



Madison River Management Challenge

Susan James, Recreation Planner

The Madison River in southwestern Montana flows from Quake Lake near West Yellowstone to its confluence with the Jefferson River 130 miles downstream. It is recognized as the most heavily fished body of water in the state. The river sees over 100,000 anglers and nearly 400,000 total users per year – people literally loving the river to death.

In an effort to manage river-related resources cohesively, the BLM and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will begin jointly administering river-related special recreation permits (SRP) this year. The agencies announced the permit program and the draft operations plan at public meetings in Bozeman, Ennis and West Yellowstone in January. This partnership is similar to the joint SRP program implemented on the Blackfoot River near Missoula a few years ago.

SRPs are authorizations which allow for commercial, competitive, and organized group recreational activities on public lands and related waters. They are a means for managing visitor use, protecting natural and cultural resources, and providing for the health and safety of visitors. SRPs also allow for a fair return for the commercial recreational use of public lands. Examples of activities requiring a permit include



The Warm Springs boat launch on the Madison River is a hive of activity on a summer afternoon. *BLM photo*



Fishing outfitters on the Madison River would be required to have a special recreation permit under the new operations plan. *BLM photo*

guided fishing, whitewater or scenic guided float trips, boat rentals and fishing lessons when a fee is charged, whitewater or flat water races or multi-sport events, and groups of 15 or more (such as a large scout campout, a fraternity activity, or large family reunion).

According to the plan, vending permits will also be required from individuals selling goods or services on public land in conjunction with a recreational activity. Examples include equipment rentals and repair services, shuttle services, or T-shirt sales at a raft race. Shuttle service permits will be required only on BLM lands. The FWP commission specifically exempted shuttle service from its permit rule.

Fees generated from the program will be used to benefit the Madison River and the SRP program. An annual report will be prepared to illustrate how and where the fees are collected and spent. The agencies expect to form a community task force within the first year to assist the agencies in determining how best to spend those fees.

Comments on the draft operations plan were accepted until February 15. Permit applications became available March 1 and will be renewed annually.

A Message from Our State Director

Greetings, one and all!

Here we are, headed into spring already. We're half way through the fiscal year with field season ahead. A lot has been accomplished, as can be seen by the articles in this edition, and a lot remains before the end of the fiscal year.

Change is the norm in this day and age. It's an election year, so there will be a change in the administration. Our three-tier proposal has been approved and we are moving forward with the implementation plan. We have a budget with significant changes in program elements and unit reporting. Fellow employees are retiring or moving on, and new faces are taking their places. The publics we deal with want to be more involved and informed on the management of their public lands.

Through all the changes, however, there remains a constant. This constant is contained in our vision, mission, values, and priorities. Please take a moment to review these important principles.

As we head into the busy season of the year (although I'm not sure there is a slow season anymore), I want to take this opportunity to express Howard's and my appreciation for your dedication and hard work. Even as we face challenges with budget and staffing levels, much is being accomplished. You are coming up with innovative approaches, expanding partnerships, involving the local communities, and reaching out to the various publics.



We would especially like to thank all of you who have and are working on our land use planning efforts. They set the basic foundation for the future and are an excellent opportunity to engage the public in developing common objectives. We would also like to thank the Dillon Field Office, and especially Pat Fosse, for her excellent presentation during the Director's Healthy Lands Initiative broadcast.

In keeping with our priorities, on Feb. 11 and 12, we brought all the managers/supervisors of our organization together for a variety of sessions designed to hone their skills through presentations and sharing of experiences. Key presentations included employee relations, responsibilities of all managers and supervisors, and assuring a unified and consistent approach on all major issues. In Howard's words, "We were really excited to bring together for the first time this group of managers and supervisors. We hope it sends a message that our number one resource is our workforce and

OUR VISION

- To enhance the quality of life for all citizens through the balanced stewardship of America's public lands and resources.

OUR MISSION

- To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

OUR VALUES

- To serve with honesty, integrity, accountability, respect, courage, and commitment to make a difference.

