Des Moines. From a young age I developed an affinity for the outdoors which was built upon by the Boy Scouts of America.

To begin building this path I attended Iowa State University obtaining a bachelor's degree in Forest Ecosystem Management. After graduation I joined the Conservation Corps in Iowa which was a great deal of fun however, having visited the Lubrecht Experimental Forest near Missoula during my studies I felt a calling from the West I could no longer ignore.

My next step was with the Big Sky Watershed Corps who partnered me with Richland and Sheridan County Conservation Districts in the eastern portion of Montana. Despite not having made it to the mountains I quickly fell in love with the landscape and its inhabitants, finding a sense of belonging with the agricultural producers I'd never felt prior. After completing my term with BSWC I began work directly for SCCD managing their groundwater reservation, soil sampling, and education programs in addition to extensive grant writing. When I found the announcement that Lewis and Clark CD was hiring a conservationist I knew that the opportunity

I'd been waiting for had shown itself. I am ecstatic to get my boots on the ground and start meeting the community I look forward to calling home!"

Andrew starts work on Monday October 5th! His CD email address will be andrew@lewisandclarkcd.org. He can be reached by calling 406-449-5000 ext.3 for the main NRCS office.

New Resource Technician-Lewis & Clark CD

For the past few years, the CD board and current staff member have been discussing what a 2nd permanent position for the Conservation District would look like. While our budget won't support a full-time position, with the help of grants, we decided to start the process for hiring for a permanent resource technician for the CD.

After reviewing applications, we finally made a selection. Connor Mertz, currently working for the Big Sky Watershed Corps with the Healthy Watershed Consortium, will be starting work part time soon, probably October 19th. Connor will be working with Chris Evans on current and new projects for the CD and will be looking for funding to help fund his position.

Born and raised in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, Connor moved out west in 2014 to pursue a degree in Environmental Science at Montana State University. His first experience in conservation work came through his involvement with a youth conservation corps in high school, a program that undoubtedly shaped his future direction and interests. During college, he spent two seasons working trail crew in the Adirondack Park of upstate New York.

After graduation, Connor spent several years working on different organic vegetable farms around Bozeman and traveling abroad in the off-season. Before joining LCCD, Connor served with the Big Sky Watershed Corps, focusing his term on capacity building for and promotion of conservation programs along the Missouri. He is excited to combine his interests in agriculture and conservation in his role with the LCCD. In his free time, Connor can be found biking around Helena, running in the South Hills, or skiing.



Naked River Banks - A Partial Cure - Fascines

Jeff Ryan - Lewis and Clark Conservation District

The Lewis & Clark Conservation District is collaborating with the Cascade Conservation District on an educational program to demonstrate ways riverbank landowners can maintain their riparian zone and/or take measures to improve it. The program is called "Naked River Banks" (NRB). The program was conceived by John Chase and outreach activity is being implemented by Tenlee Atchison - both with the Cascade Conservation District. My involvement has been to provide some technical oversight based on my decades of experience with streambank restoration techniques and projects.

This summer Tenlee organized a NRB two phase demonstration project on the Missouri River south of Great Falls. My grandson, Drake Ryan, and I helped with the project along with



numerous local landowners and Big Sky Watershed Corps members. This phase of the demonstration site involved the construction of a fascine to temporarily protect the toe of an eroding bank approximately 200 feet long.

“Fascine” is a Latin word for a bundle of sticks and that’s basically what we did on the project - bundled together juniper branches with rope and twine into a tubular shape about three feet in diameter and 200 feet long. The

rope and twine are applied every several feet along the fascine and tightly cinched to hold the fascine together. This construction activity occurs on top of the eroding bank and after it’s completed the fascine is rolled down the bank to the toe of the eroding bank. The fascine is then secured along the bank with large stakes



pounded through the fascine into the river bank. The technique is very simple and relatively low cost but does require a fair amount of hand labor to build. We used mostly juniper in the construction but ponderosa pine or Douglas fir branches work well too. Willow and cottonwood branches can also be used - especially if incorporated with the conifer branches. Christmas trees can also be used and are a great way to recycle them.

Some words of caution - fascines are only a temporary technique to reduce the erosive force of water on the toe of eroding banks. They are a band aid to buy time for vegetation to flourish before the fascine rots away after a few years.

As noted - this was phase one of a two phase project. Phase two will occur this Fall after nearby willow have gone into winter dormancy. A couple thousand willow stems will be cut and laid behind and against the fascine at about a 45-degree angle pointing towards the river with soil over much of the base of the stems. The upper portion of the eroding bank will be laid back and covered with a heavy-duty coir fabric. I will provide more details on phase two in a future newsletter.

