

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

In This Issue

- 1 Book recognizes women's contributions to agriculture
- 2 Leky in Love: Sage Grouse stomping grounds perfect place to count birds
Ag days teaches kids where Montana's food comes from
- 3 Study links soil health to animal growth
Living with grizzlies: Appearances in new places force people to think about coexistence
- 4 Assistance available for producers affected by flooding
Grayling spawners return to Red Rock Lakes NWR creek
FWP proposes thinning cattails on wildlife management marsh
- 5 OPPORTUNITIES
- 6 Calendar



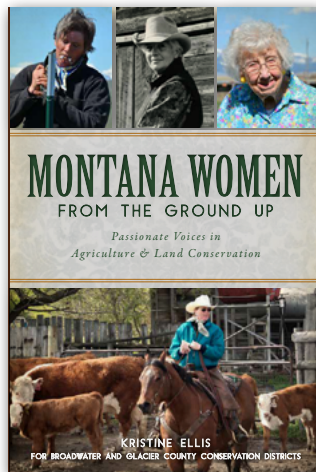
1101 11th Ave • Helena, MT 59601
(406) 443-5711 • www.swcdm.org

This newsletter is made possible
by a grant from DNRC.

May 15, 2018

Volume 12 Issue 10

Book recognizes women's contributions to agriculture



HELENA, Mont. – Politics, eminent domain, weeds, grasshoppers, economic depression, and drought were no match for these Montana women.

In her debut memoir, *Montana Women, From the Ground Up: Passionate Voices in Agriculture and Land Conservation*, freelance writer Kristin Ellis creates portraits of pioneering women who share their experiences of successes, growth and failures in farming and ranching Montana's vast landscape.

With their forward thinking, nurturing abilities and "gumption" to "make hay out of thistles," these women persevered and thrived in Montana agriculture, while creating a better landscape for the next generation.

Growing up on the family ranch, Linda fought hard to gain respect as a ranch hand, while Arlene learned to ride a horse and drive machinery at a very young age. Ellis recognizes the contributions these women have made to shape Montana's agriculture industry and the conservation movement.

A woman's role on a farm is everchanging, from cow nurse and parts manager to crew chef and bookkeeper. Ellis weaves anecdotes with discussions of differing views of agriculture, the meaning and practice of conservation, as well as advice for moving forward in today's agricultural world.

Montana Women, From the Ground Up can be purchased online for \$21.99 at www.amazon.com, and locally at conservation district offices and book stores across Montana.



Lek-y in Love: Sage Grouse stomping grounds perfect place to count birds

By Heather Nenninger, SWCDM's Sage Grouse Initiative Biologist in Forsyth, Montana

Every spring, sage-grouse and biologists alike anticipate the beginning of lek season. Leks, also known as dancing or stomping grounds, are where male sage-grouse gather yearly for their courtship display. From February to May, males puff up their chests and dance, hoping to catch the attention of hens. This display starts just before dawn, and may continue for longer than four hours. Over 100 males can gather at these leks and be dancing simultaneously. However, only a couple will be lucky enough to breed.

Biologists spend a majority of the lek season waking up far too early and driving or flying to lek locations as dawn approaches. Thankfully, leks are generally in the same location every year, which makes them easy to find. All this effort is spent so that biologists can

count sage-grouse, particularly the males. Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks have been collecting male lek counts for decades, in order to monitor the population. While it would be exorbitantly expensive and nearly impossible to get a true count of the sage-grouse population, lek monitoring allows biologists to estimate how the population changes year-to-year.

Of course, most biologists don't count sage-grouse just for the science; there are few things more entertaining than getting to watch a chicken-sized bird with yellow air sacs attached to its chest strut around the sage-brush like it's the most regal creature on the plains.

For more information about sage-grouse, leks, and sagebrush conservation work being done with private landowners in Montana and the West, visit www.sagegrouseinitiative.com.

Ag days teaches kids where Montana's food comes from

Great Falls Tribune: Agriculture is one of Montana's leading industries.

And the Cascade Conservation District has a way to get kids more excited about it.

"We are an agriculture base state and if you are going to eat the food you might as well know where it's coming from," Cascade Conservation District Administrative Assistant Laura Crawford said.

For the past ten years, they have been putting on an event known as Ag Days.

This two-day event is geared towards teaching fourth graders from all over Cascade County about agriculture.

"They are realizing and seeing where our products are coming from and how it helps our community and surrounding areas," Morningside fourth grade teacher Nikea Voegel said.

Over 700 kids will visit the nine stations throughout the two days.

"We're learning about bees, we're learning about farming. This is really cool!" fourth grader Natalia Sanson said.

The catch? They don't even realize they are learning.

