

Partners Praised at Iron Mask/McMaster Dedication

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

A ceremony on September 28 in Townsend recognized the partners that brought more than 11,000 acres in the Chain of Lakes area between Helena and Townsend into public ownership.

The McMaster Ranch and the Iron Mask property were transferred in phases to the BLM over the last few years thanks to the efforts of The Conservation Fund, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana's congressional delegation, Jim and Dolly McMaster, and the commissioners of Broadwater and Lewis & Clark counties. Both properties contain prime wildlife habitat and critical winter range for elk and big horn sheep. The BLM proposes to use both areas as "grass banks" for other permittees temporarily affected by fire or drought.



BLM State Director Gene Terland recognizes the partners critical to the acquisition of 11,000 acres in the Chain of Lakes area for BLM management. *Photo by Marilyn Krause*



Spokane Creek on the McMaster Ranch flows into Hauser Lake east of Helena and provides critical spawning habitat for several species of fish. *Photo by Marilyn Krause*

A Message from our Associate State Director

Wow, it's the holiday season! Certainly a time to give thanks as well as to plan for the upcoming year and to reflect on the year that's coming to a close. But first I'd like to offer best wishes from Gene and myself for a happy retirement to the many folks who have announced their intention. Among those, on our State Leadership Team, are June Bailey and Randy Heuscher. Both have served this state and the Bureau extremely well and have left lasting legacies with their work ethic and professionalism, not to mention their many specific projects and personal accomplishments.

Seems like the last article I wrote came at a time when some of our land use planning decisions were being challenged. That hasn't changed, and we don't expect that it will. We know that's the nature of our work and that it stems from the importance people place on the public lands.

Much has been written about the permitting aspect of our responsibilities. Energy corridors, related rights-of-way, energy permits, timber sales, grazing permits, etc., have all figured into the discussions and debate. We all know that it's just one aspect of our mandate, but nonetheless, it's significant, ongoing, and ever more in the public eye, as perhaps it should be. Our resources are too valuable not to have the benefit of carefully considered decisions that are monitored afterwards.

I'd like to use that setting to talk about one group of our workforce. Subsequent articles will expand and highlight other portions of our organization that, day in and day out, provide excellent service to the local and national publics.

So first up to bat—you know me, I'm a baseball kind of guy so pardon the sports play on words (by the way wait until next year!!) — are those folks involved with the surface, subsurface and royalty types of inspections in our oil and gas program. Of course we all need to remember that these types of "showcase" efforts include many contributing programs. There's virtually too many to name them all, but in this case they include wildlife, cultural, land status, engineering, realty, a variety of surface programs, and, well, you get the picture; they're all related and impossible to fully separate one from the other.

But anyway, Montana/Dakotas has perhaps (and many outsiders agree) the finest inspection and enforcement program in the Bureau. We've got a tremendous group of highly trained and motivated professionals. At a time when there are loose references and allegations that the Bureau does not inspect the actions we approve, we can tell you that is not the case in Montana/Dakotas thanks to the tireless efforts of the individuals involved in our program. These in-

spectors are grouped or zoned in Dickinson, Miles City and Great Falls. It's a 24/7 type of job. Seems like the oil patch comes alive on the evenings, weekends and, of course, the holidays. There are endless hours traveling to and from inspection locations. It might be an inspection focused on protecting a key aquifer by witnessing a cementing operation one day, inspecting a remote gas well location hundreds of miles away the following day, and swinging by a third location along the way to check on how the rehab efforts are proceeding on a reclaimed pad location. Our organization has been a national leader in accomplishing assigned inspections. So the next time you hear someone expressing concern that our organization is unwilling or unable to monitor the activities we have approved, I'd encourage you to visit with these folks and let them know that not only are the inspections occurring as required but both the professionalism and even the frequency of inspections exceeds the standards we are held to.

Just to give you some idea of the magnitude of the job and the accomplishments that are routinely occurring each and every day, please consider these statistical measures. By Thanksgiving of this year, these folks had conducted 154 drilling inspections, 91 plugging inspections, 708 environmental inspections, and 656 production inspections. In the past five years, they have conducted some 8,600 inspections on federal and Indian lands.

