



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Spring 2023

2023 Summer Education Walks



2022 Summer Education Walk-Streams

the Lake Helena area. It will focus on wetlands.

Helena CORE (Community of Resource Educators) has been busy planning for the Summer Education Walks for the summer. The kick-off event will be on June 8th at Montana Wild from 5:30 to 7 pm. Lewis and Clark CD will be hosting 2 walks this year. The first will be June 27th at the Ten Mile Creek Park area and it will focus on Stream Form, Function and Health. The second will be July 25th in

Summer Education Walks start June 20th and run Tuesdays and Thursdays most of the summer, through August 15th. For more information, call Corie Bowditch at FWP at 406-444-9939.

2023 Conflict Prevention Priority Areas

The Vital Ground Foundation worked with more than 60 grizzly bear biologists and managers to complete an inventory and prioritization of conflict prevention needs within grizzly bear habitat in Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming. Priority areas are updated annually. Partner grant applications that include projects designed to address the following conflict prevention needs will be prioritized for funding:

- **Increase in agency capacity**
Kootenai Valley, ID; Upper Clark Fork; Lander

- **Securing of attractants**

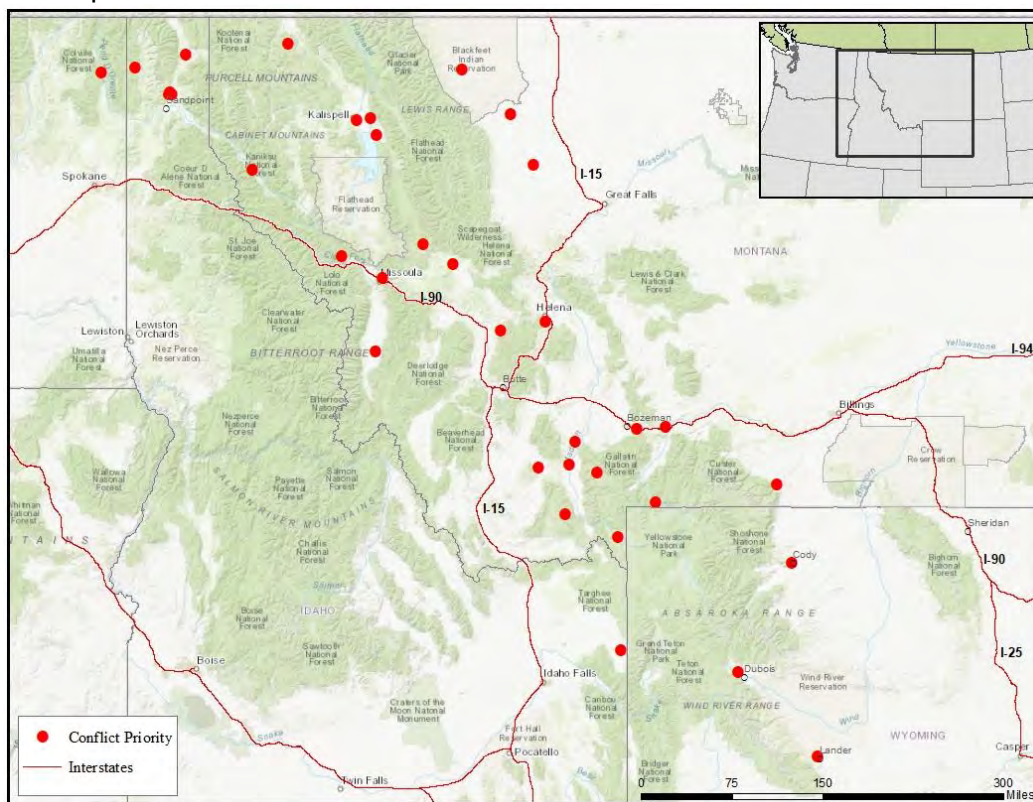
Eureka; Columbia Falls; Blackfoot Reservation; Livingston; Gallatin Valley; Madison Valley; Missoula; Evaro/Rattlesnake; Seeley Lake; Ninemile; Alberton; Ferndale/Swan Lake; Red Lodge; Gravelly Range; Ruby Valley; Lower Clark Fork; Bitterroot; Blackfoot Valley; Upper Clark Fork/Georgetown Lake; Lower Clark Fork (Sanders County); Kootenai Valley, ID; Priest Lake; Pack River; Cody; Dubois; Lander/Winds; Lower Pend Oreille, WA

- **Agriculture commodities/livestock security and carcass pickup program**

Rocky Mountain Front; Dubois; Blackfoot Valley' Deer Lodge/Upper Clark Fork; Kootenai Valley, ID

- **Community outreach and education**

Rocky Mountain Front; Whitefish; Flathead Valley; Bigfork/Swan Lake; Gardiner; Big Sky; Madison Valley; Kootenai Valley, ID; Upper Clark Fork; Lower Clark Fork; Thompson Falls; Lander/Winds; Helena; Evaro/Rattlesnake; Bitterroot



For more information contact Kim Davitt, Vital Ground, at 406-549-8650 or by email at kdavitt@vitalground.org.



