



National Wild Turkey Federation Recognizes BLM Prescribed Fire Project



Josh Barta, Fire Management Specialist, and Dan Brunkhorst, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, received the National Wild Turkey Federation's Making Tracks award for their part in improving wild turkey habitat in central Montana. BLM photo

Two Central Montana District employees recently accepted a "Making Tracks" award from the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) in recognition of BLM efforts to improve wild turkey habitat. Making Tracks is a cooperative program between the NWTf and state, federal and provincial wildlife agencies to restore wild turkeys to all suitable habitats in North America.

Dan Brunkhorst, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, and Josh Barta, Fire Management Specialist, accepted the awards on behalf of the Central Montana District. Dwight Fielder, BLM Division Chief of Fish, Wildlife and Plant Conser-

vation presented the awards February 15 in Nashville, Tenn.

Tin Can Hill Unit B prescribed fire, the project receiving recognition, was just one piece of a large-scale, multi-year program. It covered about 4,000 acres 15 miles northeast of Winnett, Mont., in the spring of 2012. The BLM, with help from numerous cooperators, has now treated more than 7,000 acres within this project area.

"Conducting prescribed fire projects in an area where natural fire has been suppressed for many years can provide a wide variety of benefits," said Central Montana District Manager Stan Benes. "In ad-

dition to improving wildlife habitat, the objectives were to improve forest health, reduce hazardous fuels, increase recreational opportunities, and enhance livestock grazing." Generally speaking, this single treatment increased biodiversity on over 4,000 acres of ponderosa pine woodlands in the Musselshell River Breaks Area.

Project implementation involved close coordination with a variety of natural resource interests including local grazing permittees, advocacy groups, state and local land management agencies, and concerned citizens. The BLM would like to thank the cooperators, landowners, ranchers, residents, and agencies involved with the efforts before, during, and after project implementation. Without the help and support of all involved parties, projects like this would never get off the ground.

*Kari Boyd-Peak
Central Montana District (detail)*

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Jeff Kitchens Takes Students Back to the Future

The class of seventh graders is quickly ushered into a classroom at Montana State University-College of Technology.

“Come on in, plenty of seats up front,” says Jeff Kitchens, Pompeys Pillar National Monument Manager.

Jeff is wearing a buckskin coat, similar to what might have been worn during the early 1800s. The kids file in, take their seats, but look unsure why their instructor for the next half-hour has a wardrobe lost between two centuries.

Jeff begins his session by reading a short entry from William Clark’s Journal from July 25, 1806. He explains that letters and journals were the only way for the Lewis and Clark expedition to communicate their historic journey to the people back East.

“I really want to educate these kids, not just about Pompeys Pillar and the BLM, but about all the changes that have happened in Yellowstone County and Montana over a relative short period of time, only about 200 years,” explains Kitchens.

And that’s what “Back to the Future with Lewis and Clark – Technology Then and Now” is all about. Using the Lewis and Clark expedition as a starting point, eight volunteer instructors explain how quickly technology has advanced in areas like mapping, communications, medical training, and weather prediction.

“I want these kids to understand that history is alive and well,” says John Pulasky. “These young people are physically living in a place where a lot of that history took place. They can still go and look at where the events that we cover during this course actually happened.”

John Pulasky was chairperson of the very first Back to the Future with Lewis and Clark program in 2006, and still runs the program today. The course began as part of the Lewis and Clark expedition Bi-Centennial and is still going strong.

“When we got started the first year it was so successful,” explains John. “We had over 900 students, and the thank you notes we got back were so great that we said, ‘we can’t do this for just one year, let’s do it again.’”

The program’s longevity is thanks to several partners including The National Weather Service, MSU-Billings, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, The Yellowstone County Museum and the BLM.

“It’s a pretty amazing program,” says Kitchens. “It’s just great to come here and explain to our future leaders about the past and present. It’s been going strong since 2006, and I don’t see it stopping anytime soon. I know I’ll be here again next year.”

If you’d like to experience history for yourself, visit the BLM’s Pompeys Pillar National Monument this spring. The Interpretive Center is scheduled to open May 4.

*Brad Purdy
Montana State Office*



Pompeys Pillar National Monument Manager Jeff Kitchens introduces Billings-area seventh graders to the remarkable history of Pompeys Pillar. Photo by Brad Purdy



Wildlife catch a break with modified fences

Winter can pose some serious hurdles for Montana’s big game.