OUR PRIORITIES

- To improve the health and productivity of the land to support the BLM multiple-use mission.
- To cultivate community-based conservation, citizen-centered stewardship, and partnership through consultation, cooperation, and communication.
- To respect, value, and support our employees, giving them resources and opportunities to succeed.
- To pursue excellence in business practices, improve accountability to our stakeholders, and deliver better service to our customers.

commitment to its needs and welfare.”

Diane Friez, deputy state director for Support Services, asked me to share our appreciation to everyone for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in our first session of Management and Supervision: The Next Frontier. We had some excellent discussions on a variety of topics that affect our supervisors and managers every day. We also hope everyone took something beneficial away from the session.

One of our goals is to provide better communication to the public about the work we do, both in terms of the value to the public, as well as the dedication and professionalism of our employees. You will see additional information placed on our external web site, in news releases, and in coordination meetings with our partners and fellow land management agencies. I will be making an effort to attend more public meetings as well as build upon our relationships with various groups behind the scenes. I encourage each of you to do the same when opportunities arise.

As always, safety is the number one priority. No matter what you are doing, take the time to pause and examine the safety aspects of what you are undertaking. With that thought in mind, have a great, SAFE field season!



Gene R. Terland
State Director

Collaborative Effort Takes Time but Results are Worthwhile

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

The North Hills in the Helena Valley offer a convenient recreation area for Helena residents and nearby landowners. As with many other areas, however, conflicts and safety issues have arisen as development encroaches on previously open space.

The 4,700-acre block of public land surrounded by subdivisions is popular among hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, OHV enthusiasts, target shooters, and hunters. Safety issues surfaced as recreational shooters created informal shooting areas in places that were too close to the road or that provided no safe line of fire. Riding a horse or mountain bike or even driving in a car was uncomfortable with shooters in the area. Unfortunately, some of the shooters were careless and used live trees or power poles for target practice.

Concerned users elevated the safety issue to the BLM and Lewis and Clark County Commissioners. The commission submitted a resolution requesting that the BLM restrict the discharge of firearms to a specific area, and declare a safety zone along the access road.

BLM Recreation Planner Pat Zurcher made a presentation to the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) late in 2006 asking for possible solutions. The RAC appointed a subgroup to tackle the issue. After a sputtering start, the working group took off last fall and by November had a recommendation to present to the rest of the RAC.

The group proposed the creation of a year-long, no-shooting zone for the one square mile section where most of the current problems occur. The remainder of the area would remain open to lawful hunting and recreational shooting. Extensive signing would be required to inform and educate the public regarding boundaries and purpose of the no shooting zone.

Where do we go from here?

The RAC endorsed the recommendation and now the ball is in BLM's court to gauge public support and go through the environmental analysis to see if the proposal is feasible. The subgroup is hoping the recommendation can be implemented before the recreational shooters are out in force this summer and fall.



These trees were destroyed by target shooters. Indiscriminate shooting sparked complaints from nearby home owners and recreationists in the North Hills area of the Helena Valley. A Resource Advisory Council subgroup offered a recommendation to BLM to help alleviate the problem. *Photo by Pat Zurcher*

COOPERATIVE EFFORTS HELP BIGHORNS THRIVE IN NORTH DAKOTA

Tim Zachmeier, North Dakota FO

“Less is more” is a common phrase among bighorn sheep managers across the West.

Because bighorn sheep are less adept at dispersing to other suitable habitats than other ungulates such as elk and mule deer, they are prone to disease when populations grow too large. Consequently, wildlife managers must work to ensure that bighorn sheep populations are kept within the carrying capacity of the habitat and that genetic diversification remains part of the population equation.

As part of this effort, the North Dakota Field Office recently assisted the North Dakota Game and Fish Department with several in-state translocation efforts. One ram and five ewes were moved from BLM lands in the northern badlands of North Dakota to Forest Service/private properties in the southern badlands.