Montana Soil Health Symposium-

Claudia Lyman, Big Sky Watershed Corps Member

The Montana Soil Health Symposium was on February 8-9th this year in Billings. It brought together national and local speakers to discuss soil health techniques and innovations. Adding to these speakers were 15 Montana producers covering topics relevant to farmers, ranchers, and gardeners—properties of all sizes--working to produce healthy, nutritious foods

using soil health principles. Over 400 people attended from all across Montana and other states. The Lewis and Clark Conservation District attended along with our NRCS partners. We enjoyed 2 days of learning all about the soil health principles and regenerative agriculture. Having the option to attend several different breakout sessions on various topics we were able to tailor the symposium to our specific interests. We tried to mix it up by each attending a different breakout session and then sharing what we learned with each other afterwards. The sessions covered all different topics but there was still the central theme of the importance of soil health.

One of the breakout sessions was “Gardening for Soil Health” where two different speakers shared examples of their no-dig gardens and how they got started. The first speaker shared how he went from a very small outside garden to using high-tunnels and being able to share his organic produce with his community. The second speaker shared how she uses her skills and knowledge to help other gardeners switch to regenerative techniques to preserve their soil so they can continue to grow beautiful gardens. Both speakers use the five soil health principles to maximize their garden's productivity while also improving the soil's health. These principles include 1.) Keep a living root in the soil 2.) Armor the soil 3.) Minimize disturbance 4.) Grow a diversity of plants 5.) Incorporate livestock. They also discussed a 6th principle which is “knowing the context” of the land and user. These principles bring farming, ranching, and gardening all together and allows the soil to become more effective at producing healthier foods. It's important that we start focusing more on these principles so we can conserve our soils for future generations.

Water Test Cost Share Program

The CD will reimburse landowners in Lewis and Clark County \$25 when they get their well water tested. Your first call should be to the Lewis and Clark County Water Quality Protection District at 406-457-8584 for recommendations on what tests would be best to run. They should also have test kits available from the Well-Educated program from MSU. Once you've gotten your results back, email a copy to us at

chris@lewisandclarkcd.org or mail to LCCD, 790 Colleen Street, Helena MT 59601. There is a limited amount of funding for this program so get your information in soon!

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

If you prefer to get this newsletter via email, sign up at www.lewisandclarkcd.org.

District Report-Chris Evans, District Administrator

The first quarter of 2023 has been a little crazy, having lost Connor Mertz, our Resource Technician, at the end of December. We are working on hiring, but in the meantime, our projects/programs are being run by District Administrator Chris Evans, and our Big Sky Watershed Corps member, Claudia Lyman.

In January, the CD participated in the Conservation District Awareness Day in the Rotunda during the legislative session, and CD administrator Chris Evans, and Chair Jeff Ryan both testified a number of times at the session.

In February, Chris Evans and Claudia Lyman attended the Soil Health Symposium in Billings. What a fabulous event, with a great variety of speakers on regenerative agriculture. We also had materials at the Montana Native Plant Society conference in Helena, and Vice Chair Karl Christians met with the East Helena High School Career Technical Education Advisory Council for the high school. Activities with the Helena CORE (Community of Resource Educators) started ramping up for the spring/summer/fall events as well, and CD staff were involved in those planning sessions.

Our district administrator, remains busy working with the state's CD Employee Organization as current president, as well as chairing the Montana Association of Conservation Districts Education Work Group, and assisting with both the Living on the Bank project and the Montana Joint Stream Restoration Committee. Chris and Claudia were busy in March preparing for the Pollinator Initiative events this spring.

CD Supervisors acted on 3 new permit applications in the first quarter, and finalized their budget and operations plan for 2023. Re-elected Supervisors were sworn in before the January board meeting.

In the next quarter, the CD will be doing a number of activities with the Rolling Rivers trailer, distributing pollinator seed in the Augusta and Lincoln areas, and working on a number of projects, including the 2023 Lake Helena Willow lift, with the aid of a grant from DNRC.

Pollinator Project 2023!

As part of a grant from DNRC, the Conservation Districts in our area are again participating in pollinator planting seed giveaways for 2023. There is limited seed and we will be requiring follow up monitoring by landowners as a part of the grant project.

If you are interested in this program, please go to our website and read about the program at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/programs/pollinator-initiative/>. We will have a third seed mix available this year, and you can read the basics about the program and check out the form that has to be filled out. Return these forms to chris@lewisandclarkcd.org.

