



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

Volume 63, Issue 1

Winter 2024

The Explorer is Going Digital!

Due to the rising costs of, well, basically existing, the Conservation District will be ending the hard copy publication of this newsletter. **This issue will be the final printed issue for The Explorer.** We will be going fully digital for the April issue. This will save the Conservation District about \$12,000 per year with printing and postage costs.

If you receive this publication via US mail as a hard copy, and would like to sign up for the electronically delivered version, please do so at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/landowner-resources/newsletter/> or call Chris Evans at 406-389-3884.

Winter Killer Alfalfa

Karl Christians, LCCD Supervisor and Irrigated Operator, North of East Helena

The winter of 22-23 started with a heavy snowfall mid-November. This snow never left until spring. We did have a couple of warm days where the snow settled, melted a bit then froze again. It created an ice layer on top of the soil. This ice layer stayed until spring melt. It was severe enough that many producers had cows injured from slipping and falling on the ice. Spring warm up left many fields of alfalfa, after much waiting and anticipation, with light to heavy winterkill as shown in the photo. It had been many years since we have experienced a winter kill and producers were scratching their heads on what to do next.



MSU Forage Specialist, Dr Hayes Goosey, came to East Helena and spoke to producers on alfalfa winter kill. He discussed what causes winter kill, when should we replant the same year, how long to wait, what varieties seem to survive winter conditions better than others, etc.

We learned that alfalfa, when it dies, autotoxicity can occur. This is where the dying plant produces chemical that will reduce establishment and growth of new alfalfa if seeded too soon. Dr Goosey gave the attendees a handout worksheet “Alfalfa Autotoxicity Reseeding Worksheet” to work through to help in decision making. It’s best to wait a year to reseed once a stand has died or been terminated. With the high cost of renovating an alfalfa field, it was very beneficial to learn more about this plant that so many of us grow!

District Report-Chris Evans, District Administrator

The Conservation District is wrapping up the 4th quarter of 2023, financially and programmatically. As noted earlier in the newsletter, we are moving toward a digital-only newsletter and would encourage you to sign up for that if you haven’t already, if you’d like to continue to receive our newsletter.

In regard to the 310 Permit program, we wrapped the year with 7 complaints, 1 emergency and 36 permit applications. Rather a slow to average year for us.

CD staff and supervisors attended the MACD Convention in Billings in November, along with a number of other meetings that week.

Stay tuned for information about our full report for 2023 and links to our operations plan and budget for 2024.

We had a long meeting in November to work on planning and budgeting for 2024. If you are interested in providing feedback to us, please find our Natural Resource Concern Survey on our website at <https://lewisandclarkcd.org/landowner-resources/landowner-survey/>.

And finally, here are a few photos of events/projects from 2023.



Lake Helena Willow Soil Lift Volunteers

Day on the Range in the Lincoln Area





Carroll College Gear Up!! Camp students learning about streams/rivers

Water Test Cost Share Program

Lewis & Clark Conservation District 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. You may also get your test kits from other labs that do water testing.

Once you've gotten your results back, email a copy of your results and invoice 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!

Partner News

DNRC

The Montana Working Lands Internship Program is designed to offer beginning agriculturalists, natural resource and range specialists, biologists, soils majors or any student looking into natural resources, the real-world and hands-on experience implementing the educational tools already gained to a ranching operation.

The WLIP is a paid, three-month summer internship where interns work with and learn from mentoring ranchers across Montana. Room and board is provided by mentoring/host ranches. Students majoring in any natural resource related field are recommended to apply for this opportunity.

The WLIP is not designed solely as a working ranch hand position; students will be responsible to help in any way throughout the summer doing various chores that are necessary for daily ranch operations. The hands-on learning experiences gained from this program are invaluable.

For more information and to find the application, go to their site at:

<https://dnrc.mt.gov/Conservation/Conservation-Programs/Rangeland-Resources/montana-working-lands-internship-programs>.

Water Quality Protection District

The Water Quality Protection District (WQPD) is fully staffed after having their hydrogeologist position vacant for almost two years. We've recently lost our water quality specialist back in October but had a quick turnaround to hire Natalie to fill the position.

The WQPD does free arsenic and uranium testing for residents in Lewis & Clark County! Pick up bottles at the City/County Building, and the WQPD does have staff that periodically go to Augusta, Wolf Creek and Lincoln, so if there is a need to drop off bottles, they can do that. Recipients are required to drop the bottles off at the State Lab since they are partnering in the free program.