Beyond that is the quality of the inspection performed. We've had innumerable reviews of that aspect and have an active internal oversight as well. Again, your co-workers are nationally recognized for the first-rate work they perform.

From time to time, Gene and I would like to continue to showcase specific examples of the great work that is being done by the tremendous staff here in Montana and the Dakotas. There is absolutely no place we would rather be than working with the quality professionals that make up the Montana/Dakotas BLM. Your professional reputation is something we hold near and dear, and something we are infinitely proud of as well.

Take care, watch out for each other, and on behalf of Gene and myself, best wishes to you and your families for a joyous and safe Holiday Season.



Howard A. Lemm
Associate State Director



Fish Barrier Protects Native Trout

Joseph Platz, Miles City FO

Photos courtesy of Bairco Construction



The Crooked Creek fish barrier project will protect a genetically pure population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

A recently completed fish barrier on Crooked Creek in the Pryor Mountains will benefit genetically pure populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT).

Crooked Creek begins in the Custer National Forest, flows through BLM and private lands, and then enters Bighorn Lake in Wyoming. The Crooked Creek barrier project protects and expands one of three genetically pure populations of YCT on BLM-administered lands and one of six pure YCT populations on lands administered by the Custer National Forest.

Native to Crooked Creek, the isolated headwater population of YCT (a sensitive species in Montana) was once protected from nonnative salmonid invasion by a naturally formed boulder barrier; however, extensive debris flows after a high intensity wildfire in July 2002 altered this barrier, making it passable by upstream migrating nonnative salmonids. Brook, brown, and rainbow trout survived the debris torrents and occupy the lower drainage, but the remain-

ing YCT population is at a high risk of localized extinction.

To prevent competitive interaction and hybridization with nonnative salmonid species, the YCT population had to be physically isolated. The fish barrier project was designed to accomplish that goal.

A temporary barrier was constructed in August 2006 as a short-term solution, but manag-

ers knew it would not be an effective obstruction during high flows. The barrier stayed intact, but did not prevent brown trout from entering YCT habitat. One year after construction, about 120 brown trout were found upstream of the temporary barrier.

The Custer National Forest funded a permanent barrier design contract with Great West Engineering of Helena, which was completed in the spring of 2007. The Billings Field Office completed an environmental analysis at about the same time.

Several issues affected the project in terms of the design and environmental analysis. First, the project is located in a Wilderness Study Area, which limits disturbance and affects visual resources and construction activities. Second, the project is located in almost inaccessible terrain, typified by steep rimrock canyon walls. Third, cultural resources are located adjacent to the project area. As a result, the design was very



Construction in progress on the Crooked Creek fish barrier.

complex and the cost elevated.

A contract was awarded to Bairco Construction from Lovell, Wyo., in early August 2007. Later that month, Bairco began work on the project, completing it in early October.

Construction was challenging. It involved erecting a cable tram to haul materials and equipment into the project site, clearing the work site, and diverting the stream. Additionally, the concrete was mixed on site, with heavy manual labor. Challenging, but worthwhile. The end product is excellent.

For more photos and video, go to <http://www.baircoconstruction.com/CrookedCreek-FishBarrier.html>.



The Crooked Creek fish barrier will keep nonnative trout from migrating upstream into the native Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat.

Dillon FO Transfers Land to Beaverhead County

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

Beaverhead County recently received nearly 170 acres of BLM land near Dillon under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

For more than 40 years, the Dillon Rifle and Pistol Club had a permit to use the area but didn't qualify for grants because it didn't own the land.

The BLM was able to convey the land to Beaverhead County as another public agency; the county will then lease it to the Dillon Rifle and Pistol Club to develop as a shooting range. In the long term, the club would like to add enough improvements so the area could be used for competitive events.

Dillon Realty Specialist Angela Brown spearheaded the paperwork effort assisted by Debby Sorg in the Montana State Office. Field Manager Tim Bozorth recognized both employees in a brief ceremony on September 10 when the land was officially transferred to Beaverhead County.



