

## Homesteads Offer a Peek into the Past

*Story and photos by  
Joshua Chase  
Havre Field Office*

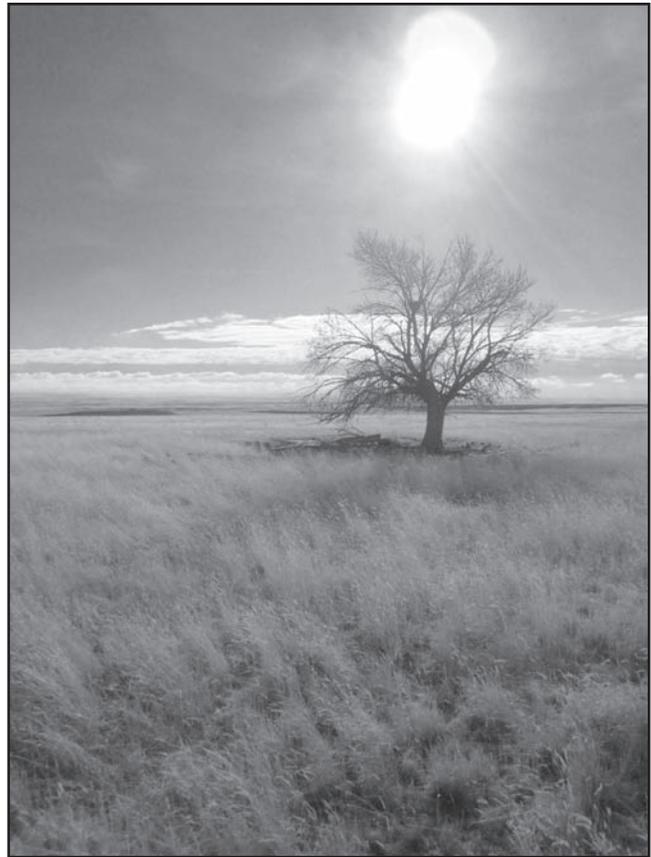
The story of the homesteader is often reflected in what we find through research or on the ground today. Sometimes perseverance and drive successfully pushed a family to a new life and a new beginning; other times the story ended on a sadder note. Both seemed to be the case at the Arthur A. Bunker homestead in northern Blaine County, Mont.

Through diligent research on the part of the Milk River Genealogical Society, we know that Arthur Bunker, a native of Lena, Ill., came to Montana with his wife Lillian and three children in October 1909. He patented a 320-acre half section north of Chinook on October 29, 1918.

Through the years Mr. Bunker and his family showed up from time to time in the periodicals of north central Montana. Usually it was in reference to something every family experiences, such as the time when Arthur gave his 13-year old son Herschel a new calf (April 26, 1917), when their daughter Mabel graduated from Chinook High School (1911), or when Hazel Bunker married Noel Nichols (April 6, 1915). But what happened afterwards? What can we see that paper doesn't allow us to?

Fast forward to the present. The remnants of three structures, a reservoir, a few trees and a small enclosure sit in a section managed by the BLM's Havre Field Office. The dilapidated structures represent what is left of a house, a barn and a shop. The reservoir still holds water that is used by the cattle that now reside here,

*Continued on next page*



A lone tree shades some remnants of the Arthur Bunker homestead in northern Blaine County, Mont.

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and the tree supplies a nice spot of shade. But what is in the enclosure?

This is where the sometimes heartbreaking aspect of homesteading lives. The graves of three children lay quietly in what was once an orchard that Mr. Bunker watered with his team of horses. The graves contain the child of Noel and Hazel Nichols (Arthur and Lillian's grandson); George Utter's baby; and Grover and Mildred Blevins' daughter Phyllis Fern. Now a complete human story begins to emerge.

Often times we see an old building sitting out alone somewhere and don't make a connection. All we notice is some farming equipment or maybe an interesting piece of metal. What we should be seeing is someone's life. In these buildings, barns and sections of land scattered throughout the West, people's lives happened.

The next time you run across the remains of an old homestead think about what was and what might have been. Who lived here? What did they do? Does their family still call nearby home?

During this year of the 150th anniversary of the Homestead Act, think of how the four million-plus people who filed claims affected what we now call home. Did the person who lived in this fallen-over house become a senator or did they go to prison? It is all part of the story of America, which we in the West are fortunate enough to see unfolded right before our very eyes.



