



# STEWARD

Montana/Dakotas

Bureau of Land Management

Fall/Winter 2015

*From Seeds to Shrubs:*

## Missoula employees plant the future

*Story by Jodi Wetzstein,  
Supervisory Forester,  
Missoula Field Office*

*Photo by Michael Albritton*

Missoula Field Office employees rolled up their sleeves June 22 to plant bitterbrush shrubs on BLM lands at Marcum Mountain in an effort to enhance and restore wildlife habitat with native plants.

The bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) seed was collected from Missoula Field Office BLM lands the previous summer by Leah Tuttle, a returning seasonal.

The seed was cultivated at Special K Ranch near Park City, Montana, over the winter. Special K is a working ranch for adults who have developmental disabilities with the goal of becoming as self-sufficient as possible through income from ranch production such as greenhouse, nursery, and garden produce sales.

Bitterbrush is highly palatable for many big game species, including deer and elk. Most of the 5,000 shrubs were

planted by a Montana Conservation Corps crew in the Upper Willow Creek area earlier in June.

The MCC program's mission is to inspire young people through hands-on conservation service to be leaders, stewards of the land, and engaged citizens who improve their communities.

The planting project for the MCC crew included an educational component describing the habitat needs of local big game species and the habitat improvement that the bitterbrush seedlings would provide.

The crew was unable to plant all of the seedlings so the Missoula Field Office scheduled a work day to complete the task. June 22 saw beautiful weather, which was a nice touch as employees came together to finish a gratifying project in the field. To top it off, the staff enjoyed a barbeque and pot luck lunch when the work was done.

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## From the State Director's Desk

The BLM has worked for years to manage multiple uses across Montana and the Dakotas. Four years ago we were further challenged to develop plans that protect the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat while continuing to maintain diverse uses of our landscapes. This fall we reached that goal.

On September 22, the BLM Montana/Dakotas released five revised resource management plans and three amendments covering a vast portion of BLM lands in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

The RMP revisions establish goals, objectives and direction for comprehensive resource management across BLM-managed lands, as well as meet the bureauwide challenge to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat while maintaining working landscapes. The three amendments add similar, updated protections to RMPs completed within the last few years.

These plans provide for a net conservation gain. In other words, wherever the Greater Sage-Grouse is involved, our management of multiple uses across landscapes will either be neutral or beneficial to the bird.

It was a challenge, but it was worth it. Thanks in great part to the BLM's efforts, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

### GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION

As a multiple use agency, the BLM must accommodate a wide range of uses including grazing and energy development, but we will keep a close eye on the health of Greater Sage-Grouse populations. The condition of this "umbrella species" is a good indication of the health of other species.

To that end, our plans seek to reduce surface disturbance from oil, gas and geothermal development while recognizing valid, existing rights. We will work with lessees, operators and proponents of proposed fluid mineral projects on existing leases to avoid and/or mitigate adverse impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that well-managed grazing practices can be compatible with long-term sage-grouse conservation. Consequently, during grazing permit renewals and modifications on lands within sage-grouse habitat, the BLM will use the best available science to incorporate locally developed management objectives

and rangeland health standards, consistent with ecological potential.

### THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

This unprecedented effort to ensure the long-term viability of western sagebrush landscapes involved numerous partners and cooperating agencies. Our partners include a host of local, state and federal agencies, tribes, and private organizations. The BLM would like to thank all cooperators.

Noteworthy partners include the Montana Stockgrowers Association, local grazing districts, and the governments of our three states. Always an integral part of successful land management, the partnership between Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota and the BLM is particularly important as we address the threats to Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat.

In Montana we are committed to working with the state in an all-lands approach, and we have incorporated significant portions of the Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Program into ours. We have committed to considering adjustments to the BLM plans when we find that the state's plan is effective in meeting our common management goals and objectives for Greater Sage-Grouse conservation.

Congratulations to all of those involved from North Dakota to California on this historic conservation effort.



Jamie E. Connell

BLM Montana/Dakotas State Director

The five revised Resource Management Plans released in September 2015 cover almost 5.9 million surface acres and 17.4 million subsurface acres (federal minerals) in Montana and South Dakota.

When combined with the plans for Dillon (completed in 2006), Butte (2009) and Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument (2009), we have updated management direction for most BLM lands in our three states.

Our next step is to address major implementation level actions, such as travel management, to meet the revised goals and objectives in these plans. We're also beginning work on revisions of the Missoula and Lewistown plans. We invite you to stay tuned and get involved.

For more information, go to <http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/planning.html>.

# Bakken slows but it's business as usual for NDFO

Story and photos by Mark Jacobsen  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

North Dakota Bakken oil play and rig activity is less than half its peak, but business is still booming for North Dakota Field Office staff.

In North Dakota, the BLM manages 58,000 surface acres and has oil and gas management responsibilities for 1,421,000 million federal subsurface and 568,000 leased Indian Trust subsurface. These mineral acres include BLM, U.S. Forest Service, split-estate, Indian Trust and other agencies—roughly 9 percent federal and Indian versus 91 percent fee and state.

Applications for Permit to Drill have increased 500 percent within a five year period. So far in 2015, 890 APDs have been approved by the NDFO—a new record. The APD fee increased from \$6,500 to \$9,500 this October, which has prompted a steady stream of applications arriving ahead of the deadline.