Garth Haugland, chairperson for the Beaverhead County Commissioners (in cowboy hat) accepts the land patent from Dillon Field Manager Tim Bozorth (left). Also pictured are commissioners Mike McGinley and Tom Rice. *Photo by Marilyn Krause*

BLM NAMES NEW MANAGER FOR BILLINGS FIELD OFFICE

Ann Boucher, MSO

A brief installation ceremony took place Nov. 20 at the Montana State Office naming Jim Sparks as the new manager for the Billings Field Office.

Born in Sheridan, Wyo., Sparks graduated from the University of Wyoming with a degree in Rangeland Science. He began his career with the BLM in 1986 in Cody, Wyo., as a range technician and in Rock Springs, Wyo., as a rangeland management specialist. In 1993, he transferred to Lewistown to serve as the supervisory range conservationist. In 1999, he was selected as the district rangeland management specialist in Boise, Idaho. While there, he accepted an opportunity to become the assistant field manager for the Owyhee Field Office in Idaho, and also served in that capacity in Buffalo, Wyo., and Billings.

"Jim's background and experience are a good fit for the Billings Field Office," said State Director Gene Terland. "He's familiar with this area and the issues facing public lands today. With his extensive background and strong leadership skills, Jim will be a great asset to Montana/Dakotas BLM."

Sparks replaces Sandy Brooks, who took a different job at the BLM Montana State Office earlier this year.



Montana State Director Gene Terland congratulates Jim Sparks after his installation ceremony.

Photo by Greg Albright

Sparks and his wife, Ami, have one 10-year old child, Sam. His outside interests include fly fishing, fly tying, bow hunting, alpine skiing, and gardening.

The BLM Billings Field Office manages about 434,000 surface acres and 900,000 subsurface acres in eight counties in south-central Montana and in Big Horn County, Wyo. This includes Pompeys Pillar National Monument, the Pryor Mountain National Wild Horse Range, and the Shepherd Ah Nei Recreation Area. The office also administers grazing, archeological sites, and wildlife habitat, and works to reduce the danger of wildland fire in the wildland-urban interface.

Montana Grown

Story and photos by Nora Taylor, MSO

A new partnership with the Special K Ranch will have an impact all across the West.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of acres of native vegetation in the western United States are lost to wildfire. Other activities such as mining and recreational activities also take their toll. The BLM works to revegetate areas susceptible to erosion and the spread of noxious weeds, and to improve wildlife habitat. For many years, non-native species were used because they were more readily available than native species, and because of high success rates due to established growth and transplanting methods. More recently, however, land managers are shifting to the use of native vegetation as they work to sustain healthy,

natural ecosystems.

Finding sufficient supplies of native species is still difficult. Many times, they are not available commercially or in the quantities needed. To alleviate this shortage, in 2002, Congress charged the BLM with developing ways to provide native plant materials sufficient to meet the needs of the public lands, and encouraging private industry to do the same. The result is the BLM's Native Plant Material Program.

The BLM in other states is developing contracts with commercial growers to provide shrubs, the priority need for rehabilitation projects. Most of these contracts are for seed, but because seed collection is at the mercy of weather

fluctuations and growing conditions, it's difficult to predict what kinds of seeds will be available and how many will be collected. These uncertainties prompted us to team up with the Special K Ranch in Columbus, Mont.

The Special K Ranch is a residential facility which provides family-oriented, Christian homes for developmentally disabled adults. A working ranch, it allows the residents to learn and achieve vocational skills in horticulture, gardening, general farm maintenance, and care of livestock. In 1997, the ranch started a tree and shrub nursery which has expanded to include production of wholesale bedding plants and hothouse tomatoes which are sold throughout Montana. The ranch has 40,000 square feet of greenhouses which were mostly empty by the end of June.

Initially, the BLM occupied one greenhouse and began planting seeds in June 2007. We got seed from Colorado, Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, and Arizona, and ultimately planted 14 species of trees, shrubs, and grasses. We now have about 14,000 seedlings of 13 different species which will be used for a variety of projects throughout the West. Gunnison sage grouse habitat in Colorado will be restored using black sagebrush seedlings; four species of grasses are being grown for the Lewis and Clark Botanical Garden in Boise, Idaho; and in Montana, green ash will restore hardwood draws, and buffalo berry will rehabilitate wildlife habitat. Other seedlings will go to the Great Basin to help revegetate burned areas.

