

Wildlife Under the Big Sky 2014

Spring Issue

A Multi-Agency News Update Featuring:

- ◆ Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) - (406) 657-6464
- ◆ Bureau of Land Management (BLM) — Central Montana District - (406) 538-1900
- ◆ Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) - (406) 444-5354
- ◆ Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) - (406) 538-4658
- ◆ Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - (406) 538-7401 (Lewistown) or (406) 429-6646 (Winnett)
- ◆ US Forest Service (USFS) Stanford Ranger District—(406) 566-2292
- ◆ US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)—Charles M. Russell (CMR) National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) - (406) 538-8706

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Greetings

Welcome to the second edition of the Central Montana wildlife newsletter. In this issue we highlight projects on some “cogs” and “wheels” that often get little attention, but are essential beyond our understanding. As our knowledge grows we must continue to strive for “intelligent tinkering.”

“The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, ‘What good is it?’ If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.” - Aldo Leopold

Working Together for Better Public Access



Public access to public wildlife was recently improved when a 40-acre parcel of land was purchased adjacent to the Lewis and Clark National Forest (USFS) along Red Hill Road in Fergus County by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). Lewistown resident and catalyst of the purchase is a local hunter and RMEF member, Kevin Kepler.

Kepler already knew there was a 29-foot offset on the section of land that allowed legal access to USFS lands. He had been accessing these public lands for a few years after getting written permission from land owner Marshall Long. When Marshall decided to sell the property, he approached Kepler. Although interested, Kepler knew he could not afford the purchase and quickly contacted RMEF. A flurry of discussions among RMEF, the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) followed to see what could be done.

In a matter of months RMEF, USFS, and MFWP had surveyed and secured the property. On October 23, 2013, a grand opening and dedication officially opened the property to the public. About 18,000 acres of public lands are now more accessible.

Greater access will provide more opportunity for sportsmen and women to enjoy their natural resources. The USFS, BLM, MFWP and RMEF are committed to improving access to public lands.



From left to right: Previous landowner Marshall Long, Kevin Kepler, RMEF president and CEO David Allen.

Field Trials Test the Efficacy of an Oral Plague Vaccine to Protect Prairie Dogs

Plague is an exotic disease introduced to North America in the early 1900s and is caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. Fleas are a primary vector for transmitting the disease.

Plague has variable effects on different mammal species and is especially lethal to black-tailed prairie dogs and the highly endangered black-footed ferret. Ferrets are dependent on prairie dogs for habitat and as prey. Plague can also be lethal to humans if not diagnosed and successfully treated with antibiotics. Two cases of plague in humans have been confirmed in Montana.

Plague is limiting recovery of endangered black-footed ferrets and conservation of prairie dogs for the many associated species that depend on them. An oral vaccine against plague in prairie dogs, delivered in a highly palatable peanut butter-flavored bait, has been shown to be effective in laboratory trials.

During summer 2013, Charles M. Russell NWR staff and 10 volunteers dealt with torrential rains, gumbo mud, heat, and epic mosquitoes to experimentally treat five pairs of prairie dog colonies in southern Phillips County. One of the pairs received the vaccine and the other a placebo. They successfully marked 584 prairie dogs and 134 small mammals during the first year of a planned 3-4 year study. Mark/recapture data will be used to estimate prairie dog survival to evaluate the hypothesis that survival will be higher on the sites that received the vaccine-laden baits vs. those that received a placebo.

This effort is part of a large, collaborative study lead by personnel at the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI. The project includes a total of 29 experimental paired treatment/control sites spread across seven western states and includes four species of prairie dogs.



Prairie dog and bait with vaccine

Boy Scouts to Mark Fences in Sage-Grouse Habitat in Petroleum County, MT:



Sage-grouse are low-flyers, which is trouble during the mating season when they fly in the dark and encounter many fences. The markers are 3-inch pieces of white vinyl siding undersill that clip to the wires. They are installed on fences in high-risk areas where birds are expected to fly and collide with hard-to-see fences. The high risk fences are close to sage-grouse breeding grounds (leks) and in areas with gentle terrain. An Idaho study has shown that placing markers every three feet on the top wire allows sage-grouse to see fences and reduces collisions by over 80 percent.

