



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

Volume 60, Issue 2

Spring 2021

COMMUNICATION WITH THE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Conservation District's new employees finally have their own phone extensions and it's changing how people can get in touch with us.

- Andrew: main work is with landowners in relation to NRCS programs andrew@lewisandclarkcd.org or call 406-449-5000 ext. 3882
- Connor: now full time with the Conservation District and is working with CD programs and outreach connor@lewisandclarkcd.org or call 406-449-5000 ext. 3886
- Chris, CD Administrator: overall CD operations and management chris@lewisandclarkcd.org or call 406-449-3884
- 406-449-5000 ext. 5 will still get you to the CD office, and the old email lccd@mt.net will still get you to Chris Evans.

THE ONGOING SPOKANE CREEK PROJECT

by Connor Mertz, LCCD Resource Technician



On the brisk but sunny morning of March 6th, over 30 volunteers gathered at the Helena Regulating Reservoir to help the Lewis & Clark Conservation District harvest willows for an upcoming stream bank stabilization project on Spokane Creek. Despite short notice of the event, friends, family, and members of various conservation groups showed up with loppers in hand, eager to help out.

The proverb “many hands make light work” rang true and the 3,000 willow cuttings required for the project were harvested and bundled for transport in just over two hours. The willows were then loaded up on a flatbed truck and driven off to be stored in a snow pile in preparation for the project. For those wondering about this practice, harvesting mature willows helps stimulate new growth within the stand. This same site has been used for cuttings in the past and evidence of new shoots can be seen throughout.

The Project

The Spokane Creek project has been in the works for several years. Jeff Claassen, the landowner undertaking the project, originally approached the CD with flood damage concerns in 2018, looking for a solution to bank erosion issues. Lewis & Clark CD has long been an advocate



Montana Association of Conservation Districts' Executive Director Rebecca Boslough and Lake Helena Watershed Group's Chair Erin Wall, taking a quick break from harvesting willows

for utilizing “green” bioengineering techniques for stream bank stabilization/restoration projects (largely due to the technical knowledge of Board Chair Jeff Ryan). Rather than using rock riprap to stabilize an eroding streambank, these techniques offer a more natural solution to improving bank stability. Incorporating live vegetation on an eroding bank rather than rock offers a range

of benefits to the stream system including: improved fish & wildlife habitat, reduced nutrient pollution, and increased bank “roughness” or its ability to absorb water energy during high flows. In addition, these bioengineering techniques can be cost-effective when compared to rock stabilization methods.

The design for bioengineering techniques



varies depending on site conditions. The Spokane Creek site will serve as a test of a new modified “willow wall” technique designed by Jeff Ryan. Dormant willow cuttings will be placed in a trench on the edge of the stream and laid back along the eroding bank. Coir, a biodegradable fabric will sandwich the willows along with a thin soil layer and additional willow and conifer material will be filled in the trench to create a protective “toe”. The coir fabric and toe provide immediate erosion protection, giving the willow time to establish roots and stabilize the soil long-term. Ultimately, this method aims to minimize the cost and labor of this type of bank stabilization project, making it more accessible and practical for landowners. The project is set to begin in late March or early April depending on weather. If you are interested in seeing the site, please reach out to CD staff.

The CD would like to thank the Bagel Company in Helena for donating bagels and coffee for the volunteer event and Montana Conservation Corps for lending extra tools. Also, a big thanks to all of the volunteers!



Some of the volunteers for the day

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUMMER EDUCATION HIKES

By Andrew Kretschmer, LCCD Conservation Planner

This summer, the Lewis and Clark Conservation District is excited to collaborate with Prickly Pear Land Trust, U.S. Forest Service, Helena Parks & Recreation, the Montana Discovery Foundation, and FWP’s Montana Wild to host a series of summer education walks.

Every Tuesday starting June 8th through August 17th at 6:00PM MST one or more of the partner agencies will be leading a one-hour outdoor educational walk in the Helena area. Each walk will focus on a natural resource with topics including pollinators, invasive species, water quality, geology, wildfire, wildlife and more! Locations will vary with each presentation with some selected sites at the Helena Regulating Reservoir, Ten Mile Creek Park, Mount Helena and others, most in the Helena Valley.

Attendance is limited to twenty people per walk but signup will be open to the public about a week and half before each event. To ensure a positive experience for all, the age limit is fourth grade or older and children must be supervised by an adult.

More information will be released in the coming weeks and can be found on LCCD's website or by contacting the CD Office 406-449-5000, ext. 3882 for Andrew or ext. 3886 for Connor at the CD. We are looking forward to the long summer days and smiling faces!

CHANNEL MIGRATION ZONE OPEN HOUSE-AUGUSTA YOUTH CENTER-APRIL 30, 2021

On April 30, 2021 Applied Geomorphology and the Sun River Watershed Group will be presenting on the Channel Migration Zone project that was done on Elk Creek last fall and through the winter.