The agreement with Special K is a benefit for everyone. It allows us to generate a stable supply of restoration and rehabilitation plant materials while maintaining flexibility in the number of seedlings grown and the species used. The project also gives us the opportunity to try different horticultural methods to get the seeds to germinate and become viable seedlings. In addition, the project will keep the Special K Ranch greenhouses occupied after the bedding plant season and present the residents with a new variety of work.

Before winter, the seedlings were moved outdoors to a deer and rabbit-proof compound built by the residents of the ranch, and covered with mulch. Next spring the seedlings will be moved to their project sites and we'll begin a new round of seedling production.

In the future, we hope to expand the seedling production project as well as start seed production beds for forbs that are not commercially available, but which will further enhance restoration efforts.



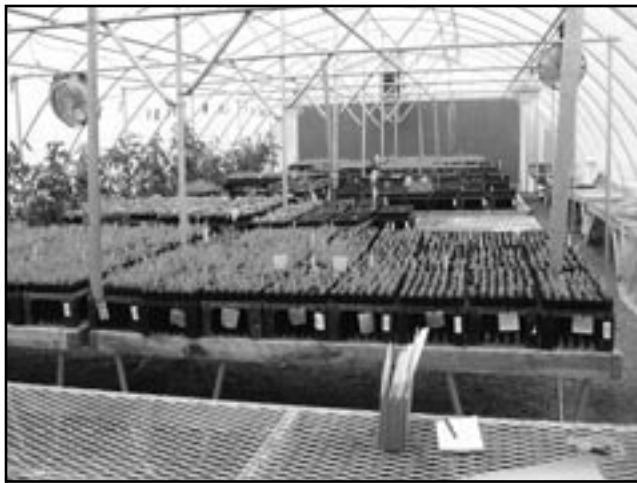
Planting begins. Ben and Stephanie (center) clean the pulp off buffaloberry seeds for Debbie (l) and Angela (r).



Mike, Bryan, and Robbie put the plant tubes into the trays.



Shorti transplants seedlings while Robbie watches.



We had great success with growing black sagebrush and blue flax seedlings. Here is the greenhouse full of seedlings.



The seedlings are being mulched outside for the winter and will be out planted next spring.



The Seedling Crew – Mike, Angela, Shorti, Keile, Stephanie, Shikira, Rod, Bret, Debbie, Bryan, Cindi, Ron, Robbie, and Alex. Not pictured are the rest of the Special K residents and the great ranch staff who are helping with the project.

History Mystery

Greg Albright, MSO

History Mystery is an educational outreach tool that is the brain child of David K. Wade of BLM's Billings Curation Center and Susan Austin, marketing and outreach director for the Western Heritage Center. It introduces junior high students to some of the basics of conducting research while weaving in local history and geography. It also helps instill an appreciation for preserving cultural resources.



History Mystery kits were given to Billings area schools November 14, and after a brief overview, teachers eagerly tried the multimedia curriculum out themselves.

Each kit contains a wide variety of research material that can be used to find answers to the many questions surrounding Sacrifice Cliff near Billings; questions such as where it actually was and when, why and how it was used. Research information is grouped into one of several packets depending on its source (libraries, museums, government agencies, historians, internet/media). The information may be in the form of newspaper or magazine articles, books, maps, television newscasts, photographs, and so on. Students digest the research material and compile evidence to solve the mystery. It turns out that there is no definitive answer to the Sacrifice Cliff questions, an interesting discovery for students.

Plans are to create a new Mystery kit for each of the next four or five years that will be added to each school's teaching arsenal.

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY 2007

The BLM Montana/Dakotas hosted several one-day volunteer projects again this year as part of National Public Lands Day. Started in 1994 with three agencies and 700 people, the annual event has grown to include nearly 100,000 volunteers at 1,100 locations managed by federal, state and local agencies nationwide.

This year some field offices coordinated two events at the same site, taking advantage of different times of the year to accomplish different

goals. For their participation, volunteers received t-shirts, something to eat, a sense of accomplishment, and a one-time pass for free admission to fee sites managed by federal agencies.

