

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

August 2, 2017

Volume 10 Issue 15

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CMR Refuge offered to cattle displaced by Lodgepole Fire

From the Billings Gazette: Thousands of cattle displaced by the 270,200-acre Lodgepole Complex fire have been greenlighted for grazing on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced Saturday.

Cattle were to begin arriving on the refuge Saturday night, as ranchers suffering from the worst fire damage took the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service up on an offer for grass and water, both hard to find on the Lodgepole Complex's more than 422 blackened square miles.

"We were able to do this in a couple days. We already have three families with contracts to get in there. We think we can accommodate at least Garfield County," fire victims, Zinke told The Gazette on Saturday. "At the end of the day, the government belongs to the people. We're happy to do it."

Cattle will be allowed to stay on the refuge until Nov. 1, though most are expected to leave earlier as ranchers send their calves to market, Zinke said. The stay guarantees thousands of calves won't be sold early at discounted rates that could break a ranch budget.

The grass isn't free. Ranchers will have to meet standard lease terms. No one expects free grass, said Dean Rogge, farmer/rancher and board member of the Garfield County Conservation District.

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CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
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We're growing Montana's future.

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This newsletter is made possible
by a 223 grant from DNRC

NRCS offers wildfire recovery assistance to MT producers

NRCS is accepting applications for its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) to assist with livestock grazing deferment, damaged fence and post removal, livestock fencing, water facility development, critical area plantings, and cover crops. NRCS accepts conservation program applications year-round; however, applications for 2017 wildfire recovery funding must be submitted by Aug. 15, 2017.

"NRCS in Montana is prepared to assist landowners in dealing with the effects of wildfires and dry weather conditions," said Lisa Coverdale, NRCS state conservationist for Montana. "We want to work with landowners to help them address fire related resource concerns on their farm or ranch operations."

High winds, low humidity, and prolonged dry conditions led to the summer wildfires in several Montana counties, and many landowners are faced with making plans for recovery after the wildfires.

Landowners impacted by recent wildfires are encouraged to contact their local NRCS office to seek assistance. NRCS can provide technical and financial assistance to install measures that address resource concerns caused by the wildfires.

Landowners should visit their local NRCS office to apply for EQIP.



River Rendezvous tours St. Mary Diversion & Milk River project

On June 27th, the Milk River Watershed Alliance and Missouri River Conservation Districts Council hosted the 2017 River Rendezvous that toured the St. Mary diversion system which supplies 60-90% of the water in the Milk River. The tour had two options, the international tour which viewed Alberta's St. Mary irrigation systems and constructed wetlands in the Milk River Ridge Reservoir, which then met up with the Montana tour group who viewed the St. Mary diversion system near Babb, MT. The tour was open to the public and brought in over 60 participants from Conservation Districts, MT DNRC, Senate and Provincial Parliament representatives, landowners, local businesses, economic growth councils, and members of various watershed groups.

The Canadian tour viewed the St. Mary Diversion Dam, which was funded entirely by provincial government in the 1990s when they decided to rebuild the spillway to ensure the longevity of

the structure. The first diversion dam was constructed by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) during 1949-51. The PFRA was created in the 1930s by the Canadian government to drought proof the prairies by creating reservoirs for irrigation and municipal use. Today, 400,000 acres are irrigated from the St. Mary Project from Lethbridge to Medicine Hat. A hydropower facility downstream from the diversion dam is able to produce enough electricity for three electric districts. The tour also viewed the Milk River Ridge Reservoir, which contains collaborative projects aimed at improving water quality through fencing, tree and shrub restoration, phosphorous filtering, installing livestock watering systems, corridor widening, and shelter belts.

The Montana tour viewed the 100-year-old diversion system that was one the Bureau of Reclamation's first five projects to be authorized in 1903.

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Alvin Ellis, Jr. at the outdoor training and testing site at his family's ranch, the Ellis Cattle Company. *Ross Campbell, DNRC*

Reflections of Montana Range Days focus on beauty, teamwork

By Carla Lawrence: RED LODGE, Mont. – Every third week in June they arrive alone or in carpools and caravans, in campers, cars and trucks and converge on one location to learn about and to celebrate Montana's largest natural resource: rangelands.