Also, the WQPD has a new interactive mapping site that displays the groundwater levels of their well network. The WQPD currently monitors over 160 wells monthly and quarterly across the WQPD. These data is still being sent to MT Bureau of Mines and Geology Groundwater Information Center (GWIC), which is a state-wide data base or repository for information on the ground-water resources of MT. The WQPD now has a new and improved website that not only displays the groundwater levels but also in certain wells their percentiles are calculated. A percentile is a way to describe how a current measurement fits against all the other measurements for that particular well measurement. The WQPD is looking into ways to display the water quality data too that they have collected over the years.

The WQPD is constantly looking at ways to present the data they collect so the public can make informed decisions. If you have any questions, please contact the WQPD at 406-457-8584. See the StoryMap on the County Website - [WQPD StoryMap](#).

The WQPD has a couple of new employees as well. Kegan McClanahan is the new Groundwater Hydrologist for the District. Kegan grew up in Ohio and Kentucky, has degrees in geology and geoscience and spent the last decade studying water quality. In 2020, he and his wife moved to Helena where he spent the last few years regulating area public drinking water systems. In September, he joined the WQPD to focus on local water issues.



Natalie Emerson is the other new WQPD employee. Natalie is the new Water Quality Specialist. She is originally from Wisconsin where she graduated with a degree in Water Resources and a minor in Soil Sciences at Wisconsin Stevens Point. She moved to Helena this past May and spent her first 6 months working to protect rivers and streams throughout Montana. She joined the WQPD in November 2023 to focus on helping with water quality in her community.

NRCS



New Face in the Helena Field Office

Hi all! My name is Zachariah Williams, or just Zach for short. I recently signed on as a soil conversationist in Chester Montana, and now begin my new role as a Forester in Helena, MT.

My past includes being raised as an air force brat moving around from places such as Japan to England. When my dad was done with the military we settled down in Mascoutah, Illinois. As time went on my parents decided

they wanted to be closer to the rest of the family where we settled in Flagstaff Arizona. While in Flagstaff I attended community college and then transitioned to Northern Arizona, graduating with a bachelor's in forestry with an emphasis in restoration and plant health. Shortly after graduating I worked for the Davey Tree Experts in Denver Colorado as a plant healthcare technician. After some time, there I decided I wanted to expand my knowledge of conservation and accepted a job with the NRCS.



Sun River Watershed Group

Tickets are on sale now for Winter RiverFest – Celebrating the Sun and Missouri Rivers. This year's event will be held on February 17, 2024 and is the annual fundraiser for the Sun River Watershed Group and Missouri River Flyfishers Trout Unlimited Chapter #406. Your ticket includes dinner, raffles, art and adventure auction, live music by 50 Watt Sun, and more! Tickets are available for individuals (\$50) or tables of 8 (\$500) at The Newberry box office (420 Central Avenue in Great Falls or online). Sponsorships available – contact tracy@sunriverwatershed.org for more information.





LEWIS & CLARK CONSERVATION DISTRICT

790 Colleen Street • Helena, MT 59601

Prsrt Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Helena, MT
Permit No.
243

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

JEFF RYAN	CHAIR
KARL CHRISTIANS	VICE CHAIR
JEANETTE NORDAHL	TREASURER
JOHN BAUCUS	MEMBER
STAN FRASIER	MEMBER
SARAH HOWE-COBB	MEMBER
SKYLER VAN DYKEN	MEMBER

LCCD STAFF

CHRIS EVANS	ADMINISTRATOR
JOE KREMER-HERMAN	RESOURCE SPCLST

NRCS STAFF

REBECCA AYRE	SUPERVISORY DC
ANDREW KRETSCHMER	DIST. CONSERV.
JASON SAARI	SOIL CON
ZACH WILLIAMS	FORESTER

Contents	Page
Going Digital	1
Alfalfa Kill	1
District Report	2
Water Test Prgm	3
Partner News	3

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

Power Townsend
Bank of the Rockies
Schatz Ranch & Leasing

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

Prickly Pear Simmental Ranch
Westech Environmental Services
Murdoch's Ranch and Home, Helena

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

Action Print
Northwestern Energy

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. The general
phone number for the Conservation
District is 406-389-3885 for more
information! To reach Chris Evans, call
406-389-3884. For Joe Kremer-Herman,
call 406-389-3886