NDFO Inspection and Enforcement personnel continually monitor wells to ensure that royalties are collected, that companies operate as approved and to detect trespasses. Petroleum Engineering Technicians are there from the birth of the well until it has ceased production and is capped. The field office Inspection and Enforcement department is adding six new positions and plans for adding and training Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara inspectors are in the works. I&E staff have also conducted training seminars for industry reps and currently are on track, with the assistance of the Miles City Field Office staff, to complete 100 percent



*The NDFO took steps to address the housing crunch by exchanging acreage with the Bureau of Reclamation in 2012 to construct a site for mobile housing units. The complex was dedicated last July and this housing serves as temporary quarters for newly-arriving BLM and U.S. Forest Service employees.*

of NDFO's high priority production and drilling inspections.

The field office has dealt with the challenges of sudden, increased costs of living in a region that experienced quick, exponential population growth. In 2014, the human capital crisis prompted a discussion among the director of the Office of Personnel Management, North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp and other federal managers resulting in several proposals to alleviate pay and housing issues.

The North Dakota Petroleum Council also stepped forward. A memorandum of agreement between the BLM and the NDPC allows contributions to fund salaries for up to five positions. The NDPC contributes the funds, while the BLM determines workload priorities and assignments, eliminating any conflicts of interest.

One of the short-term solutions employed was the use of "Strike Teams." Teams were assembled with specialists from around the bureau and other agencies who focused their efforts on processing the ever-growing stacks of applications, notices, agreements and other administrative work. BLM employees

were also detailed on assignment to assist or temporarily fill positions to keep the work moving. Even off-season fire fighters were assigned additional duties in the NDFO.



*NDFO Inspection and Enforcement personnel continually monitor wells to ensure that royalties are collected, companies operate as approved and to detect trespasses. Petroleum Engineering Technicians are there: from the birth of the well until it has ceased production and is capped. With the assistance of the Miles City Field Office staff, I&E personnel are on-track to complete 100 percent of NDFO's high priority production and drilling inspections as scheduled.*

Getting approval for additional staff and retaining qualified employees was a challenge, but housing them in a boom town was entirely different. The BLM exchanged acreage with the Bureau of Reclamation in 2012 for mobile housing units. The complex was dedicated last July and now serves as temporary quarters for newly-arriving BLM and U.S. Forest Service employees.

A U.S. Air Force Red Horse Squadron from Montana's Malmstrom Air Force Base was employed in the initial earth-moving and water/sewer installation, adding to the cooperative, interagency flavor of the endeavor. The project has been hailed by federal and elected officials as a fast-moving success story, taking only about three years from start to finish.

The field office staffing has doubled over the last five years and continues to work through the issues and challenges with the Washington Office, Department of the Interior and Office of Personnel Management. The Bakken oil patch will chart new ground, even as low crude prices keep oil production below 1.2 million barrels per day, according to state production reports. Regardless of the lower price of a barrel of oil, there remains much to do for the BLM employees who oversee the North Dakota federal and Indian mineral estate.

# Looking for the Nez Perce Trail



*by Jennifer Macy, Archaeologist, Billings Field Office  
and  
Tim Urbaniak, Montana State University-Billings*

The Billings Field Office has managed the presumed corridor of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail (NPNHT) where it crosses BLM lands since 1986--the same year that Congress authorized the trail to commemorate the 1887 Nez Perce War and Flight.

The NPNHT crosses four states and multiple land owners. It has been verified in some locations yet remains elusive in others. One of the portions in question lies within the Billings Field Office area.

During the days preceding the Battle of Canyon Creek, which took place west of present day Billings, Montana, on September 13, 1877, members of the Nez Perce tribe led by Chief Joseph exited the Beartooth Mountains and proceeded north toward Canada. The exact route to their encounter with Colonel Sturgis and the Seventh Cavalry is unknown, but current BLM maps show that it runs from the southern Montana state line to the north along the western edge of BLM property, roughly paralleling U.S. Hwy 72 and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone.

In 2014, the Billings Field Office received \$25,000 from the National Landscape Conservation System to

contract a cultural resource inventory to ground-truth the trail's location in Carbon County, Montana. The BLM entered into an agreement with the University of Montana (UM) to complete the project.

The field work took place the last week of May and first week of June 2015 and was led by Tim Urbaniak, an instructor at MSUB, and Amy Miller, grad student at University of Montana. The work was completed by current and former MSUB students on a volunteer basis.

The archaeologists relied on GPS units to follow the BLM's management corridor of the trail in two passes: first just to examine the corridor and second with metal detectors to seek out historic artifacts. An additional route was also investigated using the same methodology but based on topography and what looked most appealing for a group the size of the Nez Perce with all their accoutrements might follow.

The survey covered about 500 acres and identified zero artifacts that could be associated with the Flight of the Nez Perce, either by visual inspection or metal detection.

"No shelter or water occurs along the route line and very little evidence of human presence can be found, save for the

occasional contemporary hunting rifle cartridge," explained Tim Urbaniak.

"The path we checked went up and down some pretty tough landscapes," Urbaniak continued. "Even after examining other potential travel corridors in the vicinity, it seems unlikely the Nez Perce would have chosen to cross the main Clarks Fork River valley here. I think they would have taken the easier and speedier route along the river bottom. We should continue to explore and research this trail and see if we can't come up with solid evidence that proves what route the tribe took as they headed north."