Boy Scout Troop 8 of Billings, Sage Grouse Montana, the Winnett Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Lewistown BLM, and four private landowners are teaming up to install fence visibility markers on high-risk fences that are in some of Petroleum County's most important sage-grouse habitat.

This project will reach across ownership boundaries to reduce fence collisions in high risk areas for sage-grouse. To date, 12 miles of markers have been procured by Sage Grouse Montana, at least 30 additional miles is available through the BLM, and another 30 miles is available from a partnership funded by NRCS, BLM, MTFWP, Montana Association of Conservation Districts and Inter-Mountain West Joint Venture.

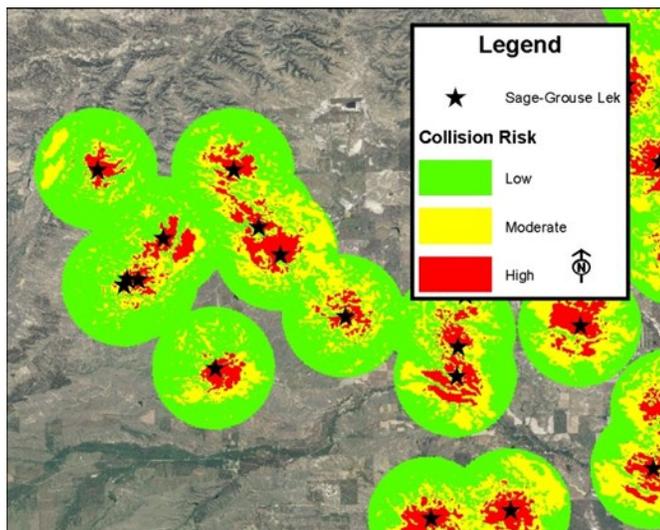
The Eagle Scout candidates are currently getting final project approval and plan to join the NRCS, the BLM and the landowners for an educational opportunity and hanging the markers during spring 2014!

If landowners are interested in getting fence markers for their high-risk fences, please contact the Winnett NRCS c/o Nikki Rife (406) 429-6646; Lewistown BLM c/o Matt Comer (406) 538-1925; or Sage Grouse Montana c/o Brandon Moss (406) 860-2205. For more information on the Sage Grouse Initiative visit www.sagegrouseinitiative.com

Sage-Grouse High Risk Area in Western States

State	Area	
	Percent	Acres
Montana	11.2	1,150,595
Wyoming	9.2	730,861
Idaho	14.4	529,258
Nevada	8.5	266,275
Oregon	10.9	225,619
Utah	6.3	70,128
California	11.4	37,814
South Dakota	13.1	17,132
Washington	7.5	11,651
North Dakota	7.3	9,795

Amount of landscape within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of active leks in each state predicted to be "high risk" (>1 collision over each lekking season) for strikes if fences are present. Modified from NRCS Fence Collision Risk Tool handout, November 2012.



BLM Lewistown Field Office Helps Mark Fences

Central Montana has thousands of acres of quality sagebrush habitat that supports a Greater Sage-grouse population. This area also supports a large grazing program. Associated with the grazing program are miles of fences. Boy Scout Troop 8 will be marking some of those fences, but they cannot do it all.

The BLM Lewistown Field Office (LFO) spent a day in November marking fences in Petroleum and Fergus Counties. After a brief instruction on marking fences and using GPS, 13 LFO employees of several different disciplines braved the wind to aid wildlife. They divided into six teams and headed into the field. With some careful preparation, several sage-grouse leks were selected for marking in areas not planned for marking by Boy Scout Troop 8.

Each team struck out with determination, hiking along the

fences carrying backpacks, duffel bags, and pockets full of markers. On that day, over 11 miles of fence on both public and private land were marked around seven active sage-grouse leks.

Still, that was just 11 miles out of hundreds. Fence marking will definitely continue into the near future.

The BLM along with other public agencies and private citizens are striving to conserve sage-grouse and make it as easy for landowners to participate as possible. Markers are available free of charge for landowners to mark their own fences. If you have sage-grouse leks on your land and would like some help marking, please contact your local NRCS office or the Lewistown BLM. The BLM LFO is also looking for others to help assist. If you or your group would like to volunteer, please contact BLM Wildlife Biologists Monica Ketcham or Matt Comer at (406) 538-1900.

Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Emergency Response

In response to the increased number of emerging diseases associated with wildlife, the Wildlife Services (WS) unit of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) began to implement a coordinated nationwide system to survey for wildlife diseases and respond to a variety of emergencies including natural disasters and disease outbreaks. This system became known as the National Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Emergency Response Program under WS.

The goal of the Disease Program is to provide assistance to other federal, state, tribal and local governments with wildlife disease threats and/or surveillance. Partnerships have been developed with other APHIS programs (including Veterinary Services and International Services), with other federal agencies (including U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and with Canadian and Mexican agricultural, health and natural resources agencies. The nationally coordinated wildlife disease surveillance system will support existing programs with the adequate collection and preservation of biological samples and facilitate the exchange of laboratory findings and ensure that information is shared among all necessary programs and partnerships.

The Disease Program was implemented in 2003 through a national coordinator and a team of wildlife disease biologists strategically located throughout the U.S. and assigned to WS field offices in most U.S. states. These biologists conduct monitoring and surveillance activities and collect biological samples through a variety of techniques (e.g. trapping, mist netting, lethal means, etc.). To maximize

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Disease—continued from page 3



Biologist collecting disease samples from a coyote for plague, Tularemia, and CPV

efficiency, efforts are made to obtain samples in coordination with existing WS operations (livestock protection, airports, and aquaculture, urban wildlife management, etc.) and research activities. Wildlife disease biologists are available to respond quickly to assist with disease outbreaks and other national or local emergencies. In the event of such an emergency, biologists are required to mobilize and report to the emergency site within 48 hours of notification.

In addition to providing assistance to the many different cooperators, WS is focusing on strengthening emergency preparedness and response and managing issues related to the health of U.S. animal resources and conflicts between humans and wildlife. To accomplish these objectives, WS is developing a more robust, nationally coordinated pest and disease surveillance system. The international partnerships developed through this program will proactively reduce the risks of terrorist attacks along our international borders involving agriculture, our natural resources, wildlife, and humans.

An important component of the disease program is science-based research on disease organisms, their reservoirs, their transmission cycles, and methods to block transmission. WS's National Wildlife Research Center located in Ft. Collins, CO, supports the mission of the disease program by conducting research, developing methods of control, and providing state-of-the-art laboratory diagnostics.

Some diseases of interest:

Brucellosis	Tularemia
Avian Influenza	Rabies
Chronic wasting disease	Classical swine fever
Bovine tuberculosis	West Nile virus
EHD/Bluetongue	Plague
Canine parvovirus (CPV)	

For more information, contact:

Gerald (Jerry) Wiscomb
Wildlife Disease Biologist
USDA APHIS WS
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Billings, MT 59103
(406) 657-6464
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Shedding Light on Montana's Bats

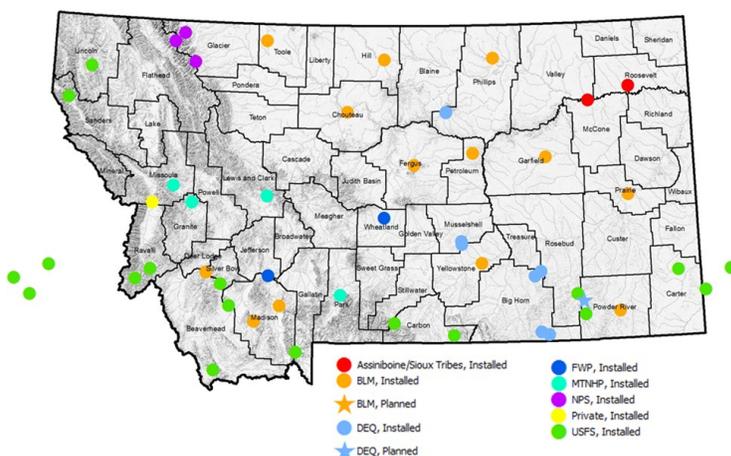


A collaborative effort to document Montana's bat roost habitat characteristics and year-round activity patterns continues due to many conservation concerns and the low birth rate of bats.