[READ MORE](#)

Study links soil health to animal growth

Rothamsted Research: Individual pastures on livestock farms yield surprisingly dissimilar benefits to a farm's overall agricultural income, and those differences are most likely attributable to the varying levels of "soil health" provided by its grazing livestock, reveals a study published recently.

The study, produced by an interdisciplinary team of 13 scientists and two PhD students from Rothamsted Research, evaluates how efficiently nutrients are used on a livestock farm, on a field-by-field basis for the first time, and links soil health to animal growth.

The team has developed a method to derive the contribution of individual fields to an animal's growth and, in the process, has opened up the possibility of using field-scale metrics as indicators of animal performance and agricultural productivity. The findings appear in the journal *Animal*.

"The prospect that commercial livestock producers could improve their productivity by purely changing rotational patterns is exciting," says Taro Takahashi, an agricultural economist at Rothamsted's North Wyke Farm Platform (NWFP) in Devon, who led the study.

"Unlike many alternative technologies, this will not require any capital investment," adds Takahashi.

[READ MORE](#)



Living with grizzlies: Appearances in new places force people to think about coexistence

Bozeman Chronicle: John Anderson never actually saw it. He first heard about it from someone at the garnet mine. They told him there was a huge grizzly bear track behind the mine, which is next to the home place for the Ruby Dell Ranch.

Anderson, 67, runs the ranch with his brother. He never had reason to believe there would be a grizzly bear nearby.

"That's the first time ever," Anderson said.

It was spring 2017, and the signs started adding up. About the same time, a cow carcass had been dragged out of a creek bottom. A water trough was busted up, too, like something large got stuck inside and had to break out.

And then there was the night the heifers went crazy.

An employee who lives near a corral where they keep a group of cattle told Anderson they were

"just raising hell in the middle of the night." When they woke up the next morning, a stretch of jackleg fence had been knocked over. The cows had run straight through it.

"Luckily there wasn't any casualties or broken bones or anything," Anderson said. "We figured it must have been that bear that had gotten into those cattle and spooked them."

The bear was later seen crossing the highway that connects the Ruby Valley to Ennis. Definitely a grizzly, maybe 3 or 4 years old. Nobody's sure where it went next — maybe the Tobacco Root Mountains, maybe back toward the Gravelly Range.

Grizzly bears in both the Yellowstone ecosystem and in the Northern Continental Divide, around Glacier National Park, have been showing up in new places.

[READ MORE](#)

Assistance available for producers affected by flooding

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as flooding, blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible livestock losses include grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), additional feed purchases in excess of normal and loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water because of an eligible drought and additional

cost associated with gathering livestock to treat for cattle tick fever.

Eligible honeybee losses include loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.

Eligible farm-raised fish losses include death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

Grayling spawners return to Red Rock Lakes NWR creek

Billings Gazette: Geoff Popken, the seasonal biotech for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, snapped these photographs of Arctic grayling spawning in Elk Springs Creek earlier this month.

"This is the second year in a row grayling were discovered in this location," wrote Bill West, refuge manager, in an email. "Natural spawning has not happened there in decades! Especially exciting is the ripe female. These findings confirm that work to restore Elk Springs Creek's historic channel has re-established historic use of this stream by spawning grayling."



Spawning season has just begun. Hopefully they will find more.

[READ MORE](#)

FWP proposes thinning cattails on wildlife management marsh

Billings Gazette: Cattails have taken over about 20 acres of marsh on the 495-acre Sleeping Buffalo Area 8 Wildlife Management Area in Phillips County, so Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is proposing a plan to thin the plants.

Reducing cattails would create more open water and increase the productivity and habitat availability within the wetlands for waterfowl and shorebirds, and improve wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities, FWP said.

There are two managed wetlands on Area 8, which is located east of Nelson Reservoir along Lake Road, that are being choked out by cattails. The project plans to test a combination of mechanical cutting, prescribed burning, and aquatic herbicide spraying of cattails, beginning on approximately four- to five-acre squares. If approved, the initial treatments would be scheduled for this spring and summer. Bad weather could postpone the actions until next spring.

After determining success, mechanical cutting, prescribed burning or chemical spraying would be implemented for the following five to 10 years on the rest of the cattails in Area 8, depending on funding and weather constraints, until cattail marsh coverage has been decreased by 75 percent.