Editor's note: Another word of caution, any work that affects the bed or bank of a perennial stream in the state of Montana requires at least a 310 permit from your local Conservation District. It may also require permits from other entities.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROGRAMS

Pollinator

The Conservation District in the Area 6 region of the state, got a grant recently for some Pollinator Funding and have a seed program put together. Lewis and Clark CD is participating and has enough seed for a total of 4 acres for the county, with the potential to get more.

Landowners who are interested can contact the office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5 or via email at chris@lewisandclarkcd.org. You can also look at the details of the program and find the landowner interest form on our website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/pollinator-initiative/>.

Cost Share Program-2021

The Lewis & Clark Conservation District Board welcomes applications for our 2021 Cost Share Program within Lewis & Clark County. All projects have to be done within Lewis & Clark County and with private landowners only (no agencies will qualify).

Application deadline for 2021 is November 13, 2020. Projects must be implemented between January 1 2021 and December 31, 2021.

Projects can include everything from weeds, tree planting, fencing, riparian area improvement, pollinators etc.! See the application for other project ideas. If you are just looking for a little bit of funding to get your project off the ground, take a look!

For more information contact the CD office at 406-449-5000 ext. 4 or email chris@lewisandclarkcd.org or see the post at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/lccd-practice-cost-share-program/>.

Water Test Program

Recently, CD Board Chair Jeff Ryan was out on a tour with the Water Quality Protection District, whose board he also is on, and they were at Rossiter School viewing demonstrations of the equipment used for well monitoring.

It was a good reminder that the Conservation District will reimburse landowners in Lewis & Clark County when they get their wells tested for at least the basic \$35 test for bacteria etc.

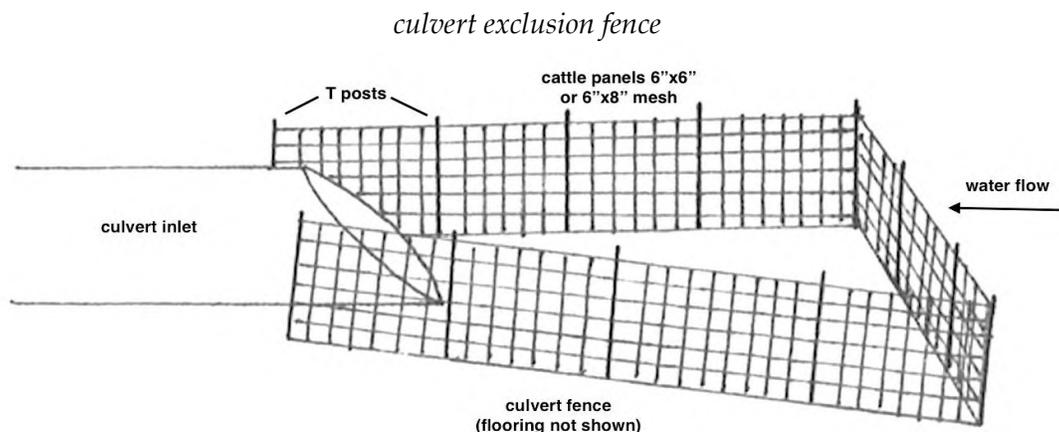
Contact the Water Quality Protection District at 457-8584 for recommendations on water testing. Send us your results (mail to LCCD, 790 Colleen Street, Helena MT 59601 or email to chris@lewisandclarkcd.org) and we'll pay you \$25! This program is in conjunction with the Water Quality Protection District and MSU's Well Educated Program.



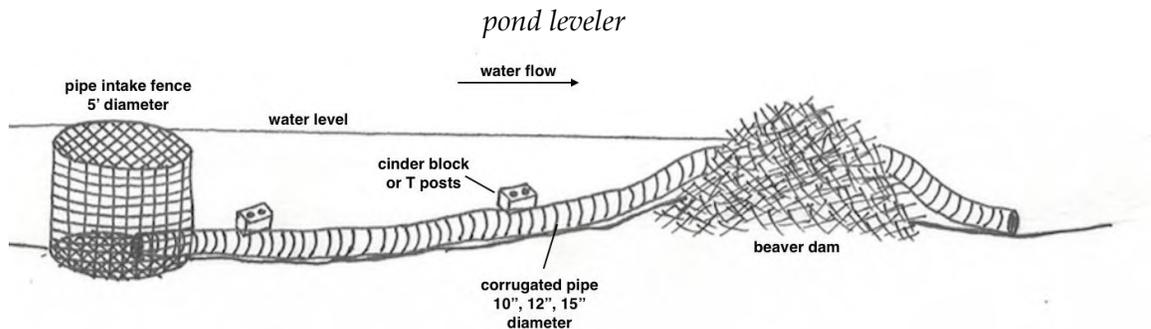
Beaver Conflict Resolution Pilot Project: Collaborating for Healthy Watersheds

In 2019, the Clark Fork Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, and National Wildlife Federation started a pilot project to increase tolerance for beavers in western Montana. Beavers' natural dam-building behavior creates wetlands, stores water, provides wildlife habitat, and retains sediment. These activities are great for ecosystem health but may damage human infrastructure or property. Our project aims to assist landowners and agencies to find nonlethal solutions for living with beavers where they are appropriate.