The event will be at the Augusta Youth Center and will be Open House Style from 9 am until 2 pm. Representatives from the Conservation District will be in attendance to take feedback from the community members on natural resource concerns and discuss current CD programs. The NRCS will also have representatives there to talk about their current programs with community members.

MONTANA YOUTH RANGE CAMP

Plans are underway for the Montana Youth Range Camp for 2021. Dates will be Monday July 26-Thursday July 29. The event will take place at the Wilderness School of the Bible near the Dearborn River.

This event is dependent on the COVID situation since students will be sharing dorm rooms through the week.

MISSOURI RIVER CLEANUP DAY-AUGUST 21,2021

A promotional poster for 'Bashin' Trash' Missouri River Cleanup Day. The central graphic features the words 'BASHIN' TRASH' in large, blue, distressed block letters. To the right of the text is a circular arrangement of various trash items including a can, a bottle, a fork, a pizza slice, a banana, a cup, and a piece of paper. A blue fish is positioned in the center of this circle. The background consists of light blue and white diagonal stripes. To the right of the central graphic, the text 'MISSOURI RIVER CLEAN UP' is written in brown, followed by 'AUGUST 21' in brown, and 'HELENA', 'HOLTER DAM', 'GREAT FALLS', and 'BREAKS MONUMENT' in teal. At the bottom right, 'VOLUNTEERS NEEDED' is written in brown. A dark blue banner at the bottom contains the text 'FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT BASH.TRASH.MO@GMAIL.COM OR GO TO WWW.SUNRIVERWATERSHED.ORG/BASHIN-TRASH' in white.

MISSOURI RIVER CLEAN UP
AUGUST 21
HELENA
HOLTER DAM
GREAT FALLS
BREAKS MONUMENT
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT BASH.TRASH.MO@GMAIL.COM OR GO TO WWW.SUNRIVERWATERSHED.ORG/BASHIN-TRASH

RIPARIAN GRAZING DAY-SEPTEMBER 14

The Conservation District is excited to announce that we're planning a Riparian Grazing Day on September 14, 2021 in the Augusta Area. We're planning a morning in the Youth Center to see presentations and then lunch and an afternoon field portion out on Elk Creek.

Allen McNeal from McNeal Resources and Dr. Clayton Marlow from Montana State University will be presenting on stream form and function and how grazing in the areas along streams can be a part of your grazing rotation without damaging the stream system.

Resource folks from the various agencies will also be on hand with information about how their programs can be accessed by landowners.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROGRAMS

POLLINATOR--The Conservation Districts in the Area 6 region of the state were recently awarded a grant to establish Pollinator Initiative programs that provide free pollinator seed to landowners in their counties. Landowners can request up to 2500 square feet worth of seed.

Landowners who are interested can contact the office at 406-449-5000 ext. 3886 or via email at connor@lewisandclarkcd.org. You can also look at the details of the program and find the landowner interest form on our [website](#).



WELL WATER TEST PROGRAM--For several years now, the Conservation District has run a well test reimbursement program for landowners in Lewis & Clark County. Landowners can submit their water test results to the CD and receive a \$25 reimbursement when they get their wells tested for at least the basic \$35 test for bacteria etc.

Contact the Water Quality Protection District at 406-457-8584 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 reimburse you \$25! This program is in conjunction with the Water Quality Protection District and MSU's Well Educated Program.

PARTNER INFORMATION

SUN RIVER WATERSHED GROUP – KICKING OFF 2021!

Tracy Wendt, SRWG Coordinator

Despite its challenges, 2020 was a productive year for the Sun River Watershed Group (SRWG), as we continued our mission *to protect and restore the resources of the Sun River watershed and its communities*.

This year, SRWG will be wrapping up the Elk Creek Channel Migration Zone study, kicking off new projects, and renewing our commitment to long-standing programs, including weed control, stream gages, and water quality. In addition to the projects listed below, we have some exciting projects in the works – be sure to check our Facebook page and website often for details!

Channel Migration Zone Studies. Phase I of the Sun River Channel Migration Zone study (CMZ) was completed in June of 2020 and encompassed the main Sun River from just upstream of the Highway 287 bridge



through Muddy Creek. In 2021, SRWG and LCCD will complete Phase II of the study, which will address channel migration on Elk Creek from Smith Creek to the Sun River, and will include deeper analysis of Sun River reaches identified as “high risk” in the Phase I study. These studies assessed risk of channel movement based on historic photos and other data and will be used to prioritize future projects. There will be a public outreach meeting to present the Elk Creek CMZ report and receive feedback from stakeholders at the Augusta Youth Center, April 30th. This will be an open-house-style meeting from 9 am – 2 pm.