The results of the 2015 search for signs of the trail won't change the BLM's management of this trail corridor. Billings Field Office archaeologist Jennifer Macy notes: We will continue to manage the trail as we always have. It's a tenant of archaeology that absence of evidence cannot be interpreted as "proof." Until we have something definitive, management of the NPNHT corridor as established will continue.

*Pictured: Volunteers inventory the Nez Perce National Historic Trail corridor managed by the Billings Field Office. Photo by Rob Mutchler, Montana State University-Billings*

# Volunteer hosts keep campground safe during fire

By David Abrams, Public Affairs Specialist, Western Montana District

How close did campground host Barb Frye get to the Holter Lake fire?

Though she wasn't near enough to get burned, she did have an unexpected shower from one of the fire support helicopters dipping water from the lake.

"It was just coming off Holter Lake and I got drenched by the spillover from the bucket," the long-time host said. "It looked like a fine mist, but let me tell you, when it hit me, it was more than a little spray!"

Barb and her husband Dan have volunteered at the BLM's Holter Lake recreation sites for five years, and they weren't about to let a little water spook them away. It was the end of the summer season and they were determined to make sure that visitors were safely evacuated and that the facilities were well-cared-for.

The Holter Lake Complex Fire, which eventually burned nearly 750 acres, began on August 30 around 2 p.m. It was a Sunday and the campground was gearing up for Labor Day weekend.

Dan was outside the camper trailer where he and Barb live during their summer duty when a bolt of lightning forked through the sky.

"I saw it hit," he said. "Several boaters came off the lake to report the smoke to me."

The fire began in steep, rugged terrain lined with timber and grass and spread quickly. Because the heavily traveled Beartooth Road is the only road along the shores of Holter Lake, there's usually an early call for evacuation. In this case, the order came soon after fire officials saw how quickly the fire was growing.

At the time, Rocky Infanger, Craig-Wolf Creek fire chief, said, "We're trying to get some hand crews in here to support the retardant and bucket operations... We've

had strong winds all night on it and we have them today."

Infanger is also a BLM park ranger, but when fires of this size break out, he steps into his other role and must depend on the campground hosts to pitch in above and beyond their regular call of duties.

"It was pretty much up to Dan and Barb to evacuate the campground since I was tied up with my other duties," he said.

"There were about 20 folks here at the time," Barb said. "Plus, we had people still out fishing on the lake."

All told, it took about two hours to clear the campground and get everyone safely onto the exit route, Dan said.

"Everyone was very cooperative," Barb added. "Of course, when you see smoke coming from right over the hill behind the campground, then they tend to clear out pretty quickly."

The campground visitors were gone, but Barb and Dan remained to shut down the facilities and make sure the bathrooms were kept clean for the firefighters who were staging their operations in the area. The campground hosts' presence came in handy when the large "Super Scooper" aircraft arrived at Holter.

"The planes showed up a day early," Infanger said, "so we had to react quickly. Dan went right out on the water to help warn other boaters about the approaching Super Scoopers, and he stayed out there two days, along with other BLM staff and some homeowners, along with



Maintenance worker David Keitel, park ranger Rocky Infanger, and campground hosts Dan and Barb Frye were crucial in keeping the Holter Lake Recreation Site safe during the late-summer fire which burned in the neighboring hills north of Helena. Photo by David Abrams

the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office."

The large aircraft come in low over the lake and only need about 400 yards to get a bellyful of water before going back airborne, but that short approach and quick touchdown can be hazardous for anyone on the lake.

"(Dan) and Barb—and all of our personnel at Holter Lake—did such a great job during this whole time, keeping the public and the campground safe," Infanger said.



A Bombardier 415 Superscooper plane skims the surface of Holter Lake for about 400 yards before lifting back into the air with a bellyful of water it will then dump on the flames of the Holter Complex Fire. Photo courtesy of Rocky Infanger

# New Fort Howes Fire Station Opens for 2015 Season

Story and photos by  
Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist, Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

The newly constructed Fort Howes Fire Station in southeastern Montana opened this summer just in time for an active fire season.

The ribbon-cutting event on July 1 saw attendance by local landowners, BLM and U.S. Forest Service staff, fire fighters both past and present, and Fisher Construction, which built the facility.

BLM Fire Management Office Eric Lepisto was Master of Ceremonies.

“The new Fort Howes Fire Station will have a positive impact on our ready response to wildland fire,” he said.

Other remarks included those from BLM Montana/Dakotas Associate State Direc-

tor Kate Kitchell and U.S. Forest Service Ashland District Ranger Ron Hecker. Other attendees took a moment or two to talk about their roles—past and present—before the group gathered at the front of the building for the ribbon cutting. Eastern Montana/Dakotas District Manager Diane Friez assisted Smokey Bear who sliced a big, red ribbon with a pair of oversized golden scissors, officially highlighting the occasion.



Eastern Montana/Dakotas District Manager Diane Friez helps Smokey Bear cut the ribbon at the new Fort Howes Fire Station in southeastern Montana on July 1.



The new Fort Howes Fire Station in southeastern Montana has stayed very active since its ribbon-cutting on July 1.