Common concerns include tree cutting, culvert plugging, and flooding from dams. Wrapping trees with sturdy wire prevents beaver cutting. Flow devices, such as culvert fences and pond levelers, are simple structures that have been used successfully in other regions to mitigate beaver-caused flooding. Culvert fences completely enclose culvert inlets and keep beavers away from the pull and sound of running water, removing two stimuli that trigger their damming instinct.



Pond levelers use a flexible pipe to create a permanent leak in the dam. The pipe is placed through a notch in the dam, draining the water to the height the pipe is set. The intake is fenced to keep beavers from plugging it.



Although these devices are simple, training in their proper installation is important. We have seen “do it yourself” projects go badly due to insufficient attention to materials, hydrology, or beaver behavior. We are training partner organizations and agencies on proper installation techniques and which materials to use. Flow devices last an average of seven years, with some not needing replacement for over ten. Maintenance on these devices is recommended 3-4 times per year. Checks take about 5-20 minutes to clear debris build-up and make sure that the device is functioning as intended.

We have worked with private ranchers and landowners, land trusts and nonprofits, railroad companies, county and state road departments, FWP, USFS, DNRC, and conservation districts to assess sites, install flow devices, and conduct outreach. Installations on public land may be seen at:

- Council Grove State Park, Missoula
- Lost Creek State Park, Anaconda
- Kelly Island and Sha-Ron Fishing Access Sites, Missoula
- Washoe Park, Anaconda

For agencies like county road departments and MDT, these devices save time, money, and equipment hours on tasks such as unplugging culverts that sometimes must be done daily to prevent flooding. We also have cost-share funding to help private landowners pay for materials. Our project assists with the entire flow device process: site assessments, design, permitting, material purchasing, and installation.

For more information, please visit our pilot project webpage: <https://clarkfork.org/our-work/what-we-do/restore-the-best/beaver-conflict-mitigation/>

Contacts:

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Will McDowell, Clark Fork Coalition, will@clarkfork.org
Sarah Bates, National Wildlife Federation, batess@nwf.org
Aaron Hall, Defenders of Wildlife, ahall@defenders.org

DISTRICT REPORT

As is probably obvious from the contents of this missive, the CD has been hopping the last quarter. Even with Covid, stream inspections and permitting are ongoing and we are ramping up for the final quarter of 2020, with 2 new employees. We are very much looking forward to what Andrew and Connor will be able to do for us in our mission to help you all as our landowners.

CD board meetings continue on the 2nd Thursday of every month, and for the time being, are being done on Zoom, with people joining on video or by call. For information on upcoming meetings, check out the Calendar section of our website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/calendar>.

For the final quarter of 2020, we will be working on wrapping up activities, creating a Long-Range Plan to go with our Annual Plan of Operations, and revising our budget for 2021. We anticipate a renewal of the Elk Creek Flood Task Force now that we have some additional help in the office. The CD recently got a grant to proceed with a Channel Migration Zone mapping project on Elk Creek from the confluence with Smith Creek to the Sun River.

PARTNER INFORMATION

NEW DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST!!!



After a long haul with people filling in, we finally have a new District Conservationist in the Helena Field Office!!! Rebecka (Becky) Ayre joins Jason Saari, the Soil Con in the office and Sean Clancy, the Area Engineer.

In her words: "I grew up in Roberts, MT on a small 80-acre farm/ranch. Growing up, I was involved in almost all sports and clubs our school offered.

I graduated Roberts High School in 2010 and went on to MSU-Bozeman where I studied Animal Science along with Natural Resource and Rangeland Ecology. I graduated Bozeman in 2015 with a dual bachelor's degree. I started with NRCS in the spring of 2016 in Malta, MT as a rangeland management specialist.

I started as the District Conservationist here in the Helena Field office in July. In my spare time I enjoy snowshoeing, hunting, hiking/walking with my dog, reading a good book, or driving around on backroads." Welcome Becky! Becky can be

reached at Rebecka.ayre@usda.gov or by calling 406-449-5000 ext. 3.

Sign up Deadlines

- Conservation Stewardship Program-Grasslands Conservation Initiative application deadline for fiscal year 2021 -- 10/16/2020
- EQIP/CSP/RCP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program) **application deadline for Fiscal Year 2021** -- 11/17/2020
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction Targeted Implementation Plan - northwest part of the county



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