Protected by a small enclosure, the graves of three children at the Bunker homestead site testify to the hardships of homestead life.



The grave of Arthur and Lillian Bunker's grandson lays on his grandparents' homestead.

## Shaping America's History

*BLM commemorates 150 years of The Homestead Act.*

<http://blm.gov/n8jd>



# Miles City FO Develops Native Plant Materials Program



Echinacea angustifolia

Story and photos by  
Mel Schroeder  
Miles City Field Office

A native plant materials program launched by the BLM-Montana's Miles City Field Office in 2011 is already producing far-reaching benefits.

Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) Conservation and Land Management Program interns Therese Parys and Brooke Stallings played an integral role in the program's first year successes. The two collected seed for the Seeds of Success (SOS) program from 18 locations (13 species) in eastern Montana, and provided labor and seed to the BLM's nursery program at the Special K Ranch in Columbus, Mont. (<http://www.specialkranch.org/>). They also collected and mounted about 60 specimens for an herbarium for the Miles City Field Office which will be used as an educational tool for employees and the public.

Therese and Brooke both excelled in plant identification, quickly becoming familiar with the local flora, most of which they had never seen before. Using their skills in navigation, photography, GPS, and GIS, they conducted extensive population monitoring (e.g., occurrence, distribution, condition, and phenology\*).

Therese and Brooke performed species-specific research on phenology, habitat, population locations, collection methods, and propagation protocol. They also helped with other BLM programs including a rare plant survey, habitat restoration monitoring, and wildlife monitoring. Additionally, they participated in the Montana Native Plant Society's annual meeting which took place at Camp Needmore, near Ekalaka, Mont.

Therese and Brooke were partially funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. They collected native seed primarily from

public lands--mostly BLM-managed--with some collections from Agricultural Research Service (Ft. Keogh) and state-managed lands. Seeds were sent to the Forest Service seed extractory in Bend, Oregon. A portion of the seeds collected (10,000 seeds) go to the SOS program for research (germination trials and viability monitoring), duplication and production, conservation (200-year germplasm storage), and distribution. Any seeds collected over the 10,000 seed minimum are returned to the BLM and will either be propagated for seedlings or production at the Special K Ranch nursery, or direct seeded for revegetation projects in our field office.

*\*Phenology: the study of naturally recurring phenomena such as blossoming, and their relation to climate and changes in season.*

The Seeds of Success program was established in 2001 by a partnership between the BLM and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, United Kingdom. Multiple partners are currently involved in the program which aims to collect, conserve, and develop native plant materials for revegetation projects on public lands. Check it out at <http://www.nps.gov/plants/sos/>



Therese Parys and Brooke Stallings collecting silver buffaloberry.

# Avalanche Safety Field Day

*John Thompson  
Dillon Field Office*

On February 7, 11 members of the Dillon Field Office staff joined John Thompson from the Western Montana District Office for a “snow day.” The field trip gave staff members the chance to hone skills in evaluating snowpack stability and understanding how avalanche rescue equipment operates in a field setting.

This field session was prompted by a policy change in the Western Montana District that requires all snowmobile operators to attend an avalanche awareness course. While it is highly unlikely that the typical winter field work will occur in an avalanche zone, it is possible that travel to a field site could take an employee through avalanche terrain.

John Thompson, who led the course and who is the designated trainer of snowmobile operators for the Butte and Dillon field offices, started the session with a discussion on the degree of slope. In the backcountry, slopes greater than 25 degrees are prone to avalanche, with slopes be-

tween 30 and 45 degrees presenting the greatest danger.

After determining the slope angle for the training area, the group dug a snow pit to evaluate the stability of the snowpack. With the relatively open winter in Montana, the snowpack stability has been an ongoing concern. Once the pit was constructed, employees could feel and see the stability of the different layers of the snowpack.

In order to verify where the weak layers in the snowpack were, participants isolated a block of snow and then performed a stability test. In this test, an avalanche shovel is placed on top of the isolated block of snow and given a series of 10 taps with varying degrees of force. On the initial stability test, the weak layer was confirmed when the block failed after three wrist slaps on the shovel. The block failed in a large slab six inches from the ground where a large layer of surface hoar existed in the snowpack.



