

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

A Monument Update

Information About Monument Projects, Programs And People

Issue No. 2

February 2010

Working Toward Increased Periodic Flows on the Upper Missouri

A deep list of agency representatives, decision makers, recreationists, conservation groups, outfitters, ranchers and other stakeholders met in Great Falls, Montana, this past December to face head-on the need to increase periodic water flows on the 149-mile long Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River.

The long-stated goals for increasing periodic water flows would be to enhance cottonwood/woody riparian ecosystems along the river and to assist in managing/recovering pallid sturgeon.

That's a pretty straight forward goal description. However, the key to implementing increased flows (water releases from upstream dams) is wrapped in a maze of agencies, regulations, policies, authorities and landowner needs.

The Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and a host

of individuals and interest groups all participated in the December 1-2 meeting (titled the Cottonwood Workshop). The attendee list included folks from Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Nebraska and Montana.

This was the first collective effort among agencies and citizens to confront the problems created by static water flows and focus on flow regimes (the need for increased water releases) from upstream dams.

Increasing periodic water releases from upstream dams would benefit a long list of plant, animal and fish species. The cottonwood is the keystone plant community along the river and increased periodic flows would greatly increase the creation of new seed beds in areas protected from ice flows. The pallid sturgeon, a prehistoric freshwater fish and one of the rarest and largest fish in North America, is now on the verge of extinction and increased flows would also help their cause. While increasing water flow is not a cure-all for cottonwoods or sturgeon, it would improve their potential and would also improve habitat conditions for

many other species making a home in or along the Upper Missouri.

Throughout the two-day workshop scientists, planners, biologists, federal and state government officials, solicitors, and other agency specialists offered presentations and citizens /stakeholders spoke of their concerns.

At the conclusion of the Cottonwood Workshop everyone seemed of the consensus that there is legal authority for enhancing flows and that science supports increased periodic flows as a means of helping cottonwood regeneration on the river.

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BLM

Lewistown Field Office



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However, all groups must come to the table and, most importantly, there must be a will for this to happen as it will take a lot of work and support from the public (especially those individuals living along the rivers who may experience an increased flow).

The BLM agreed to take the lead for keeping the project moving forward and will develop a working group, a task force, to address the multiple details that must be resolved before periodic increased water releases from upstream dams could become a reality on the Upper Missouri.

The next meeting to address this issue will be held in three to six months.

Working toward increasing water flows in the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River was



Montana/Dakotas State Director Gene Terland (far left) addresses the varied interests attending the Cottonwoods Workshop last December in Great Falls, Mont.

one of the action items that arose from the September 2008 National Riparian Service Team workshop in Lewistown, Montana.

BLM/MCC Complete Habitat Project

A seven-person Montana Conservation Corp (MCC) crew out of Bozeman, Montana, lent their talents to a BLM habitat improvement project at the Gist Bottom primitive boat camp along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River this past summer.

The MCC crew helped a number of BLM staffers construct a three-rail post and pole fence around approximately two acres of the boat camp. The

project was a mixed-bag including the good (boating into the work site each morning); the bad (digging several hundred post holes, setting the posts and installing about 300 rails); and the ugly (rainy weather that made standing/moving difficult at times).

The finished fence will help reduce livestock/recreation conflicts and will protect a mature stand of cottonwood trees.



The MCC crew was a great help in completing the Gist Bottom habitat improvement project.

The MCC crew also helped salvage/remove about a quarter mile of barbed wire fence at the nearby Gist homestead.

Between building the new fence and salvaging the old barbed wire fence, the MCC crew spent four days helping the BLM during this detail.

This was not the first time the MCC has helped BLM. MCC crews have helped several BLM offices with numerous resource improvement projects and their help is greatly appreciated.

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Monument Staff Members/Responsibilities

From time to time, people ask about Monument staff members and their responsibilities. Hopefully, this table will prove useful.

NAME	RESPONSIBILITY	DUTY STATION
Gary E. Slagel	monument manager	Lewistown
Vinita Shea	rangeland management	Lewistown
Aurora Northerner	range/riparian technician	Lewistown
Chad Krause	hydrologist	Lewistown
Mitchell Forsyth	rangeland management	Havre
Jody Peters	wildlife management	Havre
Kenny Keever	natural resource specialist	Havre
Mark Schaefer*	supervisory outdoor rec. planner	Ft. Benton
Connie Jacobs**	interpretive center director	Ft. Benton
John Robertson	recreation maintenance	Ft. Benton
Roger Williams	information receptionist	Ft. Benton
Vacant	law enforcement ranger	Ft. Benton
Vacant	park ranger	Ft. Benton
Vacant	park ranger	Ft. Benton

* Mark supervises the river staff; is responsible for overall river management; and manages the Fort Benton River Management Station which is located in the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center.

** Connie manages the interpretive aspect and program functions at the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center.