# Zortman Weed Roundup yields half-ton of weeds

Story and photo by Jonathan Moor, Public Affairs Specialist, Central Montana and HiLine Districts

This summer’s Zortman Weed Roundup yielded about a half-ton of weeds from Buff’s Day Use Area near Zortman in north-central Montana.

Several invasive and noxious weed species, including hounds tongue, yellow toad flax and Canada thistle were removed from public lands managed by the BLM.

The 56-person work force represented a number of the sponsoring organizations including the BLM Malta Field Office and BLM Little Rockies Fire Station; Boy Scouts of America Troop 444 and Cub Scout Troop 432; Phillips County Weed and Conservation Districts; American Prairie Reserve; National Resource Conservation Service; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks; Zortman’s Garage and Hotel; and the Buckhorn Store.

“We really appreciate everyone who gave their time and effort to prevent the spread of noxious and invasive weeds and all the APR has done. We couldn’t have done it without all the help and resources everyone gave,” said Hal Moore, a Rangeland Management Specialist at the BLM Malta Field Office. “The Zortman Weed Roundup put a significant dent in the weed population here.”

Engaging youth in Public Land Stewardship is one of Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell’s and BLM Montana/Dakotas State Director Jamie Connell’s top initiatives.

“The Scouts’ participation in the Zortman Weed Roundup fits in with several state and national initiatives, such as BLM’s Take it Outside Initiative, which focuses on programs that engage children and families in outdoor activities,” said Kathy Tribby, the BLM HiLine District Outdoor Recreation Planner.

Phillips County Weed District Supervisor Greg Kelsey supported the event by briefing participants about weed identification, operational assignments and safety procedures.

American Prairie Reserve Supervisor Damien Austin and BLM Malta Field Manager Vinita Shea presented awards provided by the APR for Longest Weed, Shortest Weed and Most Pounds of Weeds.



Vinita Shea (left), the BLM Malta Field Manager, presents an award for the Longest Weed at the conclusion of the Zortman Weed Roundup. The award was provided by the American Prairie Reserve.

# BLM employs local Hutton fisheries scholarship recipient

by Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist, Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

MILES CITY, Mont. – The BLM Miles City fisheries program in eastern Montana got some help this summer with the placement of a Hutton Program scholar, a volunteer field position funded by the American Fisheries Society.

Kadie Heinle, a 2015 graduate of Custer County District High School with an interest in marine biology, was one of about 25 students selected from around the nation.

“The Hutton Program is for high school students interested in getting into the fisheries field,” said BLM Fish Biologist Christina Stuart. “It’s a great program and an honor for the student to be selected by AFS for this.”

According to the AFS, “the principle goal of the Hutton Program is to stimulate interest in pursuing fisheries science and aquatic resources management careers among high school students from groups underrepresented in the fisheries professions including minorities and women.”

The AFS provides most everything for the student, including liability coverage. The student also gets a \$3,000 scholarship. Hutton Scholars are required to work with a professional fish biologist for at least 40 hours per week for eight weeks, said Stuart.

According to Hutton Program specifics, the scholars are matched with a fisheries professional for “an exciting, hands-on summer internship in a marine or freshwater setting.”

“All parties benefit from the Hutton Program. The student receives a scholarship, a mentor, and beneficial field experience and the agency gets a volunteer which is invaluable help in completing the summer workload,” said Stuart. “Kadie is a remarkable person; I really enjoyed mentoring her and was grateful to have the extra help.”

A fisheries biologist serves as a program mentor and an application must be made by an agency professional on the receiving end. Once the mentor application is approved, the process moves forward and a Hutton Scholar can be placed.

This summer has been a busy one for both Stuart and Heinle. Prairie stream sampling, habitat monitoring, and data collection on BLM waterways have kept them active afield. At the end of the season, Heinle departs to the University of Montana in Missoula.

“Participating in the Hutton Program was a great experience. I was able to try out a lot of different equipment throughout the varying jobs we did. I learned so much in just two months,” said Heinle. I would definitely recommend this program to other high school students interested in fisheries because it’s awesome to gain this much real-world experience, all before you’ve even started your first day of college.”

Wendy Warren, BLM Assistant Field Manager for Renewable Resources in Miles City also found the program to be an asset to the BLM’s mission.

“This is the first year that the Miles City Field Office has participated in the Hutton Program,” said Warren. “I was very honored and excited that Kadie and the BLM’s application were matched for this summer.”

“The success of this program relies on the workload and the dedication to get it accomplished. I am pleased with the results and I’m proud to have had such an incredible person work with,” said Warren.

The Robert F. Hutton Endowment Fund was created in 2000 to receive contributions to support the program. The fund’s namesake, the late Dr. Robert F. Hutton, served as the American Fisheries Society’s first Executive Director from 1965 to 1972 and the society President from 1976 to 1977.



*Kadie Heinle, 2015 graduate from Custer County District High School and a Hutton Program Scholar, worked this summer with the BLM Miles City Field Office performing fisheries work on BLM waterways in eastern Montana. Her field position was paid for by the American Fisheries Society.*

# Miles City Field Office staff gives back to future outdoor enthusiasts

Story and photos by Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist, Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

Every year scores of young and “seasoned” students crowd into meeting rooms to attend Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks hunter and bow hunter education courses, part of the classroom and field requirements to get their certifications as safe and ethical hunters.