Deep, drifted snow may render some fence types impassible. If the animals don’t find a way around to more favorable terrain, they can succumb to exposure, starvation or stress. This is particularly true of antelope, said BLM biologist Jesse Hankins of the Miles City Field Office.

“In extreme winter conditions pronghorn aren’t able to drift ahead of the severe weather to more favorable habitat conditions, especially where woven wire fences are involved,” said Hankins. “Drifting snow can get up to heights where the pronghorn can’t go under the fence; and if the snow drifts tall enough -and where they don’t have the natural inclination to jump—that’s where you come into big winter mortalities.

“In times when you don’t have livestock on either side of the fence, leave those gates open; they will pace the fence line looking for an opportune place to cross—either at a low spot or a wire that’s hanging or a gate,” said Hankins.

“Leaving places for wildlife to pass through fences easily can lead to less annual fence damage, especially when elk are the species crossing the fences,” said Cathy Stewart, spokesperson for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region Seven.

“Easy wildlife passage through fences ultimately means less work for the landowner, too.”

The seasonal reverse is also true, said Montana FWP Region Seven Supervisor Brad Schmitz. Deep, crusted snow can allow wildlife to cross fences in the winter, but once the snow is gone it can be a different story.

“Population loss for a region can happen by winter kill or winter time herd migration,” said Schmitz. “Those same fences can be problematic as wildlife try to migrate home again.”

The BLM is employing local contractors or contributing funds to willing permittees to remove, modify or replace fences on BLM-administered land that don’t meet

the bureau’s wildlife-friendly fence configuration of four wires--three barbed upper wires and one smooth bottom wire—for exterior allotment boundary fences.

Recently, Houston-based pipeline company TransCanada worked with 13 Carter County landowners to replace about 23 miles of woven wire near the company’s Bison Pipeline right-of-way. TransCanada coordinated its fencing criteria and configuration with landowners, the BLM and Montana FWP.

According to TransCanada spokeswoman Gretchen Krueger, rancher Ralph Brownfield was the first to participate in the fence replacement program and had 1.7 miles of fence reconfigured under the program. Brownfield has a 15,000-acre hay and cattle operation crossed by the Bison natural gas pipeline.

For more information on wildlife-friendly fence modifications contact BLM Wildlife Biologist Jesse Hankins at 406.233.2800. For additional ideas on how to design, construct or modify fencing to avoid conflict with wildlife, the booklet entitled “How to Build Fence with Wildlife in Mind” is available from your local FWP office or from the BLM Miles City Field office.

*Mark Jacobsen
Eastern Montana/Dakotas District*



A rolled-up bundle of woven wire sits next to a re-configured wildlife-friendly fence north of Terry in Prairie County. Photo by Mark Jacobsen

BLM fossils from Montana have a far-reaching impact



The plaster jacket containing parts of a dinosaur skull are moved into the lab in the Virginia Museum of Natural History.



Visitors to the Virginia Museum of Natural History marvel at the jacket containing a dinosaur skull from BLM lands of Montana.



Museum officials begin the painstaking work of working through the plaster jacket containing fossils and rock, carefully cleaning the bones so they can be used in research and education.

Most fossils are in the rocks for millions of years before they are found. However, even after they are collected, it can still take many years before they are fully brought to the light of day. Many people do not realize that collecting a fossil is only the first step in a long process of making that fossil fully available for science and education.

This process can be illustrated by a Triceratops skull from Montana. It was originally collected about 13 years ago in the Montana badlands of the Hell Creek Formation, and was collected in two large plaster jackets. In the field, the bones are exposed enough to mark their boundaries, and then the rock and fossils are covered with plaster, forming a large package that can be transported back to the lab for further work. A Triceratops skull is not small, and the two jackets were large and heavy, one weighing 1,000 pounds, and the other closer to 5,000.

Staff and budget issues always are an issue at any museum, and the large jackets containing the skull were kept in storage for many years. Recently however, the jackets were moved to the Virginia Museum of Natural History to be featured as part of their current dinosaur exhibit.

Moving large specimens is no problem for an experienced museum crew, and the jackets were moved into the perpetration laboratory that is in full view of the visiting public. For the first time in many years, the jackets were opened, and the journey of this Triceratops takes its next steps.

