



# LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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## *Lewis & Clark Conservation District Annual Report for 2020*

Well now, hasn't 2020 been a fascinating year? The Conservation District has been busy working on our normal operations to the extent that we can, and adapting to the new normal of doing things in a pandemic. Our meetings have transitioned to the virtual world and unfortunately most of our events have been postponed to 2021 (we hope!).

### EDUCATION:

This year, the Conservation District Board decided to host the Rolling Rivers Trailer for the Helena area. DNRC no longer had the capacity to host the trailer—which requires maintenance and scheduling activities--and since we use it often, the Board of Supervisors opted to step up and do the work. In 2020, the Trailer was only used twice, due to the ongoing Covid pandemic.

The East Helena High School Career Technical Education Committee remains active, and the CD has 2 associate



*Rolling Rivers Trailer in action*



*East Helena High School Ag Program*

supervisors and administrator on that committee. In 2021, we're anticipating that the American Jobs for American Youth Non-Profit will work with the Committee on a summer jobs program for the East Helena High School students.

The East Helena Flood Awareness Day event and the State Envirothon were both cancelled this year with the ongoing pandemic. Also postponed was the 2020 Montana Youth Range Camp to be hosted by the CD, as well as the Riparian Grazing Workshop that had been planned for July in Augusta.

The quarterly newsletter, *The Explorer* continues to be published online and distributed through an emailing list and in hard copy format. The newsletter incorporates articles from the CD and partners, with information that the CD

believes to be pertinent to the landowners in the county. The CD's website was given a thorough review this year by an outside firm and is undergoing extensive changes to make the site more user friendly and encompass all the activities of the CD.

The Conservation District provides information to the legislators in our area as appropriate and we participate in the session as needed to testify on bills etc. With the upcoming session starting in January, we will be reaching out to our legislators to make them aware of the needs of our landowners and that we are here to provide feedback on natural resource concerns.

**WATER RESOURCES: Elk Creek Watershed-**The CD continues our work with the Elk Creek Watershed after



*2018 Flood in Augusta-credit Prairie Populist*

2 years of flooding in 2018 and 2019. Our first priority was a stream assessment completed by Confluence Consulting in late 2019 with the help of a grant from DNRC and presented to the community in early 2020. The assessment focused on agricultural landowner priorities and will hopefully translate into quality projects to help landowners become more resilient to flooding and drought in the future. Building on that assessment, the Conservation District and Sun River Watershed Group applied for and received a grant for a

Channel Migration Zone study which should give resource professionals and landowners a picture of what the streams in the Elk Creek Watershed will likely do next. This study should be completed soon and will be presented to the landowners in the watershed. Included in ongoing discussions is the topic of stream gage replacement on the Elk Creek system. The Sun River Watershed Group, DNRC, and NOAA are all working together with the Conservation District to replace and fund gages lost during the flooding.

**Water Quality-**The board continues the well water test cost share program in 2020. We haven't had too many requests this year, but will continue that program in 2021. This project has been in collaboration with the Water Quality Protection District. We work with landowners on stream permitting projects to be sure that projects maintain the very best water quality possible and to ensure minimal long-term negative effects from their activities. We also help advise landowners on land use, such as grazing, to minimize sedimentation runoff into nearby streams and rivers.

**Watershed Groups-**The Conservation District continues to support the Sun River Watershed Group, working with Tracy Wendt who has created an amazing environment for project development in the Watershed and the CD looks forward to seeing SRWG's future work. We anticipate more activity at the Lake Helena Watershed Group in 2021. They have a new board chair and with added personnel at the Conservation District, we hope to see more collaboration with them.

**Stream Restoration Committee-**For the past several years, the CD has been working with DNRC and others to work through the complexities and expense of the floodplain permitting process. We are currently working with a local engineer, DNRC's floodplain people and others to find minimum engineering requirements for stream projects that would reduce the cost of the floodplain permitting process. As part of that effort, we are working directly with a landowner who has a project in the mapped floodplain. This project, scheduled for spring 2021, will add value to the Stream Restoration Committee efforts, while also creating a demonstration project for education purposes.

**Stream Permitting:** The Conservation District has processed 26 permits in 2020 so far, with 2 emergencies and 3 complaints. The numbers of applications were down sharply in 2020. We provide education and assistance on the requirements of the permitting process. In addition, the CD has assisted in the creation of the Living on the Bank website ([www.livingonthebank.org](http://www.livingonthebank.org)) which is a great educational tool for landowners who reside or

plan to reside near a stream or river. Moving forward, our newest Associate Supervisor, Chris Carparelli, is going to assist us in outreach to new stream or riverside landowners about permitting and responsible land management when living near water.



