

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

A Monument Update

Information About Monument Projects, Programs And People

Issue No. 2

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Working Toward Increased Periodic Flows on the Upper Missouri

A deep list of agency representatives, decision makers, recreationists, conservation groups, outfitters, ranchers and other stakeholders met in Great Falls, Montana, this past December to face head-on the need to increase periodic water flows on the 149-mile long Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River.

The long-stated goals for increasing periodic water flows would be to enhance cottonwood/woody riparian ecosystems along the river and to assist in managing/recovering pallid sturgeon.

That's a pretty straight forward goal description. However, the key to implementing increased flows (water releases from upstream dams) is wrapped in a maze of agencies, regulations, policies, authorities and landowner needs.

The Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and a host

of individuals and interest groups all participated in the December 1-2 meeting (titled the Cottonwood Workshop). The attendee list included folks from Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Nebraska and Montana.

This was the first collective effort among agencies and citizens to confront the problems created by static water flows and focus on flow regimes (the need for increased water releases) from upstream dams.

Increasing periodic water releases from upstream dams would benefit a long list of plant, animal and fish species. The cottonwood is the keystone plant community along the river and increased periodic flows would greatly increase the creation of new seed beds in areas protected from ice flows. The pallid sturgeon, a prehistoric freshwater fish and one of the rarest and largest fish in North America, is now on the verge of extinction and increased flows would also help their cause. While increasing water flow is not a cure-all for cottonwoods or sturgeon, it would improve their potential and would also improve habitat conditions for

many other species making a home in or along the Upper Missouri.

Throughout the two-day workshop scientists, planners, biologists, federal and state government officials, solicitors, and other agency specialists offered presentations and citizens /stakeholders spoke of their concerns.

At the conclusion of the Cottonwood Workshop everyone seemed of the consensus that there is legal authority for enhancing flows and that science supports increased periodic flows as a means of helping cottonwood regeneration on the river.

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BLM

Lewistown Field Office



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However, all groups must come to the table and, most importantly, there must be a will for this to happen as it will take a lot of work and support from the public (especially those individuals living along the rivers who may experience an increased flow).

The BLM agreed to take the lead for keeping the project moving forward and will develop a working group, a task force, to address the multiple details that must be resolved before periodic increased water releases from upstream dams could become a reality on the Upper Missouri.

The next meeting to address this issue will be held in three to six months.

Working toward increasing water flows in the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River was



Montana/Dakotas State Director Gene Terland (far left) addresses the varied interests attending the Cottonwoods Workshop last December in Great Falls, Mont.

one of the action items that arose from the September 2008 National Riparian Service Team workshop in Lewistown, Montana.

BLM/MCC Complete Habitat Project

A seven-person Montana Conservation Corp (MCC) crew out of Bozeman, Montana, lent their talents to a BLM habitat improvement project at the Gist Bottom primitive boat camp along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River this past summer.

The MCC crew helped a number of BLM staffers construct a three-rail post and pole fence around approximately two acres of the boat camp. The

project was a mixed-bag including the good (boating into the work site each morning); the bad (digging several hundred post holes, setting the posts and installing about 300 rails); and the ugly (rainy weather that made standing/moving difficult at times).

The finished fence will help reduce livestock/recreation conflicts and will protect a mature stand of cottonwood trees.



The MCC crew was a great help in completing the Gist Bottom habitat improvement project.

The MCC crew also helped salvage/remove about a quarter mile of barbed wire fence at the nearby Gist homestead.

Between building the new fence and salvaging the old barbed wire fence, the MCC crew spent four days helping the BLM during this detail.

This was not the first time the MCC has helped BLM. MCC crews have helped several BLM offices with numerous resource improvement projects and their help is greatly appreciated.

Recreation in the Monument -- a Year Round Activity

There aren't many days through the year when someone isn't using the Monument for some type of recreational activity. While spring, summer and fall usually prove to be the busiest seasons, a few hardy souls will venture into the uplands during even the coldest of seasons to ice fish or to hunt predators.

