

SUMMARY
SPRING 2008 WETLANDS COUNCIL MEETING TECHNICAL SESSION
& HABITAT TOUR

June 10 thru 12, 2008
Dillon, MT

June 10 – Wetland Tours.

The Madison Valley group visited:

- ***O'Dell Creek Headwaters Restoration*** – Jeff Lazlo, property owner, and Tom Hinz, coordinator of the Montana Wetlands Legacy, led the group on a tour of the Granger Ranches' O'Dell Creek headwaters restoration site. Work to date includes plugging and filling field drains; restoring the spring creek to the proper dimensions; and allowing the pasture to convert back to wetland vegetation and hydrology. Tim Griffiths with the NRCS and Jeff Everett with the USFWS were also present to discuss the project's partnerships, challenges, and successes that have been accomplished as well as evidenced through environmental monitoring. Green-winged teal, savannah sparrows, barn swallows, killdeer, and brown-headed cowbirds were observed at the site on the day of the tour.
- ***Jack Creek Ranch Wetland mitigation Suite and the Upper McKee Spring Creek Restoration*** – Tom Coleman, engineer with Oasis Environmental, and Tom Hinz led the group on a tour of a MDT wetland mitigation site at the Jack Creek Ranch. The group walked along a section of McKee Spring Creek where in-channel ponds have been reclaimed to meet expected stream form and functions. The group also visited part of the restored wetland which reformed after a drain ditch was filled. Signs of wildlife utilizing the site were evidenced by waterfowl nesting sites and muskrat tunnels. Monitoring reports for the Jack Creek Ranch site are available at the following MDT's website address:
<http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/environmental/external/wetlands/>

The Ruby and Beaverhead Valleys group visited:

- ***Silver Spring Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) Project*** – Marni Thompson, NRCS, led this tour accompanied by the second generation landowner, Neil Barnosky and his son Jake. Historically Cole Spring Creek was turned into a drainage ditch in an attempt to use the 178 acres for agriculture. The first attempt didn't work well so the drainage ditch was deepened. Prior to restoration the drain ditch was 8-10 feet deep. Wetland Reserve Program funds were used to purchase a conservation easement for the property and to restore the wetlands. Restoration included restoring Cole Spring Creek, filling the drainage ditch, and adding four shallow wetlands and one deeper wetland.
- ***Pearce WRP*** – Marni Thompson led this short stop to another conservation easement purchased with Wetland Reserve Program funds. Restoration and enhancements were completed in the winter of 2008. Irrigation ditches were filled and 8 small shallow wetlands were created.
- ***John Osborne Wildlife Habitat Incentive Project (WHIP)*** – Landowner John Osborn led this overlook stop on his property. Several ponds were constructed by the landowner and with some assistance from the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. The landowner along with Future Fisheries reconstructed a spring creek along the Beaverhead River. NRCS assisted with a riparian forest buffer on a portion of the reconstructed spring creek with the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.
- ***Beaverhead Rock*** – Larry Urban from Montana Department of Transportation led this overlook tour to the MDT Wetland mitigation site on Beaverhead Gateway Ranch. This 10 year old mitigation site has been approved for credit and had numerous waterbirds using the site at the time of our visit. This large site includes a roadside interpretation and wildlife viewing area.

June 11 – Technical Session Highlights.