John Thompson evaluates snow pack as Rick Waldrup and Brian Krott look on. *Photo by Ed Coon*

The group then broke up into smaller groups to test the snow pack stability in multiple locations at the field site. When they reconvened, they came to realize that the weak layer and the overall stability of the snowpack varied depending upon the location.

After everyone had a good understanding of snowpack stability, the group moved on to training for the worst-case outcome of working in avalanche terrain—rescuing an individual buried in an avalanche. The rescue equipment training began with operational overview of avalanche rescue transceivers, and then each person became familiar with transceiver operation by locating a hidden transceiver in the snow. Following the transceiver exercise the group learned how to use avalanche probes to locate a mass under the snow.

To cap off the experience, John Thompson and Ed Coon buried a pack with an avalanche transceiver turned on in the transmit position. The object of the exercise was to put all the parts together and to see if the mock victim could be located in less than 15 minutes.

Each group had to locate the victim with an avalanche transceiver, probe for the exact location, and then unbury the victim with shovels. Both groups were successful. Fifteen minutes is considered vital in victim rescue since the survival rate drops off quite rapidly after that.

After the exercise, many of the participants said they felt better prepared to evaluate snow conditions during field work activities. While John emphasized the preferred strategy of avoidance when working near avalanche terrain, there was an increased level of confidence in how to operate the rescue equipment should the unthinkable occur.

Trudging on snow-shoes back to the trucks, the big question on everyone’s mind was, “Why did I leave my skis at home today?”

# Urresti Named Outstanding Range Management Specialist

David Abrams  
Western Montana District

Kelly Urresti feels at home on the range. That's why it came as little surprise to her co-workers at the Dillon Field Office to hear that the rangeland management specialist received one of the top awards in her field. At the 65th Annual Meeting of the Society for Range Management held in Spokane in early February, the Bureau of Land Management recognized an outstanding Rangeland Management Specialist from each state. Urresti received the recognition for the Montana/Dakotas BLM.

Floyd Thompson, rangeland management specialist for the Montana/Dakotas, was the one who recommended Urresti for the award.

"Kelly has an outstanding work ethic, a high degree of professionalism and is one of the most 'focused' employees I have ever supervised," Thompson wrote in his nomination letter.

Urresti started as an entry-level RMS in Dillon in August 2010 and was soon assigned to take the lead on completing the Upper Big Hole Watershed Decision. She was responsible for preparing the Proposed and Final Decisions for the Watershed Environmental Assessment, as well as all of the requirements necessary when the Final Decision was appealed by Western Watersheds Project. Judge Holt from the Office of Hearing and Appeals recently approved BLM's Motion for Summary Judgment on that appeal.

Urresti's work didn't stop there. As an entry-level RMS with less than one year of experience, she was assigned as ID Team Leader to complete the



Kelly Urresti recently accepted the outstanding range management specialist award for Montana/Dakotas BLM. *Courtesy photo*

Medicine Lodge watershed assessment including approximately 16 allotments across 40,000 acres.

"Medicine Lodge is considered a high priority watershed within the Dillon Field Office," Thompson noted. "She did a remarkable job of summarizing the monitoring data and organizing and leading the ID team through the watershed very efficiently in 13 field days."

She also facilitated the ID team meetings and was the primary author in preparing the Medicine Lodge Watershed Assessment Report that was sent to the public in December 2011.

Urresti also serves as the Dillon Field Office specialist for rare plants and, Thompson says, "has amazing botanical skills." There are 54 designated sensitive plants species in the field of office that she is responsible to manage and/or protect.

## Back to the Future with Lewis & Clark

Ann Boucher  
Montana State Office

Pompeys Pillar National Monument Manager Jeff Kitchens took nearly 1,000 middle school students back to the future this winter to learn about Captain William Clark's 1806 stop at the Pillar.

Jeff's presentation was a segment of the annual *Back to the Future with Lewis and Clark: Technology Then and Now* program which introduces students to local history and showcases the technology used in the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Wearing a buckskin shirt over his uniform, Jeff read portions of William Clark's journal, focusing on Clark's impressions of the area and its wildlife, and, of course, his signature. Every half hour a new group filed into the room and his program began again.

The Back to the Future Academy began in 2006 as part of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial celebration. Held at Montana State University-Billings' College of Technology, it covers topics ranging from medicine to climatology. Students can also sample the same kinds of food that Expedition members ate.