The sheep were captured with a net gun and moved with a helicopter contracted from Leading Edge Aviation of Clarkston, Wash. Each sheep was also fitted with a radio collar and received a series of vaccinations to regulate worms and to control the bacteria *Pasteurella*, which can infect the lungs and cause pneumonia.

North Dakota’s bighorn sheep population continues to thrive after a late 1990s die-off that occurred after a single bighorn sheep ram came in contact with domesticated goats utilized for controlling leafy spurge on Forest Service lands. Translocation efforts such as this are paramount to the survival of sheep in North Dakota.



Photos by Tim Zachmeier

Reservoir Renovation

Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City FO

Miles City Field Office employee Lloyd Butcher began excavation work on Dean S. Reservoir located just east of Miles City in the Pine Hills area on Feb. 5.

The reservoir is undergoing renovation and expansion to mitigate sediment accumulation and to increase fish stock survivability, according to Joe Platz, fishery biologist.

The small lake has been losing water due to a suspected fissure in the underlying sandstone, and compounded by the gradual filling with sediment. Platz hopes the excavation will both widen and deepen the lake, increasing the reservoir's life and making trout stocking feasible again.

The project is expected to last a few months. Root wads for additional structure and an aerator windmill will be emplaced later this year.

The reservoir has long been a popular destination for local fishermen due to its proximity to town and the fact that it was traditionally stocked with trout in this predominantly warm water fisheries area.



Photo by Mark E. Jacobsen

Weed Busters

Craig Flentie, Lewistown FO

NOTE: Although this article focuses on the Lewistown Field Office, similar weed control techniques are used in BLM offices across Montana/Dakotas.

Noxious weeds present a continually robust problem for public land managers. Every year established weed patches try to expand and new patches seem to appear as quickly as bills in the mail.

Noxious weeds spread easily -- some by wind and/or flowing water, and others by human, livestock and wildlife movement. Weed seeds can also hitch a ride on the wheels or undercarriage of a vehicle carelessly driven through a weed patch before falling off to start another infestation.

Controlling or eliminating noxious weeds is not easy.

For those BLMers involved with noxious weed management, the importance of being creative and making a dollar go as far as possible has never been greater. Noxious weeds are a national concern on public lands, and the BLM's budget to address noxious weeds has not grown as fast as the collective weed patch.

To respond to this continual tug-of-war, the Lewistown Field Office has developed an innovative, efficient, and cost effective weed control program that relies heavily on the assistance of livestock grazing permittees.

Through cooperative agreements, livestock grazing permittees agree to complete the labor portion of weed control on the BLM land they graze. The BLM agrees to provide herbicide or biological control agents, recommend rates of ap-

(continued on next page)



Participants divvy up the day's catch after a successful biological control agent (bug) gathering near Grass Range. *BLM photo*

plication, conduct inventories, monitor infested sites, and in some cases, provide equipment assistance.

This cooperative effort has evolved into an extremely cost effective program in the endless war on noxious weeds. The Lewistown FO is extremely fortunate to work with a group of grazing permittees who have demonstrated an exemplary level of awareness and dedication to noxious weed control.

"The effectiveness of our weed control program depends on this cooperation and we applaud our permittees for their efforts," offered Lowell Hassler, a natural resource specialist in the Lewistown FO who manages the cooperative agreement program.

The Lewistown FO also uses a variety of other methods in the effort to keep noxious weeds at bay.

"Our noxious weed management program has grown to include several biological control insectaries which serve as distribution centers for private and public land throughout the western United States. These insectaries include various species of agents (bugs) in a wide range of stages, varying from experimental to distribution. The weed species targeted by our biological control efforts include leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, Russian knapweed, Canada thistle, Dalmation toadflax, poison hemlock, salt cedar, hound's-tongue and hoary cress (whitetop)," according to Hassler.

Each year the BLM hosts a bug gathering

day at one or several of these insectaries. BLM staffers and landowners will venture into the insectary, armed with fine mesh nets and cups to hold their catch. On a calm day, it's common to net multiple thousands of bugs to be transported in a Styrofoam cup (best used with a lid) until they are released on a new site. These gathers are popular events among landowners interested in using biological control on their property.