- ***Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program in the Big Hole: Award Winning Success Stories*** - Mike Roberts (DNRC), Emily Rens (FWP), Kyle Tacket (NRCS), Jeff Everett (USFWS), and others discussed the application of the CCAA program in the Big Hole Watershed for the Fluvial Arctic Grayling. “[A Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances](#) (Agreement/CCAA) is an agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and any non-Federal entity whereby non-Federal property owners who voluntarily agree to manage their lands or waters to remove threats to species at risk of becoming threatened or endangered receive assurances against additional regulatory requirements should that species be subsequently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).” The presenters discussed the research, monitoring, and implementation of projects for streamflow and water rights; stream and riparian protection and restoration, and private land management. This is the largest CCAA in the nation with over half of the landowner voluntarily participating. A
- ***Seasonal Survival and Breeding Site Fidelity of Female Lesser Scaup at Red Rock Lakes NWR*** – Jeff Warren, USFWS Refuge Biologist at Red Rock Lakes, presented his research to the group. Key findings were that lesser scaup survival at Red Rock Lakes NWR during the breeding season was higher during wet years and that survival was greater during breeding season versus non-breeding season.
- ***Montana Wetland Strategic Framework*** – Lynda Saul (DEQ) started off the discussion with a review of the 8 directions from the state’s new [strategic framework](#) for wetland and riparian area conservation and restoration. Lynda discussed how the plan is to be implemented through 6 working groups which function to carry out the goals of the 8 strategic directions. Working group chairs include Lynda Saul (Vulnerable Wetland and Public Policy and Steering Committee Chair), Taylor Greenup (Public Education and Professional Training), Linda Vance (Mapping, Monitoring and Assessment), Tom Hinz (Restoration), other working groups will be initiated in the near future. Throughout her discussion, Lynda stressed the importance of wetland and riparian area conservation for the preservation of clean water and healthy wildlife populations. She referenced timely issues such as the federal Clean Water Act Reauthorization legislation and local opportunities with Fish Wildlife and Park’s state [Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy](#). - Linda Vance (Montana Natural Heritage Program, NHP) updated the group on the mapping workgroup activities and focused on the status of the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) update for Montana. Wetland mapping was completed for the Bitterroot and is now underway in the Flathead and other areas of the state. For access to updated NWI data, visit the USFWS online [NWI database](#). The NHP program is also mapping riparian areas which are not part of the official NWI layer. For access to updated mapped riparian areas, visit the [NHP website](#). - Tom Hinz (Montana Wetlands Legacy) updated the group on the restoration workgroup activities. Tom stressed that it is important to communicate on funding opportunities and focus areas for restoration. An open discussion revealed that funding can be a bottleneck in the process when money is not available for hiring technical service providers. A observation was made that private conservation (land trusts/conservation easements) are not being utilized to full potential in the realm of match funding options. It was also mentioned that local governments need better information on the locations of wetlands and riparian areas.
- ***Examples of Two Tribal Wetlands/Wildlife Program Efforts*** - Jeanne Spaur discussed the Ft. Peck Tribes’ Manning Lake Project. Jeanne is working to have Manning Lake and the associated wetland area designated as a special preserve. The tribe is in the initial phases of documenting the site characteristics. Securing the land will be a large task for Jeanne due to the complex ownership system on the reservation. – Brett Gullett discussed wetland restoration efforts on the Salish and Kootenai tribes’ Flathead Reservation. Restoring natural drainage and/or supplying water to restoration sites has been a key component, as well as revegetation efforts. Substantial wetland restoration has occurred due to an aggressive program at CSKT.
- ***Wetland and Riparian Management Aspects of Comprehensive Conservation Planning for Red Rock Lakes NWR*** –Mike Parker discussed the process of developing the comprehensive conservation plan for Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The plan will be in effect for 15 years and will provide long-range guidance and management direction for all the refuge’s programs. The draft comprehensive conservation plan will is available for review and comment. Contact the Red Rock Lakes NWR at (406) 276 3536 or redrocks@fws.gov.