The BLM gathers enough information from registered floaters/boaters on the Upper Missouri River to track those trends on a yearly basis. This past year 4,905 floaters/boaters self-registered at some point during their adventure. This is up from 4,495 river users in 2008 (a nine percent increase). Of this year's 4,905 river users, 2,982 were Montana residents, 1,923 were non-residents, and 636 used the services of an outfitter.

The river also serves as a base of activity for big horn sheep and waterfowl hunters and some determined fishermen each fall. A growing number of these boaters now register when they launch which helps greatly with the record keeping.

The BLM has few means of tracking the amount of visitor use occurring in the upland portions of the Monument. Hiking, pleasure driving, fishing, and family camping all contribute to the amount of recreational activity in the uplands. However, the vast majority of the upland use occurs during the fall and is associated with the variety of hunting opportunities found throughout the Monument.

Hunters make their way into the Monument to pursue upland game birds, waterfowl, white-tailed deer, elk, mule deer and antelope. However, the bighorn sheep has become the marquis big game animal living in the Monument. They inhabit the steep ridges

rising from the river corridor as well as the deep, rugged coulees that cut through the Breaks. Most agree that these bighorns are stunning animals, living in ruggedly beautiful settings both north and south of the Missouri River.

The fact that rams taken from these Breaks are pushing the state and world records has focused much attention on the area. There are three means of landing a treasured either sex sheep tag in the Breaks. A hunter can draw one of the tags through the standard application process; or perhaps be fortunate enough to win the super tag lottery drawing for bighorn sheep; or be well heeled enough to purchase the Governor's sheep tag that is auctioned off each year. All of these means of obtaining a bighorn sheep tag are administered by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Those individuals who win the super tag lottery or purchase the Governor's tag can choose to hunt in any hunting district in the state. In recent years both of those tag recipients have chosen to hunt sheep in the Breaks.



The object of much attention.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH IN THE MONUMENT MOVES FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

The idea of developing a partnership program to better expose Native American students to the resource related work the BLM does in the Monument (along the river and/or in the uplands) and inform them of the career opportunities that kind of work can provide took root this past summer.

The outreach program is designed to be a partnership between or among the BLM and tribal colleges in the region; to clearly define roles, responsibilities and benefits for all involved; to provide hands-on learning, entry level compensation and college credits for participants; and to provide on-the-ground workload assistance for BLM.

The Salish Kootenai College (SKC) on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Pablo, Montana, quickly recognized the potential this program presents and became the first tribal college to formalize an Educational Outreach Partnership with the BLM. This past spring, both entities signed an outreach agreement that provides multiple benefits for all involved.

The SKC is contributing to the partnership by developing a Wildland Recreation Management Practicum that includes classes featuring wildland recreation, facilities planning and maintenance, monitoring, restoration and public education. Each topic will include lectures by BLM professionals.

Students will benefit by completing college credits, gaining hands on experience while working with and learning from BLM professionals, additional exposure to diverse natural resource related projects and compensation while working summers for BLM. And, the program may serve these students as a gateway to a BLM career in resource management.

The BLM will benefit from additional outreach to under-represented minority groups, a more diverse workforce, potential job recruitment and assistance with numerous work projects (river patrols, staffing launch sites, additional help at the interpretive center in Fort Benton, building exclosures, etc.).

Benny Everett and Josh McGreevey, both second year forestry majors at SKC, were the first students to participate in this partnership. Paired up with Jim Barrowman, a third year seasonal river ranger whose work ethic, dedication and passion for the river are unequaled, Josh and Benny progressed quickly into their recreation based responsibilities.

Throughout the summer, Benny and Josh found themselves involved with and learning from everyone on the river staff and a wide variety of BLM resource specialists. Each of these BLMers served as a tutor for topics including riparian management, invasive weeds, archeology, rangeland management and forestry.