*Two Dot Project*

**Stream Projects:** Chairman Jeff Ryan has been in demand for a few years, assisting with stream projects across the state. This year he has assisted in the Two Dot area, the Great Falls area and in Lewis and Clark County on a potential project on Lake Helena, and one on Beaver Creek near the Missouri River that the Forest Service is working on. In 2021, we'll also be looking at a project on Spokane Creek, as well as on Lake Helena.

**Other projects:** The CD has been working on building a solar pump system on a trailer to use for watering stream projects that we assist landowners with. The solar pump trailer should increase the success of the revegetation efforts of those projects by making them less susceptible to failing due to bad weather.

## LAND MANAGEMENT:

**Invasive Species-**The CD works with the Sun River Watershed Group on their weed control efforts by providing a backpack sprayer to be donated to the Weed Whacker Rodeo annually and help advertise that event. The CD provides annual funding to the Montana Biological Weed Control Coordination Project based out of Missoula. They have an ambitious mission to work with landowners and managers across the state to incorporate biological weed control in their noxious weed programs. See more at [www.mtbioccontrol.org](http://www.mtbioccontrol.org).

**Conservation-**We continue our support for planting trees by directing landowners to the Montana Conservation Seedling Nursery in Missoula for their shelterbelt tree and shrub planting needs. Landowners who have smaller needs than their minimum order size are encouraged to work with the County Extension who will combine orders for landowners. We will assist those landowners with species selection and planting plans, as well as irrigation plans. We advise landowners, as requested, on how they can improve the health of range



*Helena Community Garden's new high tunnel*

land and forestry in the county. Recreational use of trails and the appropriate care of the resources is also a concern of the Conservation District. The Conservation District Board saves resources for special projects, usually a specific region in the county that has a priority concern in regard to resources. Recently it's been the Elk Creek Watershed in the Augusta area.

The CD has a small cost share program for landowners to apply to address their specific resource concerns. In 2019, we had 2 projects, a conversion from a ditch to a pipe for an agricultural landowner and an irrigation system for the Helena Community Gardens high tunnel.

**PEOPLE:** The CD's current supervisors include Jeff Ryan, Ron Ingersoll, Jeanette Nordahl, Steve Granzow, Stan Fraiser, John Baucus, and Sarah Howe-Cobb. Our associate Supervisors currently include David Martin, Karl Christians, and Chris Carparelli.

In the fall of 2020, the CD added two new employees to the office. Andrew Kretschmer joined us from Sheridan County CD and is working under a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts to provide Conservation Technical Assistance to landowners in Lewis and Clark County. His priority is the Elk Creek Watershed and surrounding areas. Connor Mertz wrapped up his Big Sky Watershed Corps duties in mid-November and started with the CD as a permanent staff member. Connor will be working part time as a resource technician and the Sun River Watershed Group will be contracting with the CD for some of his time. We hope to get Connor to full-time hours with project funds and being careful with our spending.

**2021--**For the next year, we look forward to continuing work on:

- The Elk Creek Flood group
- Our education efforts with the schools in the county
- Updating/improving the website at [www.lewisandclarkcd.org](http://www.lewisandclarkcd.org)
- Our quarterly newsletter, *The Explorer*
- A riparian grazing workshop in the Elk Creek Watershed in the spring
- A range day and/or stream tour sometime in the summer
- Hosting the Montana Youth Range Camp in the upper Dearborn River Watershed
- Resumption of the Montana Envirothon
- The possibility of a rain barrel workshop
- Beaver Creek & Spokane Creek Projects
- Pollinator Initiative
- And more work for our small and large acreage landowners

If you, as a landowner, are looking for recommendations or assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to the Conservation District for help! You can find our website at [www.lewisandclarkcd.org](http://www.lewisandclarkcd.org) and you can contact the office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5.

**LCCD Staff**

Administrator, Chris Evans  
Conservation Planner, Andrew Kretschmer  
Resource Technician, Connor Mertz

**LCCD Supervisors**

Chairman, Jeff Ryan  
Vice Chair, Ron Ingersoll  
Treasurer, Jeanette Nordahl  
John Baucus  
Stan Frasier

Stephen Granzow  
Sarah Howe-Cobb  
David Martin  
Karl Christian

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Evans  
District Administrator  
Lewis & Clark Conservation District