- **Update on launch of the USFWS Hi-Line Breeding Duck Survey** – Sean Fields, USFWS is researching the relationship between wetlands and breeding duck in north central Montana using a mapping application and GIS techniques. 1984 to 1989 were the last really wet years the hi-line has seen and managers want to know what is the potential of the landscape. This project involved mapping 400 USGS quads using NWI from the original mid-1980's data and sampling over 700 wetlands.
- **Partners Updates** – Laurie Riley: The Bitterroot Water forum is working on a wetland grant to get riparian setbacks in place during subdivision review. Dave Smith: The Intermountain West Joint Venture contracted with Dan Casey as the land bird coordinator and Randy Gray as a Farm Bill expert for the Joint Venture. The IWJV is moving away from a direct grant program. They are starting to implement a program with a science foundation for waterfowl habitat needs, such as working with NRCS and other partners. Linda Vance: The updated NWI mapping in the Flathead will also cover the Swan. NHP is now mapping Aspen stands. In the Ruby Valley, NHP is working on a GIS database for communicating data to non-GIS folks. Debbie Earl: The Montana Watercourse will be releasing a revision to the 'Landowner's Guide to Wetlands', and a new guide specifically for Eastern Montana soon. Vanessa Fields: The Benton Wildlife Refuge is undergoing the comprehensive conservation plan process. They are in the public involvement phase and expect public meetings in September. Michelle Frodey-Hutchins: The Missoula Local Water Quality District (LWQD) is partnering with other LWQDs, health departments, and a conservation district in Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Bitterroot, Lake and Flathead counties to expand/launch a riparian protection media campaign. Brett Gullett: The Salish and Kootenai tribes have a restoration botanist position open. Tim Miller: the National Bison Refuge is initiating weed treatment and restoration. Monica Pokorny: the DNRC is tasked with coordinating restoration efforts within the state. She will be building a searchable database of state and federal restoration projects which will be available online. Randy Gazda: The USFWS is working on 2 conservation easements along the Rocky Mountain Front. Larry Urban: MDT is working on 2 new wetland mitigation projects: plugging a drainage ditch draining a fen in Rock Creek (Big Hole) and a Salish Kootenai project below Dry Forks Reservoir. The new wetland mitigation reports are online. There is also a revised version of the MDT assessment method available. Tim Griffiths: The NRCS is completing some wetland projects, but are looking into new projects where partners are already involved in the Shields and Yellowstone basins for cutthroat trout restoration. Maureen Kiely: introduced herself as the new EPA Tribal liaison for 4 tribes for water, Jennifer Winterstein is the liaison for the Northern Cheyenne, Crow and Rocky Boy. Michael Downey: reported that for private conservation easements substantial attractive provisions to private landowners for donated easements have been extended.
- **Farm Bill Programs** – Carrie Mosley, NRCS Assistant State Conservations for Programs discussed anticipated changes in the new Farm Bill, call the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 and just passed days ago. Title 2 is the Conservation Title and has significant funding for wetland and land stewardship options for landowners. EQIP expanded and now allows funding for forest management and energy issues. CSP is no longer on a watershed basis and attempts to reward farmers for "how they grow not what they grow" according to Senator Hawkins. CRP, new cap is 32 million acres nationally, which is lower than previous bill and also requires a 10-15 year contract. WRP has acreage cap increases and there will be no more yellowbook appraisals. FRP expands soil conservation to forestland and easements will no longer be purchased but cost shared with eligible entities. Adjusted gross income is a maximum of 1 million, off-farm, per person. Carrie stressed that there are funds available for restoration in WHIP, EQIP, CRP and WRP and that they need partners to help implement these conservation provisions. She requested feedback regarding level of interest in attending a 1-2 day farm bill seminar in summer 2008, comments were favorable and suggestions were to hold soon after the 90 day FSA rule making period. The Wetland Council's Restoration Working Group will begin working on Farm Bill implementation strategies now in advance of the seminar.
- **Landowner Panel** – Tom Hinz (Legacy Partnership) facilitated a question and answer session of two private landowners who have participated in wetland restoration projects. Jeff Laszlo, rancher in the Madison Valley south of Ennis and Neil Barnosky, farmer/rancher in the Ruby Valley near Sheridan, shared their experiences and provided advice on how participants could work more effectively with other partners in the future. Both landowners agreed that there were times when they felt like they had made the wrong decision, but in the end they said they are glad with the choices they made and they would do it again. Both Jeff and Neil said that

with all the time they spent learning about the scientific as well as legal issues for their projects, the helpful staff from public and private organizations were invaluable. It was interesting to note that both landowners were members of their local Conservation District board and that perhaps played a role in getting comfortable working with state and federal agency partners.

The evening social and barbeque was a great way to spend the evening. Thanks again to Jim Stutzman and other USFS staff for preparing for the barbeque and hosting a fun event!

June 12 – Centennial Valley Wetland Tour.

- ***BLM Wetland Projects*** – The group made two stops on the way to the wildlife refuge. The first was the Pipe Organ Wetland where land and water rights have been acquired to provide for open water habitat along the Beaverhead River. The second stop was the Lima Reservoir where the BLM is managing water so that tributaries of the reservoir remain inundated for longer periods of time. The water management contributes to wetland habitat.
- ***Red Rock Lakes NWR*** – The group made four stops at the tour of the NWR: Lower Red Rock Lake, Refuge Headquarters, Shambow Pond, and Willow Fen. Highlights included discussions on the area geology, historical and current land use/ownership, hydrology, weed management, wildlife, and of course the relatively pristine wetlands.