This is Montana Range Days.

This annual pilgrimage brings kids, students, 4-H and FFA, adults, instructors and families who come to learn about the complexities of rangeland and natural resources that ranchers use every day in Montana.

This year was no exception. The setting could not be more beautiful, with the backdrop of the Beartooth Mountains and the town of Red Lodge welcoming around 270 folks, including participants and/or volunteers, who

committed their time and energy to ensure the 41st Annual Montana Range Days went off without a hitch.

This was the first of two years the Carbon Conservation District will host the event. Along with assistance from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the state and local planning committees and the many amazing sponsors who provided funding and in-kind time and donations, Montana Range Days was a great success.

Divisions included the following: Buckaroos (age 4-6), Ecosystem Explorers (age 7-8), Superstarters (age 9-11), Wranglers (age 12-13), FFA Youth/Open Youth (age 14-19, not graduated from high school) and Rancher/Open Adult.

Outdoor workshops included plant anatomy, plant identification, range and soil sites, inventory and monitoring, stocking rates and utilization and ranch planning.

Monday began with the arrival of the planning committee members and the instructors who drove miles across the state to teach and to help set up the training and testing sites. Darlene Schwend of Carbon Conservation District and Tanya Lester of Stillwater Conservation District handled the registration for the event. After getting registered, the participants headed over to the practice site to hone their skills on plant identification.

Monday evening, illustrated talks were held at the Red Lodge High School. Participants in this event ranged from 4 to 19. [READ MORE](#)

Tester establishes online portal to help those impacted by drought, fire

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester launched an [online portal](#) Monday to assist Montanans who have suffered financial loss related to this summer's wildfires and drought.

Tester is encouraging Montana farmers and ranchers, business owners, and families who have been impacted by wildfire and drought to contact his office through [the portal](#) so he can quickly help guide them towards any financial assistance or additional resources that they are qualified to receive as a result of their loss.

"As fires and drought spread across Montana, I want to make sure that folks have access to the

resources they need to recover from significant financial loss," Tester said. "Businesses and families often don't realize this assistance is available to them after a natural disaster.

"If you have been impacted by fire or drought, please contact my office as soon as possible so I can get you squared away with the grazing relief, small businesses loan, or recovery funds that are available to folks who suffer financial loss due to natural disasters."

Tester has secured additional resources for Montana farmers and ranchers facing extreme drought. [READ MORE](#)

Farming inside wildlife refuges is transforming Klamath Basin agriculture

Ryan Hartman is driving from field to field in the Klamath Basin, giving what amounts to a masterclass on how to run logistics for 3,000 acres of farmland.

He troubleshoots equipment at one spot, sets planting depth drills on another a mile away, and farther on, shows a few of his 12 employees where to install an irrigation pipe.

"It's a pretty good job to have. You get to drive around in this every day ... it's pretty nice scenery," he says of the big blue sky, the low brown mountains, the marshes and wide open fields outside his truck window.

Hartman has been farming for about eight years on land he leases inside the Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges. He grows grain, alfalfa and potatoes.

A century ago, this land was under a massive lake that supported migratory birds. Now it supports potatoes and the people who grow them.

Hartman is one of them. But he's also part of a new generation of farmers who are making agriculture more compatible with wildlife. They're adopting irrigation methods that provide habitat for waterfowl, help keep chemicals out of the wildlife refuges, and give growers a premium price for their crops. [READ MORE](#)

Comment period now open for WOTUS rule change

From AgriPulse: WASHINGTON, July 26, 2017 - The Trump administration's effort to write new "waters of the U.S." regulations takes a big step forward Thursday with publication of a proposed rule to withdraw the Obama administration's 2015 rule.

The [proposal](#) was announced June 27 but publication was delayed because of issues involving the formatting of the document, Don Parrish, American Farm Bureau Federation's senior director of regulatory relations, told *Agri-Pulse* earlier this week.

Now that questions about the way the document looks have been laid to rest, interested parties will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal's substance.