It should be noted that although NPLD is one of our largest, most visible volunteer events, BLM volunteers make significant contributions throughout the year.

Following is a summary of NPLD accomplishments in the Montana/Dakotas BLM.

Chamberlain Creek Elk Study Fence Removal – Missoula Field Office

Twenty volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Blackfoot Challenge, The Nature Conservancy, and E-L Ranch removed about six miles of barbed wire fence from the Chamberlain Creek area east of Missoula. Installed in the 1970s as part of an elk study, the fence was no longer needed. More than 1,000 metal fence posts are being saved for reuse and 3,500 pounds of wire were sent to the metal recycling center.

Photo by Jim Sparks



Schnell Recreation Area — North Dakota Field Office

Schnell Recreation Area 30 miles east of Dickinson has been the site for organized NPLD activities for nine straight years. This year 53 volunteers made short work of several small building, painting and maintenance projects as well as the construction of a concrete block pathway to a handicap-accessible ramp. Volunteers included students from Dickinson State University, Boy Scouts, Resource Advisory Council members, and BLM employees and their families. *Photo by Angela Wetz*



Fort Meade Recreation Area — South Dakota Field Office

In April, volunteers spruced up trails and picnic areas for the summer season, and in September, they removed deadfall along Bear Butte Creek and the Sturgis Bike Path, preparing the way for controlled burns. *Photo by Brooke Tapp*



Oil Pump Reservoir — Miles City Field Office

Road improvements and an aerator windmill were on the task list for 33 volunteers at Oil Pump Reservoir 13 miles south of Glendive. The windmill will pump air into the water to prevent winter kill in the fish. Because the bubbling action could also create thin ice this winter, volunteers also put up a fence around the reservoir to keep animals off the ice.

Photo by Mark Jacobsen

Wood Bottom Recreation Area — Lewistown Field Office

Thirty-one volunteers from Malmstrom Air Force Base and five BLM employees dismantled about three miles of a barbed wire fence,



then rolled up the old wire and stockpiled fence posts. This has been a yearly NPLD project since 2001 aimed at removing obstacles to wildlife at Wood Bottom, which is located about 54 miles north of Great Falls. *Photo by Sandra Padilla*



James Kipp Recreation Area — Lewistown Field Office

In June, 13 volunteers from the Montana Outdoor Science School cleaned up the 80-acre campground at James Kipp Recreation Area 60 miles northeast of Lewistown. Later this fall, 15 volunteers from the community spread gravel around picnic tables and an interpretive sign, cleaned up litter, and planted silver buffaloberry bushes along the hillside. *Photo by Sandra Padilla*



Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range — Billings Field Office

To deter off-road driving and travel on closed routes in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, a Montana Conservation Corps crew replaced "Road Closed" signs and installed barriers. They also built a large information kiosk at the entrance of the range to provide information about management policies for the Wilderness Study Area as well as the wild horses. *Photo by Don Galvin*

Scratchgravel Hills Now Safer Due to Abandoned Mine Lands Efforts

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

The Scratchgravel Hills north of Helena are surrounded by subdivisions, which means a dramatic increase in all types of uses over the last 20 years. The hills were named because prospectors would literally “scratch gravel” looking for gold and other minerals.

As use increased, the BLM recognized that many of the former mine features are attractive nuisances to visitors in the area and are accidents waiting to happen.

Joan Gabelman, Butte Field Office geologist, has spent a portion of the last several years identifying hazardous sites and trying to eliminate the danger without losing the historic or cultural values. Additionally, several of the adits and shafts have attracted bats over the years and are now wildlife habitat. Consequently, Gabelman has worked with other program areas including



For safety reasons, some adits are closed completely with expandable insulation material.
Photo by Marilyn Krause



Other adits are fitted with “bat gates” to maintain the bat habitat but make it safe for the curious explorer. Here Eve Byron, a reporter with the Helena Independent Record, takes a closer look at a bat gate installed in the Scratchgravel Hills north of Helena. *Photo by Marilyn Krause*

wildlife, cultural, geology and botany to determine the best course of action for each site.