Montana requires certification for prospective hunters prior to purchasing a license. For Montana, it is mandatory for all persons born after January 1, 1985.

Miles City Field Office employees Kent Undlin, Jesse Hankins and Kirk Anderson have been donating time as instructors for a number of years to ensure the next generation is off to a good start when hunting season rolls around.

Rangeland Management Specialist Kirk Anderson has been teaching Hunter’s Ed for 10 years.

“Although I had been bow hunting for years, I had never taken a bow hunter education class and took the class in Colstrip prior to teaching it,” said Anderson. “I was amazed by how much I learned and by the quality of the instructors and have been helping to teach the class every year since then.”

Jesse Hankins is a Wildlife Biologist and has been teaching for seven years. He was introduced to the program through an experience with his wife.

“My wife was new to hunting so I encouraged her to take the class when we moved to Miles City,” said Hankins. “I sat through the whole thing with her. After completing the class we were both asked if we would like to get involved as instructors. We thought it would be good way to become active in the community.”

“Although time-consuming, teaching bow hunter ed has been one of the most

rewarding things I’ve done,” said Wildlife Biologist Kent Undlin who has been teaching for seven years. “If only one student teaches their child or friend to respect our wildlife and natural resources, it’s worth it.”

At times, hunter education provides the first exposure a person may have to the sport. Getting a dose of “how to” and ethics can make the difference for those who have never taken to the field before.

“I always try to bring home the point that hunters are really conservationists,” said Undlin. “We need to ensure that it continues for generations to come.”

For Undlin, the payoff for teaching is multi-faceted, both for the graduate and the resource.

“To hand a first-time bow hunter a certificate and realize that you may have provided the first step in a lifetime passion . . . and that you might have had a hand in ensuring that a student respects our natural resources, is worth it.”

“At times kids and parents struggle with the time commitment like giving up a whole weekend, often because it conflicts with a sporting event. It’s a big commitment for all folks involved,” said Hankins. “But hunting and the outdoors is something they can take with them and participate in for years to come. . . . Just my two cents worth.”

And that’s two “sense” of wisdom that generations of hunters everywhere would agree with.



*Kent Undlin gives instruction on tree stand safety to students during the field day portion of the bow hunter education class held last March in Miles City. Undlin has been an instructor for seven years.*

# Fort Peck cabin site conveyances completed

*Renee Johnson  
Renewable Energy Project Manager  
Montana/Dakotas State Office*

They say the job's not over until the paperwork is done, and after more than 15 years, the BLM has completed a monumental task.

Collaborating with its counterparts in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the BLM Montana/Dakotas Branch of Realty, Lands, and Renewable Energy has completed work on the conveyance of cabin sites within the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR).

The BLM is responsible for the preparation of land patents for lands considered public domain for all federal agencies—a responsibility inherited from the General Land Office when it merged with the Grazing Service to form the BLM in 1946.

The Fort Peck cabin site initiative began in 2000 when Congress passed the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Enhancement Act. The Act authorized the sale of leased cabin sites at Fort Peck Lake to willing lessees at fair market value and allocated those proceeds to acquire additional lands within the refuge.

The CMR, a sprawling 1.1-million acre wildlife refuge surrounding Fort Peck Lake, was created in 1936 through an executive order and is managed by the FWS. The Corps acquired jurisdiction over some of these refuge lands during the construction of Fort Peck Dam, which opened in 1940.



*Aerial view of cabin site areas on Fort Peck Lake. Photo by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

In the 1960s, the Corps began leasing land at the eastern end of the lake for recreational cabin sites. In all, the Corps leased 367 cabin sites, with structures ranging from one-room cabins to larger, year-round residences.

Between 2003 and 2011, administrative work including land surveys, appraisals, and sanitation planning was completed to set the stage for proper conveyance of the public domain land under the provisions of the law. The BLM's Branch of Cadastral Survey resurveyed the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) framework to seamlessly integrate private land surveys that conformed to state subdivision requirements.

The private land surveys were incorporated into the Federal Record System via Supplemental Plats to provide legal land descriptions of the public domain. These legal land

descriptions were updated onto the Master Title Plats to provide basis for use in the federal land patents.

The first patent was issued on January 19, 2011, and the final was signed December 12, 2014. The Corps also issued quit claim deeds for a number of non-public domain parcels.

Sales of the parcels resulted in proceeds of nearly \$7 million that will go into the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust. These funds are now available to FWS to purchase lands that enhance wildlife and other public values.

The FWS anticipates acquisition of somewhere between 10,000 and 40,000 acres from willing sellers to enhance wildlife values and conservation efforts across the refuge.

To date, FWS has acquired more than 3,000 acres using cabin site sale proceeds. More acquisitions are in the works.



*It took a team effort to implement this legislation. Front Row: Seth Jackson, Debby Sorg, and Pete McFadden, Branch of Realty, Lands, and Renewable Energy. Back Row: Blaise Lodermeier and Marvin Montoya, Branch of Cadastral Survey. Photo by Renee Johnson*

# BLM lands continue to be invaluable research and learning tool

Greg Liggett, Geologist (Paleontology), Montana/Dakotas State Office

Researchers from across the country travel to Montana and the Dakotas during the summer months with the anticipation of treasure hunters. The treasure they seek, however, is not in gold or jewels, but in bits of fossilized bones and teeth that might add another piece to our understanding of the past. Public lands continue to yield new finds and positive experiences.