First, however, EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers will have to address concerns that, at 30 days, the comment period is way too short. Nineteen environmental groups, more than 70 members of the House of Representatives, and 22 U.S. senators have already complained that a month is not enough time.

In a [letter](#) to EPA and the Corps last month, the environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice, Southern Environmental Law Center and others, asked for a six-month comment period.

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Grants

223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2017 are as follows: **July 29**, 2016; **October 14**, 2016; **January 14**, 2017; and **April 26**, 2017. [Grant Info](#)

DNRC RRGL Program

The Renewable Resource Grant and Loan program will be accepting planning grant applications July 1st through September 1st, 2017 through www.fundingmt.org. The program information can be found on the [DNRC website](#)

Western States WUI Grants

The Montana DNRC Forestry Division announces that the application period for the FY2018 Western Wildland Urban Interface Grant Program is now open. Closes August 15. [More Info](#)

RDG Planning Grants

DNRC is seeking applications for its Reclamation and Development Planning Grants, which provide funding for planning for projects that provide natural resource benefits in one of two categories: impacts from mineral development or crucial state need. Up to \$50,000 per grant, due September 8. [More Info](#)

Events

Jim Gerrish Sustainable Grazing Workshop

Ranchers Stewardship Alliance is hosting a sustainable grazing workshop at the Matador Ranch, featuring Jim Gerrish. September 19. [More Info](#)

Montana Range Tour

The 2017 Tour will take place in Petroleum and Fergus County areas, where we will focus on large landscape projects, conservation easements, new technology for monitoring water and cattle, grazing management, and soil health. September 6-7, Lewistown. [More Info & Registration](#)

SAVE THE DATE Area Meetings

The 2017 MACD Area Meetings will be on the following Dates:

- Sept 18 - East Glacier (3)
- Sept 20 - Culbertson (1)
- Sept 21 - Ekalaka (2)
- Sept 22 - Harlowton (4)
- Sept 26 - Missoula (5)
- Sept 27 - Butte (6)

Jobs, etc

Fuels Reduction Manager, Lower Musselshell CD

LMCD is looking for a fuel reduction project administrator with knowledge of forestry, fuel reduction for defensible space, fuels and fire behavior. Part time, Flexible hours. \$15-\$20/hour DOE plus mileage. Contact donna.pedrazzi@mt.nacdnet.net or 323-2103 ext. 101.

Have something you'd like to see in TMC? Submissions are due every other Friday at 5:00 (visit our website for a calendar), and should be sent to tmc@macdnet.org.

SAVE THE DATE

SOIL HEALTH WORKSHOPS

JANUARY 2018

Featuring Brendon Rokey, Steve Kenyon, Wendy Taheri, & Derek Axten

JAN. 16 THREE FORKS · JAN. 17 GREAT FALLS
JAN. 18 BILLINGS · JAN. 19 MILES CITY & SIDNEY

PRESENTED BY SWCDM & NRCS | SWCDM.ORG/SOIL-HEALTH

Coming Up:

August

3 Wildfire Reovery
Community Meetings,
Sand Springs and Fairview

8 Soil Health Series Webinar

14 MACD Board Conference
Call

28 MACD Executive
Committee Conference
call

September

6-7 Montana Range Tour,
Lewistown

11 MACD Board Conference
Call

12 Soil Health Series Webinar

18-20 Musselshell Watershed
Tour

18-27 MACD Area Meetings

Have an event to share?
Visit macdnet.org/calendar to
add your event to our list!

SAVE THE DATE

for the
Montana Association of Conservation Districts
Annual Convention

Bozeman, November 14-16

Holiday Inn

Reserve your room at a discounted rate now by calling
(406)587-4561 and mentioning MACD room block.

Reminder:

If your district has a resolution, bylaw change, or officer nomination that you want to be considered at the 2017 MACD Convention, it needs to be approved by the local district by **September 1**.

This way, we will have time for other local districts to review the proposals before they are asked to vote on them at the area meetings in September and at the convention in November.

That means your August meeting is a good time to talk about resolutions and bylaws!

Address Change: The Yellowstone River Conservation District Council has changed their address: 3120 Valley Drive East, Miles City, MT 59301