The Lewistown FO has also entered into cooperative agreements for weed control utilizing domestic sheep grazing. This program is very effective, but is limited to geographical areas with concentrated weed infestations and adequate water supply for large bands of sheep.

In addition, the Lewistown FO targets specific weed infestations at specific locations around the state for chemical applications by sponsoring cooperative weed control days with other agencies and public entities. These efforts are generally geared toward a fun, educational, and productive days in the battle against noxious weeds.

The BLM also works cooperatively with the county weed departments in the nine counties that make up the central Montana zone.

"We've found that it takes a full tool box to make progress or just stay even with the rate of spread we've seen with noxious weeds. Each of these methods has its place on the landscape, but our cooperative agreements with grazing permittees are certainly the most effective means we've found for keeping noxious weeds at a manageable level," Hassler said.



A cup of bugs on its way to a new weed patch. These mecinus attack both the leaves and root system of their host plant (dalmation toadflax). *BLM photo*

Alkali Creek Sagebrush Restoration

Jim Roscoe, Dillon Field Office

Biologists in the Dillon Field Office recently mowed sagebrush in some important sage grouse and antelope habitat in far southwestern Montana.

What?! BLM is mowing sagebrush, even given all the concern about preserving this kind of habitat?

That's right! It may be an unorthodox practice, but it may have been the only way to actually *restore* a healthy sagebrush community in some vital wild-life habitat.

Jim Roscoe and Kelly Bockting have been monitoring sagebrush in Big Sheep Creek Basin southwest of Dillon for several years. Data extending back through 1983 indicated a continuing decline in healthy sagebrush. As much as 85 percent of the plants were decadent and the average plant height had decreased by 30 percent, making much of it unavailable as winter forage and cover during even light snow conditions. This area is winter survival habitat for up to 350 antelope and is within a half mile of a sage grouse lek.

The Big Sheep watershed planning process concluded that it was time to do something about this problem, and authorized treatments to restore up to 400 acres of sagebrush. Here's what raised people's eyebrows: in contrast to past projects that focused on reducing or eliminating sagebrush, this one aimed to stimulate greater production from the existing sagebrush community.



Jim Roscoe mows sagebrush in the Big Sheep Creek watershed to stimulate growth and improve the vigor of decadent sagebrush. *Photo by Kelly Bockting*

Roscoe and Range Conservation Specialist Brian Hockett decided that mowing might be the best option. Based on experience and observations of similar efforts on private lands in the area, they believed that mowing could stimulate sagebrush growth and production in as little as 5-10 years while protecting current wild-life uses to the greatest extent possible.

With this as the goal, Roscoe and Bockting

rented an agricultural tractor and 15-foot mower from a local implement dealer and headed into the frigid solitude of Big Sheep Basin. After two weeks of working through equipment breakdowns and temperatures



By mowing the sagebrush, biologists will be able to compare the sagebrush regeneration in treated and untreated areas. *Photo by Jim Roscoe*

occasionally hovering at sub-zero levels, about 200 acres of sagebrush had been mown. Part of the area was reseeded with a sagebrush/yarrow/Lewis flax mix to evaluate the need for and effectiveness of reseeding.

The timing of mowing, the size and shape of the treated areas, light snow cover, natural seed production, and the availability of new seed should all combine to restore sagebrush cover and productivity. Coordinated livestock management and potential antelope harvest changes will further enhance the success of the project. Now all that remains is to hope for plentiful winter snows and spring rains to replenish sagebrush on this important wildlife habitat.



Ryan Martin, Brian Hockett and David Early reseed the mown area with a mixture of sagebrush, yarrow and Lewis flax. Notice the antelope tracks crisscrossing the area. *Photo by Jim Roscoe*

Former Students STEP up and Reach Out to Others

Chris Timcher, MSO



Soft-spoken, yet radiating a quiet confidence, Melissa Half is on a mission. A natural resource specialist with the BLM-Billings Field Office, Melissa is reaching out to students and encouraging them to follow her lead.