The program's popularity continues to grow. This year about 900 students took part, with thousands more on the waiting list.

"Nine hundred is our maximum," said organizer John Pulasky. "We rotate schools every year. The farthest school we have this year is Forsyth."

"We hope that this event gives students a sense of the history of the area, as well as a sense of our past, where we've come from and where we're going," commented Judy Foster, liaison for the schools. "It's a worthwhile program that keeps moving."

# Dillon Field Office partners with youth organization in recycling program

David Early  
Dillon Field Office

Billy Salada and Buck Decker, laborer leaders with the Dillon Field Office, contemplated heaps of discarded, twisted steel fence posts, tangled, rusting rolls of barbed wire, and leaking, bullet-punctured water troughs in the Dillon ware-yard and saw an opportunity.

For years, the laborer crews, led by Salada and Decker and the Dillon Field Office staff, have been hauling tons of steel to the landfill and it seemed like a monumental waste of resources.

Salada suggested a solution. Not only did he want to recycle the steel, but he also had the idea to contribute the proceeds to a worthy youth-oriented charity or organization. With the goal of cleaning up the public lands, the Dillon Field Office has been systematically modifying, or completely removing from public lands, old barbed-wire fences, dysfunctional steel water troughs, and other debris left over from past activities.

Rather than throwing all that stuff away, Salada proposed recycling it in partnership with a non-profit organization.

“We really feel good about the program. Helping youth groups was the main reason, but also recycling is important. Getting it started and organizing everything this first year was the hardest part,” he said.

The first step was finding a qualified youth-based non-profit partner that could lend a hand. The Dillon Field Office employees didn’t have to look far.

The Montana Youth Challenge Academy is a Montana National Guard-sponsored program based at the University of Montana Western in Dillon. MYCA is intended to help at-risk teens overcome unfortunate personal circumstances and give them a second chance. Public service is an important--and required--component of the cadets’ experience.

During the past few summers, cadets have spent several field days helping the Dillon Field Office staff roll up miles of wire, collect dysfunctional

steel troughs, and haul the scrap material back to the BLM ware-yard.

When asked if MYCA would like to expand their participation to include recycling steel, Deputy Director Trent Gibson enthusiastically embraced the opportunity.

The next challenge was figuring out a way to get all that tonnage to a recycling facility. H&H Trading, a steel recycling company in Butte, was contacted and eagerly stepped forward. They provided a large recycling container and free transportation to their facility in Butte.

And so, on a chilly November day, four cadets helped BLM employees Decker, Salada, and Ryan Martin stuff tons of steel into the container which H&H later retrieved and hauled to Butte.

An amazing 15,680 pounds of steel was crammed into the container, netting the MYCA \$1,098.

“That’s awesome! Thank you so much!” was Gibson’s reaction when told how much money had been raised.

Gibson said the windfall will be added to the Cadet Incentives Fund which rewards individual accomplishments and achievements with things like trips to the movies, pizza, candy bars, and ice cream.

When told how much money he and the other cadets helped raise for future classes, Cadet Andrew Christensen said, “Not only is it good karma for us, but it makes you feel really good to help others.”

The Dillon Field Office will continue to work with various non-profit youth based organizations to recycle old material and debris gathered from public lands in southwest Montana. And beginning in 2012, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest plans to come on board expanding the local recycling partnership.



Montana Youth Challenge Academy cadets Elijah Stewart, Brandon Hoaks, Joshua Duff, and Andrew Christensen are all smiles after a hard day’s work of collecting scrap metal. *Photo by Ryan Martin*

# BLM Earns Engineering Excellence Award

*James Claflin  
Montana State Office*

Chief Cadastral Surveyor James Claflin recently accepted an award from Morrison and Maierle, Inc. for Montana/Dakotas BLM's involvement in a monumental project that will have numerous far-reaching benefits.

It started a couple of years ago when the Branch of Cadastral Survey received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to improve the positional accuracy of the Geographic Coordinate Data Base (GCDB). Increased accuracy would facilitate the processing of applications for developing renewable energy (including wind, solar and geothermal) on public lands.

Premier Data Services was awarded a \$653,869 contract in the spring of 2010 and hired the local Morrison-Maierle, Inc. surveying and engineering firm as its prime sub-contractor. Field work began in the spring of 2010 and was completed in the fall of 2011.