Muddy Creek. SRWG continues to address stream health issues on Muddy Creek. Currently, we are replacing a deteriorating stream crossing with a new bridge, which should reduce erosion and have fewer impacts to the local hydrology. In April, we will begin developing the Muddy Creek Master Plan, a project that will catalog past projects, identify and catalog issues affecting Muddy Creek, and suggest long- and short-term projects and strategies to improve water quality and hydrologic processes. There will be a public outreach meeting in late April for landowners and other stakeholders to learn more about the project and provide input. Event details are preliminary, but please check sunriverwatershed.org/events or our Facebook page for details coming soon.

Volunteers. The annual Weed Whacker Rodeo will be held the second Saturday in July this year. We will wait to define the scope of the event until we are more sure of community health protocols at that time, but we do plan to hold the event in some manner. SRWG is working on several other volunteer opportunities for later in the year – be sure to check our website and Facebook occasionally for more information. **Stream gages.** Funding USGS gages on the Sun River has been a challenge and in 2020, our partners stepped up to ensure the gages kept running. SRWG would like to thank DNRC, Greenfields Irrigation District, Reclamation, and FWP for their support funding these year-round gages. SRWG also supports a network of seasonal stream gages that operate April - October. Stream gages are a vital source of information for drought and flood

forecasting, recreation, and river-dependent businesses such as agriculture and fishing guides. In 2021, SRWG will roll out a new River Conditions page on our website that will be a one-stop-spot for gage and reservoir information and more.

Water Quality. SRWG collects water samples monthly from April through October from six long-standing data sites across the watershed. This helps us identify changes in water quality and prioritize projects and work areas. SRWG is revising our Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP) in 2021, to update water quality goals and objectives and lay out a plan to address them.

SRWG projects come from our partners, such as Lewis & Clark Conservation District, agencies, landowners, and concerned citizens from across the watershed. If you are aware of a resource issue or would like to be added to our email list, please contact tracy@sunriverwatershed.org. You can learn more about SRWG at www.sunriverwatershed.org or on our Facebook page.



Check out our website at www.lewisandclarkcd.org. We're also on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).
If you prefer to get this newsletter via email, sign up at www.lewisandclarkcd.org.

DISTRICT REPORT

Chris Evans, LCCD Administrator

There wasn't enough room in the last issue for a District Report, so we have a lot to catch up on!

In the last quarter of 2020, the CD wrapped up the permitting year with 2 complaints, 2 emergencies, and 27 permit applications. At the end of the year, the board convened a planning meeting and revised the format of the [Annual Plan](#) into a [Long Range Plan](#), covering 2021 through 2023. The Annual Report for 2020 was completed and both documents are posted on the CD website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/landowner-resources/planning/>. With 2 new employees, the CD has been doing a lot of planning on how to utilize their employees the best way possible for landowners and programs.

In the past quarter we've seen a number of 310 permit applications come in to the office and are at 8 applications and 2 emergencies in 2021 as of the writing of this newsletter. Numbers were down in 2020, probably largely due to the pandemic.

In pandemic related news, the CD board meetings are still being held virtually. March's meeting was cancelled due to lack of a quorum. The next meeting is April 8 at 1 pm. If you want information on how to call in or get on the video link, please call the CD office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5.

In March, CD staff and chairman Jeff Ryan led a volunteer willow cutting day in anticipation of an upcoming stream project on Spokane Creek. We've been working with other landowners, in the county and outside the county, on the green methods for doing these kinds of projects, using willow soil lifts and other methods. Jeff Ryan worked with the Upper Musselshell CD on a project not long ago and if you'd like to have a look, there's a great time lapse video on our [YouTube channel](#). Consider subscribing to this channel since we'll be having more options coming up like Webinars on some of the programs and resources that we have, along with more stream project videos.

Conservation Planner Andrew Kretschmer has been hard at work doing Forest Management Plans for a number of landowners, helping to write some Targeted Implementation Plans for NRCS for parts of the county and working with the State Technical Advisory Committee. He has also been doing some work on historic data from the Helena Valley Irrigation District to compile it for a potential upcoming project. The Conservation District has applied to the National Association of Conservation Districts for a 2nd year of funding to keep Andrew on at the office.

Resource Tech Connor Mertz has been busy helping out with 310 inspections, doing some data entry on older permits into the 310 Database, coordinating the Pollinator effort, recently coordinated the Willow Harvest project (See page 1), and working on updates to the website, among other things. He recently went full-time, so we're really anticipating an increase in outreach. Connor is working on a survey section for our website which landowners and other can use to alert us to natural resource concerns for future CD Planning.

We have also been continuing work with the East Helena High School's Career Technical Advisory Council, increased work with the MACD's Education Committee and Employee Organization.



LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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JASON SAARI	SOIL CONSERVATIONIST
SEAN CLANCY	NRCS AREA ENGINEER

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LCCD SPONSORS- *"Those who assume responsibility."*

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Murdoch's
Power Townsend
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LCCD STEWARDS- *"Those in charge of a large estate."*

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Sieben Ranch Company
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To update your mailing address, contact
Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 3884 or email
chris@lewisandclarkcd.org. If you would
rather receive this via email, let me know!