“When I go to the colleges and talk about the opportunities available, I tell them [the students] we come from the same place,” says Melissa. “I want them to know they can succeed too.”

Melissa started with the BLM in 2001 through the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). After a year, she was converted to the Student Career Employment Program (SCEP) as she continued her higher education.

It wasn’t her decision to join BLM, Melissa says. “I was pushed. I’m a procrastinator, but my advisor, Mari Eggers, kept after me and nudged me right into BLM’s student program.”

“I never even heard of BLM before I started working here, but now I’ve grown in both

my confidence and my experience.” Melissa continues. “The nice thing about being a STEP or a SCEP is that everyone understands that you don’t have that experience at first. The whole office has shown me support. They helped me every step of the way.”

Melissa’s mentor, Larry Padden, range management specialist, encouraged her to ask questions and that was all she needed.

“At first it was hard for me. I had to learn about a new culture and to make eye contact. But after awhile I was more comfortable. I asked as many questions as I could.”

With a small smile, Melissa shares, “Now when I go home, I have to remind myself that showing respect is done differently than when I’m at work.”

There were many people who helped Melissa along the way, but two people really stand out in her mind: David Jaynes, with the BLM-Montana State Office, and Ken Hanify, a former BLM-Natural Resources Specialist. Hanify now volunteers with BLM in the summers.

“David was very supportive,” says Melissa. “He made me feel a part of the office right off the bat and was always willing to answer my questions.

“Working with Ken was good too. He took me to the field as he completed oil and gas compliance and would ask me what I thought

about the situation. Then he would explain what was going on and how the area could be rehabbed. To help me learn more, Ken would pull apart a small plant to show me how to identify it in the future."

Now Melissa wants to share what she has learned with others.



The story has a similar ring to it for Sara Whitney. Starting with BLM as a STEP in 2006, Sara was also converted to a SCEP. Also like Melissa, Sara didn't know anything about the agency before finding out about the student program.

"I was searching the MSU Billings web site looking for job postings and found the BLM positions," says Sara. "I remember thinking 'Where and what is the BLM?'"

"I was amazed to learn there was so much to this agency," says Sara. "My first job was in the public room. I learned so much just from listening to questions from the customers. It was really beneficial to start there."

Sara encourages students to apply for openings. "BLM is great. Most people just think it is just about public lands, but there is much more than they realize. It has all of the big business aspects. There are tons of opportunities in this office from working in the field to working in finance or directly with the public," Sara adds.

Looking to graduate with a BA in Marketing in May, Sara sees herself continuing with BLM for many years. "It is a great place to work," says Sara. "The atmosphere of the organization is good and my co-workers are very supportive."

Sara now works in Solids. Her mentor is Connie Schaff.

"Connie is wonderful," says Sara. "I can go to her for any question I have and she knows the answer or she knows where to find it. I've really learned a lot. I didn't know there was so much about surface and subsurface ownership. I

thought if someone owns the lands, they would naturally own the mineral estate. That's not always the case."

Many people have helped Sara as she has worked in her two different positions. "They have all been very supportive," says Sara. "Ed Hughes (Sara's current supervisor), is really supportive," Sara continues. "He is always checking on me to make sure I have everything I need and to see how my studies are going.

"This experience has been really good. I'm hoping other students have a chance to find out about what it is like to work with BLM. I'm looking forward to telling them what BLM is all about," she concluded.

Photos by Chris Tincher

Students hired through the **Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)** are temporary federal employees. Job duties do not have to relate to academic career goals. Rates of pay depend on current education, work experience, and other position requirements.

The **Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)** is a partnership among a student, his/her school, and the BLM. SCEP students are hired for jobs related to their academic career goals, and combine their studies with practical, on-the-job experience. Their initial rate of pay depends on education and work experience. SCEP students also receive federal employee benefits such as paid vacation days, holidays, and sick leave; health and life insurance; retirement plans; and possibly training and tuition assistance. Some SCEP students become permanent BLM employees after they graduate and complete the SCEP work requirements.

