



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Summer 2021

Riparian Management Workshop Riparian Grazing for Flood Resilience



Join the Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Dr. Clayton Marlow and Allen McNeal on September 14th in Augusta!!! This workshop, sponsored by the Lewis and Clark Conservation District, and partially funded by a grant from the MACD Programs, will begin at 8:30 am and will start at the Augusta Youth Center, next door to the Augusta Senior Center, for the morning portion and lunch provided by the Buckhorn Bar. The afternoon will be in the field at a landowner's property on Elk Creek.

Lunch choices are Burgers or Chicken. We're asking a \$5 fee to help cover the lunch costs since the grant doesn't cover that part.

Topics to be covered will include Stream Bank Erosion, Riparian Grazing techniques and monitoring, site selection to maximize profit and conservation programs and funding available from conservation partners.

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED! Call Connor Mertz at 406-449-5000 ext. 3886 or email connor@lewisandclarkcd.org. You may send us a check at LCCD, 790 Colleen Street, Helena MT 59601, or pay [here](#).

Lake Helena Soil Lift Project

By Connor Mertz, Lewis and Clark CD

Tim Olds initially contacted the Lewis & Clark Conservation District looking for a solution for his bank erosion problems. Olds recently purchased a property on the north shore of Lake Helena

and was losing significant amounts of his bank to the water each year. The issue: ice-shear and wave action were rapidly eating away at his largely unvegetated stretch of shoreline, resulting in property



loss. As he put it, he was paying taxes for land that extended underneath the lake. Initially, Olds planned to use rock or concrete to help stabilize his bank. However, after several conversations with the district and a closer inspection of a similar project done on Lake Helena in the past, he opted to try a bioengineering technique called a willow soil lift. This “green” technique uses vegetation, specifically willows and their root mass, to promote bank stabilization. The eroding bank is graded back before incorporating willows and biodegradable fabric just above the high-water mark. The fabric helps keep the soil in place for several years as the willow

cuttings establish roots. Using vegetation to stabilize a bank mimics a natural system

and in contrast to rock or concrete methods, creates wildlife habitat and can improve water quality.

The willow soil lift project, spanning roughly 300 ft of shoreline, was completed at the end of March. Over



the winter, Olds and his family harvested around 8,000 willow cuttings for the project, a feat in itself. The majority of the dirt-work and lift installation was completed in a period of two days. Conservation District staff, Board chair Jeff Ryan, and his grandson Drake helped Olds with the installation and by providing technical assistance. Olds helped fund some of the material and equipment costs of the project through the Lewis & Clark CD cost-share program. A

timelapse video of the process can be found on the District’s YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/g9PP26ajmaw>.

This project generated a lot of interest amongst landowners on Lake Helena and throughout the county. The district is looking into assisting with similar projects on Lake Helena and elsewhere moving forward. If you have a potential project site and would like more information contact Chris or Connor at 406.449.5000 ext. 5

A Lifetime Dedicated to Rivers and People: Jeff Ryan Receives Montana Watershed Stewardship Award Montana Watershed Coordination Council



You can trace Jeff Ryan's path across Montana by following the newly planted willows – and the everyday people singing his praises for making rivers more resilient to flooding with restoration projects that incorporate living plants to benefit everyone involved.

"Jeff has helped pioneer the inclusion of living materials in riverbank restoration projects in the state," said Chris Evans, LCCD administrator. "Time and time again, he has worked to bring common sense and respect for the resource back to the conversation through his open-mindedness in listening to people talk about their projects."

In recognition of his dedication and innovative approaches to watershed health, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) has selected Jeff as a 2021 Watershed Stewardship Award recipient. The biennial Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Awards are a joint project of MWCC and the Montana Wetland Council (MWC) to honor individuals and groups who embody excellence and commitment to wetland or watershed conservation, protection, and restoration. Award recipients will be honored at a ceremony during the Fall Watershed Tour to be co-hosted by MWCC and local conservation partners September 15-17, 2021 along the Rocky Mountain Front.