Montana's bat populations face a wide array of conservation issues, including loss of roosting sites, collision and drowning hazards at sites where they forage and drink, barotrauma (injury/death resulting from the pressure change caused by spinning blades on wind turbines) and collisions with wind turbines, and the potential arrival of *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, the cold-adapted soil fungus that causes White-Nose Syndrome and has decimated bat populations in eastern North America.

To date, collaborators have deployed over 30 temperature and relative humidity data loggers near known winter bat roosts; most known bat hibernacula in Montana are now being monitored. Collaborators have also established a nearly statewide array of 48 passive ultrasonic detector/recorder stations that are deployed year-round and powered by solar panels and deep cycle batteries. **See Bats**, p. 5

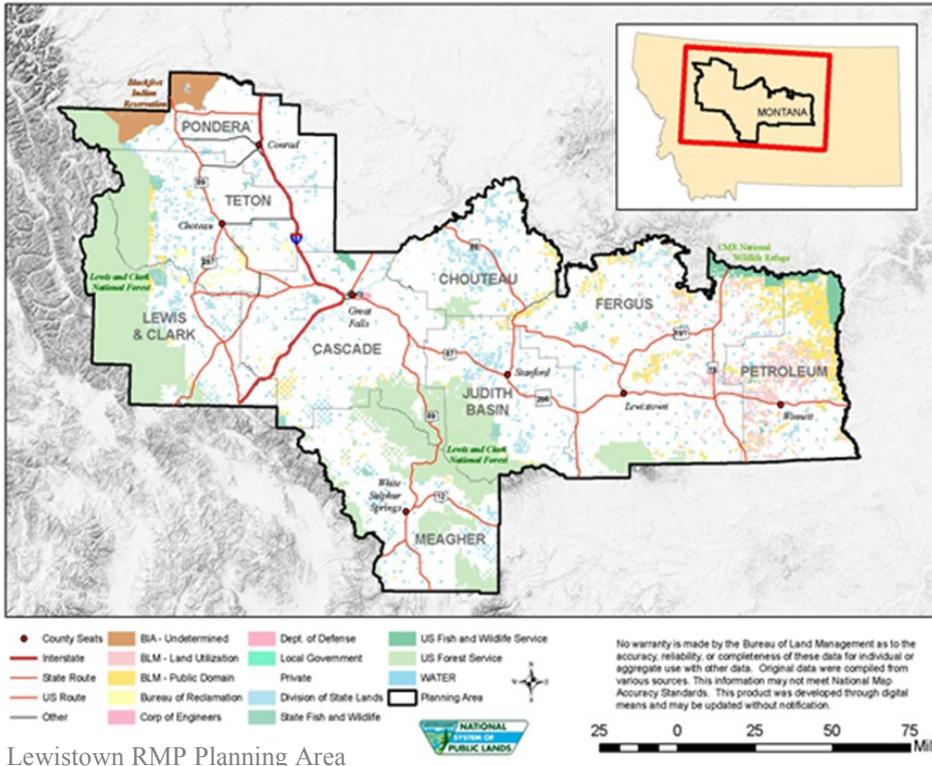
Funders of Long-term Bat Acoustic Monitoring Stations



Bats—continued from page 4

Through June 2013, these recording stations have resulted in more than 1.3 million sound files containing nearly 5 terabytes of information. Highlights to date include numerous first records of species in regions with previously limited bat survey effort; numerous first records of bat activity during the fall, winter, and spring months; documentation of temperatures at which bats are active year-round; documentation of winter bat roost temperatures; documentation of nightly activity patterns throughout the year; and the potential year-round presence of species previously considered migratory.

How Do You Want Your BLM Lands Managed?



of public lands. The public lands must be managed in a manner that protects the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resources and archeological values. Decisions in land use plans guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions.

The RMP will accomplish the following:

- ◆ Establish goals and objectives for resource management and the measures needed to achieve those goals and objectives
- ◆ Identify lands that are open and available for certain uses, including any restrictions, and lands that are closed to certain uses

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lewistown Field Office (LFO) is preparing a resource management plan (RMP) to guide management of approximately 654,025 acres of public land (surface) and 1,399,880 acres of federal mineral estate (subsurface) administered by BLM. The RMP will reflect the changing needs of the planning area over the next several decades, and will replace the current Headwaters and Judith-Valley-Phillips RMPs that were developed in 1984 and 1994, respectively.