As usual, many of the research teams this summer were focused on the Hell Creek beds of eastern Montana and the western Dakotas. This rock unit is world famous for its fossils, including some of the most iconic dinosaurs like *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *Triceratops*. Crews from the Denver Museum of Science and Nature reported discovering an area with over 28 partial dinosaur skeletons, and a well-preserved skull of the three-horned dinosaur *Triceratops*. No doubt they will return next year to expose those finds in more detail.

Sometimes old sites yield additional exciting discoveries. One particular site in Montana exposes rocks from the mid-Jurassic--almost 80 million years older than the Hell Creek rocks.

Fifteen years ago it produced a new sauropod (long-neck) dinosaur that was named *Suuwassea* (Su-uh-WAZ-eh-ah). However, additional bone was observed weathering out, so at BLM's request, crews from the New Jersey State Museum revisited the site. To their astonishment, they found numerous bones and bone fragments spread over a wide area. In addition to the long-neck dinosaur remains, they found parts of the meat-eating dinosaur *Allosaurus*. They are excited, and busy planning an excavation for next year!

Dinosaurs were not the only prize finds of the summer. Working in North Dakota, an intern with the North Dakota Geological Survey found a rare lower jaw from a marsupial mammal, preserved from the age of *T. rex*. Mammals from that time were mostly small—the largest grew to about the size of a skunk, but most were much smaller. They scurried around the feet of the dominating dinosaurs, eating seeds and



*The jaw from a marsupial mammal, preserved in the Hell Creek beds, was recovered in North Dakota, extending the geographic range of this Late Cretaceous species. Photo courtesy of Clint Boyd, North Dakota Geological Survey.*

insects and trying to avoid being eaten themselves. This particular species had previously been found only in Montana and Saskatchewan. Its new record in North Dakota extends its known range, adding to our understanding of the ecosystem of the Late Cretaceous from 65 million years ago.

Scientists are not the only ones to benefit from a great collecting season in 2015. Several of those who were authorized to collect fossils from BLM land used the opportunity to teach others about the fascinating world of paleontology. Among them was the team from the University of Washington Burke Museum that conducted its largest Field School yet-- 33 K-12 classroom teachers from 14 different states joined the crew to learn about fossils and science. Each of those teachers took what they learned in the unique outdoor laboratory on public lands to bring enrichment back to their students and inspire another generation of eager minds with the thrill of fossil hunting and learning.

Experiences and discoveries like these were made many more times by other crews this summer on BLM land in Montana/Dakotas. All the collection and research activity was authorized by permits issued and managed by BLM to ensure that public lands, and public fossils, continue to benefit all citizens.



*Participants in the University of Washington Burke Museum Dig School include 33 classroom teachers from across the country, all learning about fossil collecting, and learning on public lands about science to inspire their students in the coming school years. Photo courtesy of Greg Wilson, University of Washington, Burke Museum Dig School.*

# South Dakota Field Office supports 75th Sturgis Rally

Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist, Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

The BLM took an active role when Sturgis, South Dakota, hosted the 75th anniversary of its world-famous Motorcycle Rally Aug. 3-9.

Sturgis-area officials expected attendance to push one million in 2015 and started planning two years in advance.

The BLM South Dakota Field Office administers the Fort Meade Recreation Area located between Sturgis and several outlying Rally venues. Encompassing almost 7,000 acres of what was once part of the old Fort Meade military reservation, the area offers historical interpretation and outdoor recreational opportunities. The Fort Meade Backcountry Byway bisects the Recreation Area and provides access for recreational use and Rally traffic.

Law Enforcement provided for public safety and information and encouraged normal recreational use of the area during this time of increased traffic and hazards. BLM Montana State Chief Ranger Bryan Sakahara led a team of BLM professionals –some accompanied by K9 companions -- from Montana,

South Dakota, Arizona, Idaho and Colorado to support city, county and state law enforcement.

“I think it went well, overall,” said South Dakota Field Office Law Enforcement Ranger Chuck Huston. “We planned for the worst and got the best of it.”

A number of BLM firefighters and engines supported the Rally with wildfire prevention messaging. While inter-agency banners urged “Don’t Burn the Rally,” the Meade County Veterans Program staff, a BLM-funded Firewise Program that provides returning veterans job training and hands-on experience in fuels reduction, manned booths to educate visitors about fire safety.

Kevin Forrester, BLM Dakotas Resource Advisory Council Chairman and Meade County Facility Manager, felt the crowds were better behaved than in other years. Advance planning paid dividends for city and county organizers.

“We do the rally well, and it showed this year because it was the best rally so far,” said Forrester whose department does the technical work for local law enforcement agencies. “Every piece of it flowed together nicely; even our visitors were more relaxed and easier to get along with.”

“Our total county population is around 30,000,” he continued. “Everything that we have, every piece of equipment becomes mission critical during



South Dakota Field Office Law Enforcement Ranger Chuck Huston and his K9 companion Hondo were part of a detail of BLM officers and K9s from several states who supported city and state public service departments throughout the Rally. Photo by Mark Jacobsen

the rally when the population increases by tens of thousands.”

“Tens of thousands” is not an exaggeration.