Mitigation can come in a number of ways – some of the adits are closed completely while others have bat gates installed so that bats and other small critters can pass through but curious people are kept out. For other features, it is simply a matter of reshaping the tailings pile to make the area less hazardous.

Besides the obvious dangers, some adits have been known to contain old mining supplies such as dynamite or blasting caps. As they age, the explosive material crystallizes, making them more unstable – one more reason to address the issue.

Gabelman is quick to give credit to the state and national abandoned mine land programs for their funding and staffing support. She also likes to point out that the goal is to make the area safe for public land visitors -- not to erase history.

“We have such a rich mining history in western Montana,” said Gabelman. “We want to preserve as much as possible for future generations.”

Sleep with the Ghosts at Garnet this Winter

Marilyn Krause, Western Montana Zone

If you're looking for a little adventure this winter, try a night or two at Garnet. Two historic cabins in the ghost town are available for rent from December through April. Reservations are on a first come, first served basis.

Located about 40 miles east of Missoula, Garnet is accessible in the winter only via snowmobile, skis, snowshoes or dog sled.

Cabins come furnished with beds, dishes, gas cook stoves, lanterns, and wood heat stoves. The Dahl Cabin sleeps up to six for \$40/night, and the McDonald Cabin sleeps four for \$30/night.

For more information about cabin rentals, stop in at the BLM Missoula Field Office, 3255 Fort Missoula Road in Missoula, or call Lonna Sandau at 406-329-3914. Applications for rental are available at www.garnetghosttown.net. Full payment is required to make a reservation.

More than 100 years ago, Garnet was an active gold-mining town with 1,000 residents, 31 businesses, and 13 saloons. By the 1920s, the gold had played out and the once prosperous town slowly went into a deep sleep until its last resident passed away. The ghost town is now publicly owned and managed by the BLM. Proceeds from the cabin rental program are used for the preservation and interpretation of the town.



The historic Dahl Cabin (on the right) in Garnet is available for rent from December to April.



The interior of the Dahl Cabin. *BLM photo*

There are two routes into Garnet in the winter:

- From Highway 200 turn south on the Garnet Range Road between mile marker 22 and 23 and park near the gate about a quarter-mile from Highway 200. The winter journey is about 12 miles with a steady incline from the closed gate to Garnet.
- Visitors using I-90 should take the Bearmouth or Drummond Exit, then the Frontage Road to Bear Gulch. They can drive to a gate and a small parking area within four miles of the ghost town. This route is shorter but steeper, gaining 1,500 feet before reaching Garnet.

Building Partnerships

Award recipients demonstrate outstanding leadership in fire program

The BLM has placed a high priority on reducing the threat of fire in wildland-urban interface communities, and a critical link in that process is developing strong community partnerships.

Four Montana/Dakotas specialists have embraced that task, and for their outstanding efforts, received the BLM's national Excellence in Ecosystem Management Award for Achievements in Community Protection and Assistance.

Terry Chaplin (South Dakota FO), Karly Krausz (Lewistown FO), Terina Mullen (Butte FO), and Dena Sprandel-Lang (Miles City FO) are specialists in the MT/DKs fire program. In the course of helping communities to develop Wildfire Protection Plans, planning and conducting interagency fuels treatments, and educating the public about wildland fire, these indi-

viduals have developed effective cooperative partnerships with a high level of trust.

"Dena, Karly, Terina, and Terry searched out community leaders and guided them through the planning process," said Mike Dannenberg, MSO fire prevention and mitigation specialist. "They provided the insight, motivation, and education that have led to improved fire response, integrated command, and safer and more effective fire strategies and tactics."

"The heart of this award is this group's demonstrated excellence in the establishment and nurturing of positive, productive relationships with key stakeholders," said Kelly Hawk, community protection specialist in the National Interagency Fire Center. "As I see it, this kind of work takes the most effort, patience, finesse, and tenacity of any job we undertake."

Chaplin is a fuels specialist and Krausz, Mullen and Sprandel-Lang are mitigation and education specialists. The four will share a \$10,000 cash award and will be recognized at the annual Prevention Workshop scheduled for next May in Jackson, Wyoming.

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@mt.blm.gov with address changes.

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