What is an RMP?

An RMP describes broad, multiple-use guidance for managing public lands administered by the BLM. The planning decisions in an RMP are the basis for every on-the-ground action the BLM undertakes. An RMP ensures that public lands are managed in accordance with the intent of Congress as stated in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). Under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, FLPMA directs the BLM to develop such land use plans and to provide for appropriate uses

- ◆ Provide comprehensive management direction for and/or allocate use of all resources.

In order to provide a comprehensive plan, the BLM requests input from you to help identify issues and management opportunities within and adjacent to the planning area. Contact us at:

Bureau of Land Management
Lewistown Field Office
Attn: Dan Brunkhorst
RMP Project Coordinator
920 NE Main Street
Lewistown, MT 59457-4079
(406) 538-1900

blm_mt_Lewistown_RMP@blm.gov

Visit <http://blm.gov/ngld> to track progress on the RMP revision and other projects within the LFO.

Web Resources of Interest

Montana Field Guide with Information on Montana's Bats and other Species <http://fieldguide.mt.gov>

Montana's Bats: distribution, conservation status, and roost site overview

http://mtnhp.org/animal/presentations/Motana_Bats_Distribution_Status_and_Roost_Overview_20130601.pdf

Up-to-Date Information on White-Nose-Syndrome, including decontamination protocols.

<http://whitenosesyndrome.org/>

Thinking about some new binoculars? Check out The Cornell Lab of Ornithology 2013 Binocular Review. With 102 binoculars reviewed in 5 price categories there is something for every budget and adventure! <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/>

The BLM has educational materials including books, rubbing plates, realistic scat and flexible molds for many different animal tracks to create plaster casts. Please contact the Lewistown Field Office at (406) 538-1900 to borrow some or all of these supplies.

Contact the BLM Lewistown Field Office at (406) 538-1900 or BLM_MT_Lewistown_FO@blm.gov with suggestions to improve this newsletter. This and future electronic editions can be found at http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office.html.



OVERVIEW OF AGENCY ROLES

Even though differences in the lands we manage are often not apparent, with multiple agencies contributing to this publication, we feel it's important to clearly define the mission and guidance that influences our actions.

FEDERAL AGENCIES:

BLM: The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

USFS: The mission of the USFS is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

The BLM's and USFS's multiple-use missions mandate that they manage public land resources for a variety of uses, such as energy development, livestock grazing, recreation and timber harvesting, while protecting a wide array of natural, cultural and historical resources.

USFWS: The USFWS's mission is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

NRCS: The mission of the NRCS is to provide national leadership in the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources. The NRCS works with landowners through conservation planning and assistance designed to benefit the soil, water, air, plants and animals that result in productive lands and healthy ecosystems. Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned, making stewardship by private landowners absolutely critical to the health of our nation's environment.

APHIS WS: The mission of USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) is to provide Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts to allow people and wildlife to coexist.

STATE AGENCIES:

MDNRC: The mission of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (MDNRC) is to help ensure that Montana's land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations.

Trust Land Management Division: Our goal is to manage the State of Montana's trust land resources to produce revenue for the trust beneficiaries while considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land.

MFWP: The MFWP, through its employees and citizen commission, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

Upcoming Calendar & Events:

May 1, 2014: Application deadline for moose, sheep, goat and bison hunting licenses

May 21, 2014: Range School in Winnett, MT with NRCS & Petroleum Co. Conservation District. Contact 406-429-6646

May 22, 2014: Range School in Stanford, MT with NRCS & Judith Basin Conservation District. Contact 406-566-2311

June 2, 2014: Application deadline for antlerless deer B, elk B, antelope and antelope B hunting licenses

June 24, 2014: Ladies Day on the Range with NRCS & Petroleum Co. Conservation District. Contact 406-429-6646

June 25, 2014: Ladies Day on the Range with NRCS & Garfield Co. Conservation District in Jordan, MT. Contact 406-557-2740