“Personnel used data gathered from a multiple of indicators to draw the conclusion that there were 739,000 at this year’s event,” stated Meade County Town Hall on its Facebook page. “This number is based on previous comparisons for tons of garbage hauled within the city, Department of Transportation vehicle counts, Mount Rushmore traffic counts, sales tax collections, sanitation fees collected and Main Street photo counts.”

A whopping 764 tons of garbage were hauled out of Sturgis by the time the rally was done. Other notable figures include: \$827,526 in South Dakota sales tax; 122 marriage licenses issued; 13 rally-related deaths; 309 parking tickets; five felony drug arrests; 246 arrests for non-traffic violations; and 542 Sturgis Hospital emergency room visits. More stats can be found at: [www.facebook.com/MeadeCounty-Town-Hall](http://www.facebook.com/MeadeCounty-Town-Hall).



This photo of Main Street in Sturgis gives an idea of the Rally’s level of attendance. Main Street photos have also been a means of calculating attendee numbers by event organizers. Photo by Bob Davis, Sturgis photos and gifts

# New computer technology aids Miles City Field Office bat survey

*Photos and text by  
John Kuntz, Biological Science Technician, and  
Jesse Hankins, Wildlife Biologist*

*Edited by  
Mark Jacobsen, Public Affairs Specialist*

MILES CITY, Mont. --- Holy Bat Trap, there's bats everywhere!

With a Bam, Pow, and a Zap! mist nets were filled nearly instantly with bats. So began the late-July action-packed night in southeastern Montana.

Miles City Field Office Wildlife Biologist Jesse Hankins and Biological Science Technician John Kuntz traveled to the Chalk Buttes near Ekalaka to field test a new wildlife acoustics microphone and iPad for future bat surveys in the region.

There they met up with Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) staff and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks employees conducting population surveys with mist netting. This method, which involves a large, fine net stretched between two long poles next to a water source, catches bats as they fly in to feed or drink.

For the two hours of post-dusk bat activity, it was a mad frenzy of crew members untangling the bats and placing them into small cloth bags to reduce their stress as much as possible. After the bat activity dwindled, the nets were taken down and the data sampling began, in part to determine presence or absence of the recently listed Northern Long-eared Bat. Thirty-six bats were trapped over the course of a couple hours.

MNHP and FWP staff removed the bats one-by-one, and for each specimen took data including ear to snout and wing measurements, a biopsy of the wing membrane and a guano sample. After the physical data collection, Kuntz stood ready with the microphone to catch the calls of each bat as they were released.

Kuntz and Hankins used an iPad tablet equipped with an "Echo Meter Touch Bat Detector" for bat detection. This technology instantly identifies

and monitors bats based on their vocalizations.

"This was a perfect learning opportunity to get familiar with the bat detection App while being able to get the bats in hand," said Hankins.

Bats navigate by echolocation. These vocalized high-pitched rhythmic clicks, allow bats to "see" the world in which they fly. Bats hear and interpret their own clicks, based on the returning echo as the sounds bounce back from obstacles such as trees, cliff faces, other bats, and their food source: flying insects.

Each bat species has its own signature call with specific characteristics like duration, calling interval and pitch height and fluctuation. The microphone on the tablet picks up the minute differences and identifies the bat species for the researcher.

The microphone and tablet combo is an integral component of the MCFO's bat monitoring program. Researchers are able to accurately determine what species are in the MCFO area and specifically identify individuals. The Northern Long-Eared bat is a variety of particular interest to researchers.

The Northern Long-Eared is a species whose populations have been devastated by White-Nose Syndrome, a fungus that grows on the skin of hibernating bats and is often evident on the muzzle, hence the name. A combination of wing-skin lesions, arousal from torpor and possibly other factors saps the energy of hibernating bats. They burn their excess fat stores before winter ends and starve to death.

The BLM Miles City Field Office is on the periphery of the Northern Long-Eared native range. Of the 36 individuals detected by the iPad and caught in the mist nets, none were identified as the Northern Long-Eared bat. Meanwhile researchers will continue to sample bat populations with this new tablet technology and the information will help the BLM make informed decisions that benefit eastern Montana's diminutive aerial mammals.



*Jon Kuntz weighs a bat held temporarily in a bag. Researchers took measurements, a biopsy of the wing membrane and a guano sample from each bat, prior to release. The information will help the MCFO make informed decisions that benefit eastern Montana's bat populations. Photo by Jesse Hankins*

# From Armenia to Montana: Mining the knowledge of two countries

Story and photos by  
David Abrams  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Western Montana District

Gevorg Navasardyan stood at the top of a hill, looking down at a spill of splintered timbers, a rusted barrel and curled sheets of corrugated metal—the ghostly remains of what had once been a thriving copper lead zinc mine in western Montana. He was a long way from home—6,200 miles, to be exact—but the Iron Mask Mine’s mill complex made him think of his native Armenia.

“Reclamation is a problem in Armenia,” said Navasardyan, who works for his country’s Ministry of Nature Protection. “We have many mines in Armenia and there is a problem with wanting to clean them up.”

Navasardyan was on the last day of his three-week stay in Montana when he and BLM geologist Dave Williams toured the abandoned mine site in the Elkhorn Mountains. The international visit was arranged through the U.S. State Department’s Responsible Mining Program to bring Navasardyan and several other scientists from other countries to America for an intense exchange of ideas.