The task encompassed the office research and field work required to recover existing survey corners and measure their positions more accurately using GPS technology. These corner positions were then used to "control" the geographic position of the survey reference system and tract parcels to ensure compliance with national map accuracy standards.

About eight corners in 170 townships had to be recovered and measured to



Contractor David Lee collecting geographic position of corner.  
*Photo by James Claflin*

increase the overall positional accuracy to within 40 feet per corner.

Premier Data Services used the new data to adjust the GCDB. The increased accuracies will enhance the database's many applications.

"This information is used by federal agencies, county appraisers, and private companies," said Claflin. "It's also used in the Montana Cadastral Mapping Program, which the BLM and the state operate as partners. A new application for GPS units even provides hunters with status maps so they can avoid trespassing on private land."

The worthwhile project has already earned awards at multiple levels. In addition to the Montana/Dakotas BLM's recognition, Morrison-Maierle won the Engineering Excellence Award from the American Council of Engineering Companies of Montana. It is now entered in the national competition.

The Montana Cadastral Mapping Program is a partnership between the BLM and the state of Montana. Check it out at:  
<http://svc.mt.gov/msl/mtcadastral/>

## Geographic Coordinate Data Base (GCDB)

Maintained by the BLM, the GCDB is a collection of geographic information representing the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) and some non-PLSS surveys of the United States.

The GCDB grid is computed from BLM survey records (official survey plats and field notes), local survey records, and geodetic control information. The GCDB data, combined with PLSS alternate source data, are being used by many federal agencies, local governments, and private companies as the framework for their in-house geographic information system (GIS) systems.

These coordinate values are updated as better data and methodology become available. The Montana State Office is responsible for producing the GCDB for North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana.

To learn more, go to <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/gcdb.html>.

# BLM staff get Wild Turkey Federation award

*Mark Jacobsen  
Eastern Montana/Dakotas District*

Staff members from the BLM South Dakota Field Office were recently awarded the “National Making Tracks with the BLM Award” from the National Wild Turkey Federation at its annual convention held in Nashville, Tenn., on Feb. 10.

Travis Lipp, Ryan Larson, Elizabeth Stiller and Chuck Berdan were recognized for their efforts to improve ecosystem function and wildlife habitat on the BLM-administered Fort Meade Recreation Area located near Sturgis, S.D.

The group was a good fit for the NWTF Habitat Management Projects category -- a single year award for projects that best incorporate active wild turkey management into ecosystem management projects that

significantly benefit habitat improvement for the wild turkey.

The Fort Meade Recreation Area is comprised of approximately 6,700 acres. The BLM South Dakota Field Office developed an intensive management plan to improve forest health by taking measures to encourage hardwood establishment, rejuvenate decadent bur oak woodlands and deciduous draws.

The plan also made allowances to halt pine encroachment into meadows in order to maintain open park-like stands of ponderosa pine. The results have been both improved wildlife habitat and a reduction of hazardous fuels accumulation.

The NWTF has been a vital ally by securing funding to assist with BLM habitat improvement projects

and the South Dakota Field Office will continue to work with the NWTF as the federation has many of the same goals and objectives as the BLM.

“Fort Meade has long been recognized as some of the finest habitat for the Merriam’s wild turkey throughout their range,” said BLM Lead Wildlife Biologist Dale Tribby, who also represented the bureau at the convention. “As a result of natural succession and a lack of periodic fire, the vegetative composition of the area has changed, resulting in a decrease in habitat quality for wild turkeys and other species.”

Tribby is based out of the Miles City Field Office in Miles City, Mont.

“Through the cooperative efforts of the BLM and the National Wild Turkey Federation, this project exemplifies the benefits which can be realized,” said Tribby.

The bureau’s Fort Meade habitat improvement work has been previously featured on the NWTF television show “Get in the Game” with a show highlighting “Big Sky Projects in South Dakota”.

For more information contact the BLM South Dakota Field Office at: 605.892.7000 or visit them on the web at: [http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/south\\_dakota\\_field.html](http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/south_dakota_field.html). For further information on the National Wild Turkey Federation go to: <http://www.nwtf.com>.