[READ MORE](#)

Grants

Ranching For Rivers Program Applications

SWCDM is seeking applications for Ranching for Rivers – a cost-share program to help rancher with riparian pasture fencing projects. In partnership with the MRCDC, SWCDM will offer up to 50% cost-share to landowners to voluntarily construct fences and/or other infrastructure that enable them to better manage the riparian resources on their land. Applications accepted on rolling basis, closes **June 15**. [More Info](#)

Future Fisheries Grants

The goal of FWP's Future Fisheries Program is to restore rivers, streams and lakes to improve Montana's wild fish habitat. Entities can receive funding for qualifying projects that benefit Montana's wild fish. **May 31** [More Info](#)

Community Forest & Open Space Grant

This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forest land from a willing seller. **June 29** [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Bumble Bee Ecology and Conservation Webinar

This webinar will cover the basics of bumble bee ecology and conservation. Participants will learn the status of North America's nearly 50 species of bumble bees, the threats they face, and the role that important habitat features and land management play in supporting robust bumble bee communities. **May 22** [More Info](#)

Montana's Water Future Video Release Party

Join Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney and DNRC for the release of a short video contemplating the future of water in Montana and celebrating the people making it brighter. **May 23**, 5:30 pm, Ten Mile Brewery

Judith Basin Range School

Judith Basin CD is hosting a range workshop featuring Dr. Fred Provenza, discussing Soil, Plants, Herbivores, Humans: How are we linked? **May 24**, Geyser Community Hall, Geyser. For info call 566-2311 ext 107.

Connecting Soil Health with Productivity

Dr. Christine Jones will cover the basics of soil function; including the links between soil elements, structure and water at this workshop hosted by Little Beaver CD. **June 15**, Baker. Email littlebeavercd@macdnet.org for more info.

Wetland Rendezvous

The purpose of this gathering is to spend some quality time in the field exploring springs and wetlands with other wetland scientists and learn about new and innovative ways to inventory, monitor, and assess these ecosystems. Hosted by Montana Wetland Council. Lincoln, MT, **June 26-28**. [More Info](#)

Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp

The 32nd annual Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp will be held July 15-20. Students aged 14-18 will spend a week in rustic cabins at Lubrecht Experimental Forest east of Missoula, learning about our natural resources & their management, and make lasting friendships. Camp cost is \$300. Application & deposit of \$150 due **June 15**. www.mnryc.com for more info.

2018 River Rendezvous

Please join us on **July 11th and 12th** for the 2018 River Rendezvous hosted by the Cascade Conservation District and the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council. Contact Rachel Frost 406-454-0056, or Tenlee Atchison 406.727.3603 x125 for more information.

Montana AWRA Call for Sponsors / Exhibitors

The 35th Annual MT AWRA Conference will be October 17 - 19 in West Yellowstone, Montana. We invite you to support a community of nearly 200 scientists, natural resource managers, students, and guests at the Annual Montana AWRA conference. [More Info](#)

Coming Up

May

- 21 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call
- 23 Montana's Water Future Video Release
- MT Invasive Species Council Meeting

June

- 3-6 NACD Northern Plains Regional Meeting, Charlo
- 6 Montana Association of State Grazing Districts Annual Meeting
- Granite County Noxious Weed Clinic
- 11-13 MACD Spring Board Meeting, Helena
- 14 Digital Atlas & GIS Training for CD Employees, Helena
- 16 Mud Run for Conservation, Hamilton
- 18-20 Montana Range Days, Red Lodge

Have an event to share?

Visit macdnet.org/calendar to add your event to our list!

Jobs

Montana DEQ Wetland Field Tech

If you have a passion for wetland ecology and working outdoors, a position as a Wetland Field Technician may be for you. This position is temporary and expected to work from mid-May through early fall. The Technician travel extensively (at least 15 days per month) beginning June through mid-September. [More Info](#)

FWP Riparian Ecologist

The primary responsibility will be managing the CCAA programs for Arctic grayling in Region 3. This duty involves coordinating with agency partners, private landowners and interest groups, developing site-specific management plans with private landowners, ensuring landowner

compliance with site specific plans, and completing reporting and administrative obligations. **Closes June 1** [More Info](#)

Lower Musselshell CD Resource Technician

Work with LMCD supervisors and other community agencies to support and implement small scale and large landscape scale fuel reduction; identify and promote development of a market for wood by-products; secure grants to purchase equipment for by-product production; combine fuel reduction with wildfire suppression and hire a crew to do both. **Closes May 31** [More Info](#)

RIPARIAN GRAZING WORKSHOPS

FEATURING SANDY WYMAN

Sandy is a retired BLM Riparian & Rangeland Management Specialist, National Riparian Service Team 2002-2018 and NRCS for 15 years. She has worked throughout the west providing coaching and training in conflict management, facilitation, riparian assessment, restoration, monitoring, and adaptive grazing management.

Learn how to effectively manage riparian grazing areas. Workshops will include a morning session with speakers, catered lunch, and a field tour in the afternoon.

JUNE 26 THOMPSON FALLS

JUNE 27 HELENA

JUNE 28 DEER LODGE

\$15 pre-registration / \$20 at the door

Hosted by SWCDM, MRCDC, and DNRC Rangeland Resources Committee

➡ Visit www.swcdm.org for more information and to register. ⬅