Jeff's numerous accomplishments include:

- Advising and helping to develop dozens of restoration projects on the Beaverhead, Missouri, Musselshell, and Sun River Watersheds, as well Pumpkin Creek at Zoo Montana near Billings and multiple projects within Lewis and Clark County: on Little Prickly Pear, Prickly Pear, Sevenmile, Ten Mile, and Spokane Creeks.
- Working with the Missouri River and Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Councils to create the Living on the Bank project, a resource for landowners who are living – or considering living – along a stream or river.
- A 26-year career with the Montana Department of Transportation and Department of Environmental Quality, where he learned the ins and outs of stream permitting that he now applies to his second career.

Learn more about the Lewis and Clark Conservation District, including many of the programs Jeff has helped to develop, through their [website](#).

The 2021 Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Awards are made possible by funding from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

A project along the Bitterroot River that Jeff worked on with the Bitterroot Conservation District. Photos from before, immediately after, and two years later:



Some New Faces in the

Helena Field Office



Tommy Le is the new Helena Field Office Customer Support / Administrative Assistance employee from AttainX. He was born in Boston, MA and had been back and forth between the Rockies and the Atlantic Coast for most of his life. He finally decided to settle in Helena 5 years ago and has been here since. He is currently working on digitizing the aerial maps in the storage room to allow for ease of access, while also making space, among other administrative tasks. He will be helping around the office especially as things start to open again! Tommy's hobbies include

nerdy things like Video Games and Magic: The Gathering. Sometimes he practices coding and 3D modeling in his spare time! When he isn't being a nerd, he enjoys trying new foods, swimming, and skiing!

Sebastian Schreiber is a new Pathways Range Specialist Intern. He'll be working for the NRCS in the Helena field office through the end of July. He graduated this May from Angelo State University, in West Texas, with a range degree and will be



continuing with his master's in the Fall. He is excited to be spending the summer in Montana working with NRCS, the Conservation District, and local landowners to learn more about agriculture and conservation in this area.

When does it rain money? When there is “change” in the weather! --Andrew Kretschmer, Lewis and Clark CD

Many Montana homeowners choose to water their lawns throughout the dry summer months. Without the extra moisture, many turf grasses would not survive, let alone make an appealing lawn. If you water even a small portion of your grass this article might save you time and money this summer!

Turf studies from the USDA show that most lawns only need watering about once a week. During hotter weather, this may drop to every four days and in cooler weather jump to eight days. Watering more frequently than this may be detrimental to your grass as constant moisture encourages shallow roots. Deeper roots increase the ability of grass to survive hot dry weather as they escape the heat of the day in the cool subsoil.

Tangentially, it is important to apply enough water during these infrequent irrigations to last the plants through their next drink. For best results most soil types do well with about an inch of water, this can be easily measured by setting a tuna or cat food can out under your sprinkler system, once full, your plants have had their fill. Applying more water than this can cause nutrient leaching to accelerate as the water flushes nutrients down through the soil profile out of reach of plants roots. This is particularly important if you fertilize your lawn as you may be literally flushing your money away!

Time of day is another important factor to consider when watering the lawn with morning and evening being the best times to irrigate. By applying water during these cooler portions of the day, you limit the amount of water that is lost to evaporation. Late evening will offer the most efficient water use. Early morning is a close second but has the extra benefit of limiting the growth of fungal species, which may cause root rot in shaded or cooler areas.

For more information on best management practices for your lawn feel free to reach out to Andrew Kretschmer at the Helena USDA Service Center! Send emails to Andrew.Kretschmer@usda.gov or by phone at (406) 389-3882.

Drone weed spraying

Sebastian Schreiber, NRCS Pathways Student

Weeds are among the biggest issues in conservation right now. Weeds can outcompete desirable species, degrade wildlife habitat, and destabilize ecosystems all leading to decreases in biodiversity. A 2005 study estimated that non-native weeds cost the United States \$34 billion annually. However, innovative methods are always emerging to help fight the war on weeds. Members of the Conservation District and Helena Field Office



along with a number of landowners, recently met with Cahoon Aerial Systems for a demonstration of a particularly interesting new method - drone spraying.