The BLM also has numerous openings for **summer jobs** throughout Montana and the Dakotas. In addition to positions related to wildland fire, there are many opportunities in fields such as archeology, engineering, forestry, hydrology, and recreation. The season generally starts in May and continues through September.

Application Process for STEP, SCEP and Summer Opportunities

- 1) Go to www.usajobs.opm.gov
- 2) Select the "My USAJOBS" tab at the top to:
 - a. Create your account and resume on USAJOBS.
 - b. Register for automated notification for future openings
 - c. Check status of your application and supplemental documents
- 3) To apply for a vacancy:
 - a. Go to the vacancy announcement on USAJOBS
 - b. Scroll down the first page of the announcement and click on APPLY ONLINE button.

For more information, contact Katherine Ilari, human resources specialist, at 406-896-5230.

Adam Carr Recognized as Exceptional Range Employee

Craig Flentie, Lewistown FO

Adam Carr, a rangeland management specialist with the Lewistown Field Office, was recently recognized for his exemplary work during the 61st Annual Meeting and Trade Show for the Society for Range Management (SRM).

The BLM can nominate one rangeland management specialist from each state for this prestigious recognition; Adam represented the Montana/Dakotas BLM.

Willy Frank, Adam's supervisor and BLM's Lewistown assistant field manager, nominated Adam for his outstanding work performance during 2007, citing his large, complex workload, high quality products, and can-do attitude.

Adam was raised in South Dakota and graduated from the University of Wyoming with a degree in range management. Adam, his wife,



Photo by Craig Flentie

Tia, and their daughter Laurel moved to Lewistown two years ago. Prior to that, he worked for the BLM in Miles City.

"Adam is one of those professionals

who will consistently take on extra work assignments and provide high quality results. He has excellent communication skills and a unique ability to balance resource needs with customer needs. We're extremely pleased that the Montana/Dakotas BLM organization also recognized Adam for his efforts and forwarded his nomination to the SRM," Frank added.

The SRM's annual meeting took place this past January in Louisville, Ky.

Retiree Returns as Volunteer

Melissa Half, Billings Field Office, and Ann Boucher, MSO

Whenever a retiree walks out the door, a library of knowledge walks out, too.

Fortunately for the Billings Field Office, one retiree has come back as a volunteer, bringing with him the wealth of knowledge and experience that he gained during a long career with the BLM.



BLM retiree and volunteer Ken Hanify conducts an abandoned mineral compliance check.

Photo by Melissa Half

Ken Hanify retired in 2003 after 42 years of federal service. Three years ago, he started volunteering for the Billings Field Office, conducting abandoned mineral compliance checks -- one of his responsibilities

before he retired. Ken's knowledge of the area is impressive and his recollection of well locations

is phenomenal. His ability to find well locations has greatly decreased our search time -- time that can be applied to training.

"It's a bit intimidating to follow a legend like Ken, but I also have the opportunity to learn from him while in the field," said Melissa Half, natural resource specialist in the Billings Field Office.

While Ken was employed with the BLM he also established his credibility with grazing operators and mineral lease holders. Those positive relationships carry through in his role as a volunteer.

"It's sort of comical when Ken comes into the Billings Field Office and there are various specialists with a list of questions for him, mainly related to past projects that Ken was involved in," added Half.

Ken started his career as a biology and physics teacher with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He later worked with the Youth Conservation Corps program with the BLM, and retired as a natural resource specialist. He now contributes about 40 hours a year, helping with compliance checks and passing on institutional knowledge.

Montana Creature Feature – the Amazing World of Axolotl Salamanders

Paul Hutchinson, Dillon FO

On the north slope of Montana's Gravelly Mountains, surrounded by sub alpine meadows and timbered slopes, are the scenic Axolotl Lakes. The unusual name comes from an unusual species that inhabits the area: the neotonic (meaning "retention of juvenile traits") form of the tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*), commonly called "axolotl."

