



COOL OPERATORS

BLM employees and volunteers remove old fence



Moving wire rolls over the snow with a sled. L to R: Volunteer Marvin Carmichael, and BLMers Lee Baldwin, Scott Haight, and John Sandford. (Photo by Vickie Anderson)

On a cool December day in 2014, two volunteers and four BLM employees started removing old wire fencing from a non-leased grazing allotment called Dana's Bar, about 10 miles northeast of Helena, Montana.

The fence is a 1.75-mile-long snarl of barbed and woven wires--and "snarl" is an understatement--that poses a safety threat to wildlife and members of the public who live nearby and recreate on the Dana's Bar Allotment.

Volunteers Marvin Carmichael and J. Daly, and BLMers John Sandford, Lee Baldwin, Scott Haight, and Vickie Anderson formed two work groups to start disassembling the fence behind Marvin and Tina Carmichael's home, going in opposite directions.

Early expectations that most of the fence could be removed that day were dashed when workers discovered wires upon wires: barbed wires wired to woven wires, wires down, wires partially buried beneath duff, wires overgrown by the trees they were

attached to, and so on. Even so, they removed close to half a mile of fence, to the tune of 940 pounds of recycled wire.

"It's great to get this mess of a fence out of here and remove the threat to wildlife. We have other neighbors nearby who will be glad to see it gone as they like to hike and ride their horses on the BLM," said Marvin who, along with his wife Tina, has lived next to the Dana's Bar Allotment for 15 years.

J. Daly, another volunteer from the Helena area and a life-long friend of John Sandford, was interested in cleaning up public lands and reducing wildlife hazards.

John Sandford was the organizer for this project. And boy, did he relish this project since it was his last as a BLM employee before retiring in January 2015 after 37 years of public service.

For Administrative Support Assistant Lee Baldwin, it was a great day to get

into the field and take a break from his normal indoor job. Scott Haight, Butte Field Manager, appreciated yet another opportunity to flex some "muscle" outside the office.

"These types of projects, where the BLM gets hands-on assistance from public volunteers who cherish recreating on the nearby BLM lands, are truly important to everyone involved," Scott said. "They create good neighbor vibrations and get people more involved in public stewardship."

Several more workdays, with public volunteers, will be scheduled to remove the rest of the fence.

"I think I might have to come back as a volunteer after I retire so I can see the fence removed in its entirety," said John Sandford.

*Vickie Anderson
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