The Cahoon's plan on employing two large drones for pesticide application and seeding purposes and a set of smaller drones for aerial mapping, but final approval is still pending. Currently, the process involves mapping out an area before hand and setting a flight plan. Then, the drone, carrying up to 10 gallons of herbicide, flies a grid pattern over the designated area while controlling for a certain spray-rate. After about 10 minutes the drone returns to be reloaded with more herbicide and a charged battery. In general, the drones can cover 20 acres per hour, and can detect and avoid obstacles as well as follow any terrain. It is particularly promising that the cost of this method is competitive with traditional weed spraying methods.



This cutting-edge technology is evolving so rapidly it's hard to predict what it will be capable of in the future. It is already obvious that drone weed spraying is much more practical than hand-spraying in remote and rugged areas, but the possibilities go beyond that. The Cahoon's estimate that within a few years, drones will be able to incorporate remote sensing technology, in conjunction with other imagery processing programs, to identify plants in real time. This means that drones would be able to identify, approach, and spray weeds at large scales fully automatically. Needless to say, the present and future for this technology is extremely exciting. For more information on this method of spraying noxious weeds, contact them at: David Cahoon, 406-930-8776 or Levi Cahoon, 406-210-4690.

DISTRICT REPORT

CHRIS EVANS, LEWIS & CLARK CD

In the second quarter of 2021, the Conservation District has been working on all the summer programs and activities, including the very popular Pollinator Initiative, the Summer Education Walk Series with PPLT and FWP (Montana Wild), a variety of stream projects, grants and other activities, many of which are noted in this newsletter.

Already in 2021, we have had 23 permit applications 4 complaints and 3 emergencies. Landowners who want to do anything related to a stream or shoreline (Canyon Ferry, Hauser and Holter Reservoirs) are reminded to apply for a permit with us well in advance of when you want to do the project!

With vaccinations for Covid on the rise, and loosening of many of the restrictions, the Conservation District met in person in June, in Augusta for the first time since their March 2020 board meeting. While virtual meetings have seemed like a hassle for some, they have been effective in allowing the district to continue almost all of our normal activities.

The USDA Service Center is still locked at the moment, though appointments may be made with any of the offices by calling them at 406-449-5000. Extension 2 for FSA, 3 for NRCS, 4 for Rural Development and 5 for the Conservation District. We are still not allowed to have our board meetings in the building, so when we resume meeting in Helena in September, stay tuned for a meeting location or to see if we'll be meeting virtually again!

You can find all of our events, programs and more on our website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org>.

PARTNER INFORMATION

NRCS

While Montana NRCS doesn't have Fiscal Year 2022 application cut off dates yet, that doesn't mean you can't apply! There are some new fuel reduction Targeted Implementation Plans coming to Lewis and Clark County! Keep an eye out on this [link](#) for when the information is released. NRCS will also get the information to the Lewis and Clark Conservation District so they can post it on their social media sites. If you have any questions feel free to call our office at (406) 449 - 5000 x3 or email our District Conservationist at rebecka.ayre@usda.gov.



The Sun River Watershed Group has several meetings and events coming up this summer. For more information, go to the Events page on our website, www.sunriverwatershed.org, or find us on Facebook.

- July 10 Weed Whacker Rodeo. Join us for our annual weed pull in Sun Canyon, followed by BBQ lunch and prizes! We meet at 8:30 am at the Beaver Creek trail/camping area.
- July 21 10 am Water Quality Working Group meeting
 1 pm SRWG Board meeting
Both meetings will be held at the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce office in the basement conference room and are open to the public. We will provide lunch for anyone joining both meetings.
- July 21 SRWG night at the ball park. Come watch the Great Falls Voyagers with us. \$22 ticket includes reserved seating in our section, ball park fare dinner, and soda. Meet SRWG staff, board, and partners for a night of fun. Gates open at 6, first pitch at 7. RSVP to Tracy to reserve your spot now!