We also have a facebook group for the pollinator program at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2267594850058599>. This group can be a forum for questions, for people to post photos and more!

Pollinator seed pick up days for this spring (due to limited staff availability) are:



LEWIS & CLARK CD POLLINATOR SEED PICK UP DATES-2023

March 28
USDA Service Center
790 Colleen Street
Helena MT
9am - 4 pm

April 11
Lincoln Montana-Hooper Park
10 am - 2 pm

April 18
Augusta Montana Community Center
Main Street, Augusta
10 am - 2 pm

For more information email chris@lewisandclarkcd.org or go to our website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/programs/pollinator-initiative/>



Partner News

Birdseye Area Agriculture Call for Planning Input

The Helena NRCS office is seeking input from active farming and ranching or other agricultural operations in the Birdseye area. Staff in the office are exploring the feasibility of a conservation project focused on providing agricultural producers in the area with technical and financial assistance to enhance their operations. Helpful feedback includes:

- Identification of resource concerns such as: livestock water limitations, invasive weed management, wind or water erosion, wildfire hazard, crop production limitations, etc.
- Determination of useful assistance practices such as: livestock watering facilities, high tunnel systems, fuel breaks, fencing, noxious weed management, etc.
- Recognition of potential partners and cooperators.

For more information or to provide input please contact Andrew Kretschmer at the Helena NRCS Office by phone at 406-389-3882 or email Andrew.Kretschmer@usda.gov

2023 SRWG PROJECT & PROGRAM UPDATE

Tracy Wendt, Executive Director

In 2022, SRWG completed our DEQ-sponsored Watershed Restoration Plan. This plan describes our long-range plan to further our mission to *collaboratively protect and restore the resources of the Sun River watershed and its communities*, and to work on our strategic goals, which are to:

- Improve water quality through reduction of sediment, nutrients, and temperature
- Manage stream flows for all seasons and multiple uses
- Restore hydrologic processes, such as floodplain connectivity and river migration
- Enrich natural resources, such as soils, fish, and wildlife
- Control noxious weeds
- Educate our communities about watershed resources and stewardship
- Monitor and follow up on actions to measure project success

SRWG also recently completed the Muddy Creek Master Plan. Using this plan, in 2022 SRWG identified top-priority work that includes three miles of stream restoration and expansion of J-Wasteway, and applied for \$2.3M to complete this on-the-ground work. To date, \$1.769M has been awarded through a Reclamation WaterSMART grant and a \$500,000 grant proposal to DNRC is currently completing the approval process at the Montana State Legislature.

Other Projects: SRWG also installed a new stream gage on Muddy Creek near the town of Power, replacing the previous gage that washed out in 2018 and 2019. SRWG hosted many events and educational opportunities for our local communities. In 2022, that included our second Rain Barrel Workshop, which teaches the public about nonpoint source pollution and provides them each with a rain barrel so they can collect rain for watering their yard and garden. We also held our 24th annual Weed Whacker Rodeo and first ever Freezeout Lake Spent Ammo and Trash Cleanup. SRWG participated in the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce “Worlds of Work” event, encouraging 8th and 10th graders to consider studies and careers in natural resource science and conservation.

In addition:

- SRWG continues to monitor water quality at seven locations throughout the watershed. SRWG leads a Water Management Working Group that brings water managers and water users together twice a year to discuss water management, storage, weather, and stream gages across the watershed. The next working group meeting is April 20 at 10 am in Fairfield. Contact tracy@sunriverwatershed.org for more information.
- SRWG’s River Conditions page is now live. This page includes a map of the watershed with links to real-time stream gages and water quality monitoring sites. The page will also display “hoot owl” closures by FWP and other recreation information and will eventually include reservoir heights as well: www.sunriverwatershed.org/river-conditions.
- **Weeds** are a key program for SRWG. SRWG participates in multiple programs to control weeds in the watershed.
- In 2023, SRWG will host our 25th annual Weed Whacker Rodeo (July 8), 2nd annual Freezeout Lake Spent Ammo and Trash Cleanup (May 7), and multiple other events. We also hope to begin work on the Muddy Creek Restoration Phase I project this year, while continuing to pursue other project opportunities. In addition, SRWG has many more potential projects and events in planning

Stay tuned to www.sunriverwatershed.org and the SRWG Facebook page to learn how we will restore and protect the resources of the Sun River watershed and its communities in 2023!



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Contents	Page
Summer walks	1
Conflict program	1
Soil Health	3
Water Test	3
District report	4
Pollinator Pgm	5
Partner News	6&7

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

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Bank of the Rockies

LCCD STEWARDS- *"Those in charge of a large estate."*

Prickly Pear Simmental Ranch

LCCD CHAMPIONS- *"Those who fight for a cause."*

Action Print

For more information on any of our activities, call the CD Office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5.