*Left to right: Robert Abernathy, National Wild Turkey Foundation Vice President for agency programs; South Dakota Field Office staffers Ryan Larson, Travis Lipp, and Chuck Berdan; and BLM Deputy Director Mike Pool. Courtesy photo*

# SURVEYING IN THE BAKKEN

*Story and photos by  
Blaise Lodermeier  
Montana State Office*

The recent oil boom in northwestern North Dakota has prompted the need for up-to-date surveys of BLM-managed lands along the scenic Little Missouri River.

From June to September of 2011, the BLM surveyed about 10½ miles of the river as a Boundaries at Risk project called The Bakken Riparian Cadastral Survey for Federal Oil and Gas Leasing. This area had not been surveyed since 1905. Since then the river has migrated through the North Dakota Badlands, changing land ownership in some areas by nearly half a mile.

Searching for wooden posts and deteriorating sandstone monuments left by the original surveyor more than 105 years ago was a challenge, and navigating the rugged badlands made it even more difficult. Determining how the river went from where it was in 1905 to where it is today was another challenge. With the help of historical aerial photography and the evidence of old river banks, however, we were able to determine how the river had migrated through the area and how it affected land ownership.

We had to survey more than 123 miles of lines in the 10½-mile stretch of the Little Missouri to determine the federal interest along the river. In addition, we set 157 stainless steel monuments to perpetuate the original wood and stone monuments and to monument for the first time the corners of federal interest.

These river boundaries are ambulatory in nature by the processes of erosion and accretion. In one instance, we found that a 27-acre lot now has only two acres remaining due to erosion. In another instance, a 10-acre lot now has 55 acres through accretion.



The rugged North Dakota Badlands presented challenging terrain to Bureau of Land Management surveyors this summer as they resurveyed about 10.5 miles along the Little Missouri River. The last survey through the area took place in 1905.

Previous to this survey, in this 10½-mile stretch, the BLM managed approximately 1,005 acres of mineral estate (oil & gas) adjacent to the river. During the 2011 survey we discovered that about 262 acres of that BLM estate had eroded away. Likewise, an additional 447 acres of accretions had attached to BLM-managed mineral estate. This amounts to an additional 185 acres of leasable mineral estate. These additions/subtractions to the BLM mineral estate are not officially leasable until a BLM Dependent Resurvey is completed and approved. The additional 185 acres determined in the 2011 survey could amount to an additional \$2.22 million in royalty payments.

The Branch of Cadastral Survey is looking forward to surveying at least another 10 miles of the river in the 2012 field season. This will enable the public mineral interest in the Bakken formation to be better managed.



While working along the Little Missouri River in North Dakota this summer, surveyors managed to find this cedar post that was set in the original 1905 survey.

# Mule Deer Foundation recognizes Miles City Field Office biologists

Mark Jacobsen  
Eastern Montana/  
Dakotas District

Miles City Field Office biologists Kent Undlin, Bobby Baker and Jesse Hankins have received the 2012 “BLM-Special Partner Award for Mule Deer Conservation” at the annual Mule Deer Foundation convention held in Salt Lake City, Feb. 9-11.

The citation is a joint award presented by the BLM and the MDF.

The Miles City Field Office biologists were selected in recognition of their sustained efforts on the behalf of wildlife, particularly mule deer, in the coordinated removal of over 83 miles of woven-wire fencing from BLM lands in southeastern Montana.

Most of the removed fencing was located within crucial mule deer and pronghorn winter ranges and was replaced with wildlife-friendly fencing. The results have been reduced wildlife mortality and improved habitat connectivity and herd movement.



BLM biologists Kent Undlin (center left), Bobby Baker (center) and Jesse Hankins (center right) were presented with the 2012 “BLM-Special Partner Award for Mule Deer Conservation” at the annual Mule Deer Foundation convention held in Salt Lake City, Feb. 9-11, 2012. Acting Utah State Associate Director Shelly Smith (far left) and MDF President and CEO Miles Moretti (far right) were also part of the presentation event. *Courtesy photo*

The ongoing work has already improved over 100,000 acres of wildlife habitat across BLM, private and state-owned lands.

Undlin, Baker and Hankins are “...getting credited for their dedicated leadership and successful efforts in working

with partners to secure the cooperation, required funding, and other resources necessary to accomplish this important and substantial wildlife habitat improvement work,” said Linda Cardenas, BLM/Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation National Liaison based out of Missoula.