August 21 Bashin' Trash River Cleanup. With our partners, we are cleaning up the Missouri River from Helena through Great Falls and at the Breaks Monument, and the mouth of the Sun River. We're looking for volunteers to clean up the river, trails, and parks. Adopt a reach now or ask about event sponsorship opportunities.

Contact for all these events is watershed coordinator, Tracy Wendt: tracy@sunriverwatershed.org or (406) 214 2868.

Call FSA to Arrange to Report Acres When Done Planting

USDA Farm Service Agency offices in Montana are currently open by appointment only; but can still work with producers on timely filing crop acreage reports. FSA staff can provide assistance over the phone, by email, scheduled office visits and through virtual meetings via a software program called Microsoft Teams.



The deadline for acreage certification is **July 15, 2021** and applies to crops such as **perennial forage (unless covered by NAP), annually spring seeded crops, Conservation Reserve Program, spring alfalfa seed, and any other crop not reported by a previous deadline.**

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers, including livestock producers, must file an accurate crop acreage report by the deadline. FSA staff is available to assist producers in completing acreage reports and providing maps.

Certification plans may vary by office, so customers can assist FSA by:

- Paying close attention to phone messages, email or mail from their county FSA office that outlines the process put in place for 2021 spring certification in their office and following the requested steps, and
- Keeping good records of what is planted, where and when it is planted, and ensuring that information is accurately reported on the maps and provided to FSA as soon as possible following the completion of planting.

Producers are encouraged to work with their county office to arrange for getting map packets and completing the certification process using available options. Upon receipt of completed maps, FSA will make software updates and contact the producer to obtain signatures on the FSA-578 Report of Commodities to complete the certification process by the July 15 deadline. Crops not certified by this date may be subject to late-filed fees.

- The following exceptions apply to the July 15 acreage reporting date:
If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting deadline, the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after the purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation to support the newly acquired land must be provided to the county office.
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the **earlier of** July 15, 2021 or 15 calendar days **before** grazing or harvesting of the crop.

Reporting Prevent Plant Acres: Producers also must report crop acreage that they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were unable to plant. Prevent planted acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by

FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency. If you have acreage that was prevented from being planted, please notify your county office and they can assist you in completing this form.

Reporting Organic Crops: Producers who selected the "organic" option on their NAP application must report the applicable crop as organic and provide a copy of their current organic plan and recent written certification in effect from a certifying agency. Please note that if you have applied for organic certification and do not receive it before the acreage reporting deadline, you may provide the necessary information to FSA immediately upon receipt.

Nominations Open for the 2021 County Committee Elections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants or cooperators to take part in the Lewis & Clark County Committee election nomination process.

FSA's County Committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision-making and farm program delivery process.

The Lewis & Clark County FSA Committee is composed of three elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. This year, LAA 3 in the Helena area is open for nominations. LAA 3 is more specifically described as: All land South of Township 13 North within Lewis & Clark County that is also East of Range 4 West or is South of Township 11 North and West of Range 3 West within Lewis & Clark County.

County Committees may have an appointed advisor to further represent the local interests of underserved farmers and ranchers. Underserved producers are beginning farmers/ranchers, women, other minority farmers and ranchers, and landowners or operators who have limited resources.

All nomination forms for the 2021 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by August 2, 2021. For more information on FSA County Committee elections and appointments, refer to the FSA fact sheet: *Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a COC Member* available online at:

fsa.usda.gov/elections. You can click on your county's name to view a description and map of the 2021 FSA Election LAA scheduled in your area. [2021 Montana LAA Public Notification](#) - pdf

Check out our website at www.lewisandclarkcd.org. We're also on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 3884 or email
chris@lewisandclarkcd.org. If you would
rather receive this via email, let me know!