By the end of the summer season, both students had developed a good working knowledge about the multiple programs BLM works with and lauded the BLM staff's knowledge, professionalism and work ethic. Both Benny and Josh enjoyed the experience, and felt it was a summer well spent; with the most satisfying portion being the time spent on the river.

Mark Schaefer, the Monument supervisory outdoor recreation planner, and Sara Romero-Minkoff, the Montana State Office equal employment manager, were instrumental in designing the precise details of the partnership.

"Overall, I thought the partnership was a huge success," observed Mark Schaefer. "I think we met 90 percent of our objectives and everyone involved (Benny, Josh, BLM and SKC) is quite satisfied with the fledgling program. As with many new undertakings, there is always room for improvement and we have a feel for what BLM can do to make this educational partnership better. We will be working with BLM resource specialists this winter to further refine the work experiences and lessons available with the partnership."

The BLM looks forward to continuing this program and has already started a dialogue with faculty members from other tribal colleges to inform them of its potential.

Take it Outside

The Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center (MBIC) in Fort Benton, hosts a long list of educational, entertaining and informative events each year.

One of the most popular events (at least with the Fort Benton seventh grade students) has proven to be a Take It Outside program called “A Journey Through the Monument.” The Take It Outside program has proven very beneficial as it can be tailored to include specific lessons, keyed to specific field opportunities.

This past summer the MBIC organized and hosted a Take It Outside program with a series of lessons (aquatic ecology, water sampling, water turbidity, water quality, safe canoe paddling, and aquatic

invertebrates, etc.) keyed to floating the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and learning about the surrounding national monument. The students also learned about unique geological formations, Native American tipi rings, homesteads, Lewis and Clark sites along the river, journaling, art, relevant local history, *Leave No Trace* principles and safe camping protocols.

Students then got to apply their new skills and knowledge during a float trip down the river.

The Fort Benton seventh graders thoroughly enjoyed the lessons and the float down the Upper Missouri. Almost none of these students had seen this stretch of the Missouri River before. Few of the students had done an overnight river trip and

some of these students had never been camping at all before this opportunity.

The Take It Outside – A Journey Through the Monument program has certainly helped these students learn about the public land treasures they have right in their own back yard. Now, nearly all of the students plan on returning to float the Missouri River again with their families.

The word has spread, and the Fort Benton School will continue providing their seventh grade students the opportunity to participate in the Journey Through the Monument program. Other area schools are also inquiring about Take It Outside opportunities for their students.

Jacobs Honored for Work at Interpretive Center

Connie Jacobs, Director of the Bureau of Land Management’s Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center in Fort Benton, Montana, was awarded the 2009 Silver Star Award for Excellence in Interpretation by the BLM’s Division of Education, Interpretation & Partnerships.

This national level award is given in recognition of exceptional work with partners and communities to

create meaningful interpretive experiences and materials for public land users.

Specifically, Jacobs was recognized for her instrumental role in developing “A Journey through the Monument,” a middle-school educational program about the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.



Connie Jacobs

River Community Weed Control Effort

The concept of building a River Community/Youth Weed Control Project along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River took a big step forward this past October when eight Chinook high school students and their advisor (Ms. Robin Allen) spend a day on the river learning about GPS techniques and weed identification.

The students then spent the latter part of the day on the river identifying and mapping invasive species (weeds).

River Community/Youth Weed Control Project is designed to inform the next generation about the problems associated with weeds and enlist their help with identification, monitoring and control efforts.

A primary step in this process will be introducing invasive species information into the curriculums at local high schools and FFA and 4-H organizations. The BLM and county weed districts will take the lead in providing this information. Those students

who are interested will then become members of monitoring crews for specific portions of the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River corridor. These monitoring crews will use GPS technology to measure the change in the size of noxious weed infestations over time.

Kenny Keever, a natural resource specialist on the Monument staff who will lead BLM's involvement with this project, was pleased with the start the Chinook students lent the project and hopes that students from additional high schools will become involved.

This River Community/Youth Weed Control Project was one of the action items that sprang forth from the National Riparian Service Team's 2008 workshop in Lewistown.