The program is a good value for the Department of the Interior, Williams said. “This is all geared toward responsible mining. It’s good to lay foundations with other countries. Now, we have a bridge between our nations.”

This was Navasardyan’s first visit to Montana and he said there are a lot of similarities between Big Sky Country and Armenia, which he called “the country of talking stones.” Situated between the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean seas, Armenia is a country of mountains, volcanoes, and lakes puddled in ancient craters. It’s also a nation full of mines—nearly 500 in a country that measures 11,484 square miles, Navasardyan noted. Many of those mines perforate the hills around the pristine Lake Sevan, an aquatic crown jewel of Armenia.

“We realize we need to use its fresh water for drinking,” Navasardyan said. “We need to develop a reclamation plan.”

Environmental clean-up hasn’t always been a priority, he added. “But I

think it will be getting better. Our government wants to find money for more reclamation because they understand it’s a problem.”

While working out of the Butte Field Office during his stay, Navasardyan shadowed Williams on the job. The two saw abandoned mine sites, ongoing operations at Montana Resources in Butte, and visited the Golden Sunlight Mine near Whitehall, which the Armenian said was the highlight of his time in America. “I was able to see the kind of operations and processes which we can use in my country in the future.”



*BLM Butte Field Office geologist Dave Williams points out features of the former Iron Mask Mine site to Gevorg Navasardyan, a geologist visiting from Armenia.*



*Gevorg Navasardyan, a geologist visiting from Armenia, photographs an adit at the abandoned Iron Mask Mine site as Dave Williams, geologist with the Butte Field Office, looks on.*

# Employees on the Move

## NEW TO BLM

JaNae Anderson  
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Legal Instrument Examiner  
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Supvy. Rangeland Mgmt. Spec  
Western Montana District

Daniel C. Downing  
Fish Biologist  
Western Montana District

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Lead Range Tech (Fire)  
Central Montana District

Brenda C. Geesey  
Geographic Info System Spec  
Western Montana District

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**PROMOTED WITHIN BLM**

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Gabriella K. Torres  
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Montana State Office

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Loren C. Wickstrom  
Field Manager  
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Stephenie J. Merrill  
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Hiline District

Mark B. Sant  
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Montana State Office

Harvey A. Wolff  
Engineering Equipment Operator  
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*As of September 30, 2015*

# For BLM Retirees

## The BLM Email list

Send your email address to [aboucher@blm.gov](mailto:aboucher@blm.gov) to get alerts about upcoming social events and/or news stories from BLM Montana/Dakotas.

## The Public Lands Foundation

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) offers new retirees a free one-year membership. If you're interested, contact one of the Montana PLF representatives: David Mari at 406-538-7121 or [dmari@earthlink.net](mailto:dmari@earthlink.net); or Kemp Conn at 406-360-9252 or [montanakconn@wildblue.net](mailto:montanakconn@wildblue.net) (please note "PLF" on the subject line).

What is the PLF? It works to keep America's public lands in public hands, managed professionally and sustainably for responsible common use and enjoyment.

The goals of the PLF are to:

- Keep lands managed by the BLM in public ownership and open to use by the public.
- Support multiple use management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- Encourage professionalism by BLM employees.
- Increase the public's understanding of and support for the proper management of the public lands.

Although PLF membership consists largely of retired BLMers, current employees and anyone interested in the goals of the organization are welcome to join.

Visit us at [www.blm.gov/mt](http://www.blm.gov/mt), like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/BLMMontana](http://www.facebook.com/BLMMontana), or follow us on [Twitter@BLM\\_MTDKs](https://twitter.com/BLM_MTDKs).

# Youth volunteers down in the weeds

*Photos and story submitted by the Dillon Field Office*

Five Montana Youth Challenge Cadets recently chipped in to fight the war on weeds on the Madison River in southwest Montana.

The teens joined 32 other people, including employees from the Madison and Gallatin County Weed Crews and BLM Dillon Field Office, for the 14<sup>th</sup> annual Bear Trap Backpack Spray Day. The goal of the spray day is to control noxious and invasive plants species within the Bear Trap Wilderness Area along the Madison River.

BLM Weed Specialist Mike Mooney has coordinated this effort twice each summer since 2002, resulting in a substantial reduction in noxious weeds in this area. The Dillon Field Office estimates the noxious weed infestation in



*Montana Youth Challenge cadets Blake Davidson, Isiah Littleplume, Karlton Madplume, Shaine Gates and Tyren Landwehr at Bear Trap Backpack Spray Day.*

this area has been reduced by as much as 90 percent in the last 13 years.

MYCA cadets have volunteered for the past several years, donning backpacks and spraying weeds in the pristine wilderness area. The “at risk” youth are required to complete at least 40 hours of service to the community as part of their curriculum in the MYCA.

“It is a lot of fun to work with these youth,” said Pat Fosse, assistant field

manager. “They are great kids who are happy to come out and contribute to the success of this project. It’s a win/win situation, where these cadets can fulfill their requirements while learning, having fun and contributing to a very worthwhile project.”

Once everyone has finished spraying for the day and hikes out from their assigned area, they’re treated to a barbecue at Trapper Springs Picnic area.

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The Steward is published twice a year by the Bureau of Land Management and distributed in Montana and the Dakotas. It is produced by the Office of Communications, Montana State Office.

Ann Boucher, Editor & Graphic Design

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