While not a true axolotl - that distinction is reserved for a distantly related species (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) that occurs only in Lake Xochimilco in central Mexico -- Dillon's axolotls exhibit nearly all the traits that make the true axolotl famous. Traits such as a fully aquatic lifestyle, retention of gills into sexual maturity, limb regeneration, and a finlike tail. The major difference between a true axolotl and our axolotl is that ours will readily morph into a terrestrial tiger salamander if its environmental conditions improve. However, it is extremely rare to find the Mexican species in the wild in other than the neotonic form.

The name axolotl comes from the Aztec language. One of the most popular translations of the name connects the axolotl to the god of deformations and death, Xolotl. The most commonly accepted translation is "water-dog" (from "atl" for water, and "xolotl," which can also mean dog).

The axolotls found in the Axolotl Lakes are actually the neotonic form of the blotched tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum melanostictum*). These creatures can reach 12 inches at full growth, with smaller 6 to 10-inch specimens most common. Within some populations are two distinct foraging lifestyles. The most common form feeds on insect larvae and small crustaceans such as scuds. The second has a much more sinister side in its feeding preferences. This form is cannibalistic -- a large percentage of its

diet consists of its brethren. They are facilitated in this pursuit with a larger head and a mouth full of sharp teeth.

Not much is known about axolotls in Montana or elsewhere. It's not known how long they can survive in the wild, but some from the Mexican species have been known to live for 20 years and more in captivity.

Why don't these unusual creatures turn into adults? There are several conditions including high altitude, cold water temperature, lack of predation in the water, dry conditions outside the water, and hormones.



Notice the gills and fin-like tails on these axolotl salamanders, juvenile characteristics carried into adult salamanders. *Photo by Paul Hutchinson*

During the summer of 2007, fisheries biologist Paul Hutchinson and BLM volunteer Kyler Morse conducted an axolotl survey in the Axolotl Lakes chain to determine their distribution. During three days of survey, axolotls were found in only two lakes. Several dozen were caught and measured, with several individuals measuring over 10 inches. Larger axolotls seen but not captured were estimated to exceed 11 inches.

Historically, axolotls may have occurred in all of the natural lakes in the axolotl area. Today they are only found in two. Introductions of trout into several of the lakes around the turn of the century likely wiped out other populations.

Wild Horse & Burro Adoption Heading Your Way!



June 27-28, 2008

Flathead County Fairgrounds, Kalispell

August 8-9, 2008

Billings Saddle Club, Billings

For more information, call Nancy Bjelland at 406-896-5222.

Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association meets at 11:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of even-numbered months at Guadalajara in the Riverboat Casino (444 S. 24th St. West) in Billings. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please call Shirley Heffner at 259-1202, Cynthia Embretson at 252-1367, or send your address to Cynthia at ceatsage@wtp.net.

The Public Lands Foundation offers new retirees a free one-year membership. Please contact David Mari, Montana PLF Representative, at (406) 538-7121, or email dmari@earthlink.net. If you send an email, please note "PLF" on the subject line.

Please also help us keep our Quarterly Steward mailing list current by contacting Ann Boucher of the External Affairs staff at (406) 896-5011 or aboucher@blm.gov with address changes.

Retired since January 2008:

Thomas Maxwell – 34 years
Fire Management Specialist (Fuels Management Coordinator) -- Lewistown Field Office

Jimmie Ward – 32 years
Petroleum Engineer Technician – Great Falls Oil & Gas Field Station

June Bailey – 32 years
Field Manager – Lewistown Field Office

Dennis Bucher – 34 years
Outdoor Recreation Planner – South Dakota Field Office

Joseph Casey – 30 years
Forester – Dillon Field Office

Terry Chaplin – 33 years
Fire Management Specialist – South Dakota Field Office

JoAnn Heins – 31 years
Legal Instruments Examiner – Montana State Office

Randy Heuscher – 30 years
Supervisory Mining Engineer – Montana State Office

Daniel Jimison – 31 years
Civil Engineering Technician – Glasgow Field Station

Bureau of Land Management
Montana State Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, Montana 59107
Phone (406) 896-5011
<http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en.html>

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