“MDF and the Miles City BLM office have a unique partnership, as Jesse Hankins is a committee member of the Miles City MDF Chapter and has served hundreds of hours volunteering his time to the Mule Deer Foundation,” said MDF Regional Director Marshall Johnson. “This wire removal project and replacing the wire with a wildlife friendly wire is an improvement to the health of the mule deer population and still serves the needs of leased grazing. Truly a project that benefits wildlife and multi-use of the land.”



The decomposing remains of a deer carcass hang from the fence that ensnared it, near the BLM Hay Draw Travel Management Area in Powder River County. Unable to crawl under, this deer attempted to jump across and got entangled in the process. BLM fence modifications are intended to make wildlife movement across fences easier for deer, antelope and elk, while keeping livestock on the “right” side of the fence. *Photo by Mark Jacobsen*

# Montana Youth Challenge Academy Cadets Remove Hazard Fence near Lemhi Pass

*Ryan Martin  
Dillon Field Office*

On August 12, 1805, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark crossed over Lemhi Pass on what is now the Montana/Idaho border during their historic search for a water route across North America.

About 140 years later in that same area, a five-strand barbed wire fence was built to separate portions of what is now called the Selway BLM grazing allotment. Time and Mother Nature have taken their toll on this fence and in 2010, I found it in disarray. Most of the wires were either buried or wrapped around logs or grown into trees.

A local rancher with a long history in the area told me that he knew of at least one instance when the old fence had caused one horse wreck and was pretty certain there were many other livestock and wildlife entanglements.

When I asked him why the fence didn't get pulled out, he said, "Have you seen where that fence is located?" He knew that removing this fence would be no easy task.

After discussing it with my BLM co-workers, we made a plan for what to do next.

In May 2011, a call was made to the Montana Youth Challenge Academy (MYCA) in Dillon. We asked if we could get some help removing a fence and added that we needed the best cadets they could spare because the job wouldn't be easy. We needed to remove one mile of fence that was mostly hidden in the ground or wrapped around trees and rocks. This fence was located on a steep mountain near Lemhi Pass where thick tree branches made an almost impenetrable wall, and where footing could be a problem. And oh, by the way, we would need to walk about a mile to the fence carrying all the supplies we needed, and then walk two miles back to the vehicle when we were done.

"No problem," replied Commandant Tim Hansen from the Montana Youth Challenge Academy. "How many cadets do you need and on what day?"

On a sunny day in September, four willing cadets (Jesse Miley of Great Falls, Mont.; Corey Avila of Great Falls,

Mont.; Dean Vandersloot of Crow Agency, Mont.; and Jeb Commin of Laurel, Mont.) began removing a fence that was likely older than many trees in the area. The one-mile walk with fence stretchers, wire rollers, and water was a good warm-up before beginning the day's work.

Although we thought this fence clean-up would take two days, we were nearly done by 3:30 p.m. on the first day. Before heading back to the vehicle, each cadet was loaded down with old wire and fence equipment. The walk back was literally an uphill climb.

After about 20 minutes of walking and a short break mandated by a less-physically-fit BLM employee, we reached the vehicle and were soon on our way back to Dillon.

A fence that was long overdue to be retired had finally met its match by four determined MYCA cadets. More than 200 years had elapsed since the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed through the area and I am confident that both groups were extremely proud about what they had accomplished that day.



Despite the thick trees and steep terrain, Montana Youth Challenge Academy cadets needed only one day to remove an old, broken-down fence from Lemhi Pass last fall. *Photo by Ryan Martin.*

# 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](mailto: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](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.

## Retired since December 2011:

Mary Apple – 27 years  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Montana State Office

Jean Schaak – 21 years  
Secretary (OA)  
Montana State Office

George Johnson, Jr. – 33 years  
Fire Management Specialist  
Dillon Field Office

James Beaver – 39 years  
Land Use Specialist  
Montana State Office

Irene Harris – 31 years  
Petroleum Engineer Technician  
Miles City Field Office

Joel Ellis – 22 years  
Park Ranger  
Pompeys Pillar Nat'l Monument

Loretta Heth – 28 years  
Contact Representative  
Montana State Office

Charles Laakso – 34 years  
Petroleum Engineer  
Miles City Field Office

Bureau of Land Management  
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