That journey began more than 65 million years ago along the lush banks of a tropical river flowing through what is now eastern Montana. The animal died and was buried in river muds, where it remained covered for millions of years. After discovery the bones were carefully exposed and jacketed in plaster, and then the dinosaur traveled almost two thousand miles across a continent.

After more than a decade in storage this Triceratops is seeing the light of day again, its bones being revealed to the amazement of museum visitors, young and old. It will take many months to fully clean the bones and make them available for study or display. In this way, public fossils from Montana are making an impact in public education thousands of miles away; all in all, another dramatic story for our public fossils.

*Greg Liggett
Montana State Office*

*Photos by
Timothy Dooley*

Roger Olson Named Outstanding Rangeland Management Specialist

Last summer, as in many areas across the West, the Butte Field Office had a very active fire season. In June, a wildfire burned across BLM lands in area known as the Scratchgravel Hills. The fire was very high profile due to its location in a Wildland Urban Interface and the fact that the smoke could easily be seen from the capitol.

Roger Olsen was named the interdisciplinary team lead to determine the need for Emergency Stabilization (ES) and Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) plans. This was the first ES/BAR Roger had been assigned, and due to the high profile nature of the wildfire, he had many obstacles to overcome from the beginning.

Due to Roger's motivation, leadership and coordination with state office program leads, the Butte Field Office obtained ALL of the funds requested to address the hazards included in the ES plan. That was no small task considering that the Butte Field Office was competing against a multitude of catastrophic wildfires that had gained national attention and had burned many more acres than our fire.

Because of the very tight time frames that occur in August for budget, spending, and accomplishing our base targets, Roger had to complete coordination, submit the plan, and meet contracting deadlines by the end of the fiscal year. Soon after the fire, heavy rains washed large amounts of sediment onto adjacent private property and public roads, which added even more attention to the fire.

Roger rose to the occasion, successfully working with adjacent land owners and completing a detailed interview with National Public Radio (the first he'd ever done), in addition to answering Senate and congressional inquiries. It's often the high stress situations that really show whether or not someone is a true leader, and Roger went well above and beyond to represent the Butte Field Office professionally, assuage the concerns of the public and our senators and representatives. We received MANY compliments from both the public and congressional staff regarding Roger's ability to communicate effectively and develop positive outcomes during difficult situations.

Roger has been a rangeland management specialist only since the spring of 2010, and it is difficult to gain the level of respect that he has achieved in such a short time from permittees, other agency partners, contractors and field office staff. He excels at applying both the "art and science" of rangeland management, and already possesses the leadership skills that often takes many years to develop.

Because of those attributes and his work on the Corral Fire ES/BAR plan, Roger earned the Outstanding Rangeland Management Specialist Award at the Society for Range Management Annual Convention in Oklahoma City on Feb. 3, 2013.

*Tanya Thrift
Butte Field Office*



Roger Olson of the Butte Field Office accepted the Outstanding Rangeland Management Specialist Award at the Society for Range Management Annual Convention in Oklahoma City on Feb. 3. He's pictured here with Robert Bolton, Senior Rangeland Management Specialist from the WO, and Lynda Boody, WO 220 Division Chief. BLM photo

Old mammal records nearly lost ...

but not forgotten

Old BLM records shed light on seldom seen Montana animals.

Could this weasel photographed on BLM land in the Glasgow Field Office in November 1987 be the elusive short-tailed weasel? Researchers are looking to BLM records for clues. Photo by Fritz Prellwitz

BLM wildlife biologists recently brought forward two small mammal records from 33 and 25 years ago in the Phillips and Valley resource areas (the Malta and Glasgow Field Offices today) to help determine the distribution of two secretive mammals seldom observed in the wild.

Few people have seen either the short-tailed weasel (*Mustela erminea*) or the montane vole (*Microtus montanus*) in Montana and have known for sure whether or not that is what they really observed.

BLM wildlife biologists cooperate with the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) in reporting wildlife observations for use

both as historical records and in producing maps of current distribution. Thousands of records are added each year to this huge database that is often used when agencies are making resource management decisions.

BLM Malta Field Office Biologist Fritz Prellwitz recently submitted some small mammal records collected in 1979 as part of the Soil-Vegetation Inventory Method or SVIM used in the preparation of some early grazing Environmental Impact Statements. Included in those records were four montane voles trapped in northern Phillips County by Mark Carrington and Fritz under the direction of Jeff Shryer, the Lewistown District's nongame biologist at the time.



Microtus montanus (Montane Vole) Photo by Roger W. Barbour. Source: Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

more...

Jeff was a disciplined field biologist who kept detailed records according to current accepted scientific procedures. That often included the preparation of study skins and skulls for museum collections. Jeff even started his own small museum study skin collection in the Lewistown District Office.

The MNHP requested additional information on the four montane voles because their trapping locations were considerably outside of the known range of montane voles in Montana. In addition, the montane vole is easily confused with other vole species such as the meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), and positive identification is best done by tooth examination. Vole teeth are very small.

Fritz had submitted the typical small mammal measurements for small rodents such as body, tail, and hind foot lengths, but those measurements fell within the known range for more than just the montane vole. It was then that he remembered that Jeff Shryer may have prepared study skins of those voles. After all, Jeff had recorded the other measurements in the field.

There were two problems, however. First, Jeff had left the Lewistown District Office decades ago, and the Lewistown District Office (now Central Montana District Office) had moved across town. Things often get lost during moves.

Fritz contacted wildlife biologist Matt Comer in Lewistown and asked if he had ever seen a collection of study skins or if a museum collection even existed anymore. Matt recalled seeing something like that in their storage room and had wondered about the story

behind the collection of study skins. Matt relocated the collection and found two montane vole study skins from Phillips County in 1979. Skulls were included in pill bottles.

Dr. Bryce Maxell from the MNHP stopped in Lewistown on Nov. 7, made a quick identification, and then transported the study skins to Helena for further evaluation. The M3 and M2 upper molars were consistent with the montane vole, as was the coat color. The study skins were then transported to Missoula where MNHP Biologist Dr. Paul Hendricks also concluded that they were montane voles.

The study skins will now be accessioned into the Phil Wright Museum on the University of Montana campus. Matt and Fritz also agreed that other specimens in the Lewistown BLM collection should be transferred to the Phil Wright Museum where they would be better preserved and available for further examination and research.

The second mammal species with historic BLM records is the short-tailed weasel. Dr. Kerry Foresman, in his second edition of the *Mammals of Montana* book, shows the distribution of the short-tailed weasel in Phillips County and west, probably based on some observation records submitted to the MNHP by Fritz Prellwitz. The MNHP distribution map, however, using confirmed records from photos and study skins, shows the distribution in the western third of Montana and in an isolated pocket in west-central Blaine County considerably west of the Phillips County observation records. The MNHP has asked for photos to confirm short-tailed weasel occurrence in Phillips County.

Fritz remembered having taken three photos of a weasel near a BLM reservoir in southern Valley County on November 13, 1987, that he had identified as a short-tailed weasel in his field notes. Valley County in the Glasgow Field Office is even farther from the known range of the short-tailed weasel.

Both the short-tailed weasel and long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) turn white in winter, making identification more difficult. The old slides were recently converted to digital images and sent to Bryce Maxell. The weasel's tail is not visible on any of the photos, and most of the body can only be seen faintly in one photo. Dr. Maxell agreed that it could very well be a short-tailed weasel, but still couldn't completely eliminate the long-tailed weasel from consideration. Photos were also sent to the University of Montana, but a response has not been received yet. Bryce Maxell did admit that "it is a cutie."

In the meantime Fritz will start carrying his camera to the field more often.



The weasel's body is faintly visible in this photo and appears short enough to be a short-tailed weasel. But, it still could be a long-tailed weasel. Photo by Fritz Prellwitz

Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association

Stay in touch! The BLM Retirees Association has a social gathering at 11:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of even-numbered months at the Windmill (3429 TransTech Way) in Billings. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please contact Alice Slagowski at 406-259-9319 or asluggo@bresnan.net.

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; or Kemp Conn at 406-360-9252 or 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.

Retired since December 2012:

Timothy L. Welna – 29 years
Civil Engineer
Western Montana District Office

James W. Chapman – 31 years
Supvy. Gen Supply Specialist
Montana State Office

Mitchell V. Forsyth – 36 years
Rangeland Mgmt. Specialist
Upper Missouri River Breaks NM

Teresa A. Deakins – 38 years
Reco Project Manager
Dillon Field Office

Stephen M. Klessens – 34 years
Rangeland Mgmt. Specialist
Glasgow Field Office

Craig M. Haynes – 35 years
Realty Specialist
Montana State Office

Deborah K. Clark – 22 years
Production Accountability Technician
North Dakota Field Office

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The Quarterly Steward is published every three months 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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