Students from Chinook High School line up to learn about weed identification.

BLM Hosts Informative River Floats

The BLM hosted three, one-day floats down a portion of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River throughout this past summer as a means of helping Central Montana Resource Advisory Council members and members of the public see first-hand the sites, resources and issues we all discuss so often.

The trips proved to be excellent formats for discussion and information and were learning experiences for everyone involved.

"It's important that the public see how programs and projects actually work on-the-ground. We're often asked what we're doing along the river or in the monument, and having people see for themselves how the agency is managing their public resources is better than us providing a report or a briefing," offered monument manager Gary Slagel.

The consensus of all the participants was that the trips were well worth the effort and that the BLM should continue providing such learning opportunities as need, work schedules and logistics allow.

PFC Assessment Work on the Upper Missouri this Summer

An early February meeting among BLM staff members, USGS scientists, and members of the National Riparian Service Team (NRST) resulted in a plan to complete a Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) Assessment of the Upper Missouri River this coming summer.

In order for PFC assessments to be valid, they must be conducted by a journey-level Interdisciplinary Team (IDT). This IDT will include Wayne Elmore, riparian ecologist; Steve Smith, NRST team leader; Chad Krause, BLM hydrologist; Jody Peters, BLM wildlife biologist; Mitch Forsyth and Vinita Shea, BLM range

Extensive public involvement will continue to be an integral part of this process. At a minimum, during the week of June 14 there will be public workshops in Winifred and Fort Benton to inform the public about the PFC assessment process, how it will progress, and how the information will be utilized in future management. At least one follow-up community workshop will be held in January 2011, to thoroughly inform those interested about the assessment findings and future steps.

Efforts will also be made to include members of the public during the field assessment work. These stakeholders may accompany the IDT and engage in on-site discussions about resource condition. However, the agency appointed IDT is solely responsible for completing the checklist and assigning the final condition rating; stakeholders do not become IDT members as a result of their participation. Logistical difficulties will limit the opportunity for people to participate, but at a minimum there will be efforts to allow two-three stakeholders to accompany the IDT each day. A specific process to schedule public participation has yet to be developed, but the IDT will prepare a fair, balanced and open way of hosting this public participation.

More information about the public workshops and efforts to include members of the public will be made available as those details come together.



Gary Slagel and Vinita Shea (second and fourth from the left) discuss riparian management during one of the summer informational exchange floats on the Upper Missouri River.

The field assessment will be conducted between July 6 and 16, and will involve intensive work along the entire 149 miles of the Upper Missouri River which runs through the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The end result of the PFC assessment will be an estimation of the status of ecosystem structures, functions and processes along this reach of the Missouri River at this specific time.

management specialists; Josh Sorlie, BLM soils scientist; Abby Ehlert, BLM documentation; and Aurora Northerner, BLM range technician. Several other people will participate as available including Gary Slagel, monument manager; Mike Philbin, BLM state program lead for soils, air and water; and Stan Benes, BLM Lewistown district manager.

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Monument Staff Members/Responsibilities

From time to time, people ask about Monument staff members and their responsibilities. Hopefully, this table will prove useful.

NAME	RESPONSIBILITY	DUTY STATION
Gary E. Slagel	monument manager	Lewistown
Vinita Shea	rangeland management	Lewistown
Aurora Northerner	range/riparian technician	Lewistown
Chad Krause	hydrologist	Lewistown
Mitchell Forsyth	rangeland management	Havre
Jody Peters	wildlife management	Havre
Kenny Keever	natural resource specialist	Havre
Mark Schaefer*	supervisory outdoor rec. planner	Ft. Benton
Connie Jacobs**	interpretive center director	Ft. Benton
John Robertson	recreation maintenance	Ft. Benton
Roger Williams	information receptionist	Ft. Benton
Vacant	law enforcement ranger	Ft. Benton
Vacant	park ranger	Ft. Benton
Vacant	park ranger	Ft. Benton

* Mark supervises the river staff; is responsible for overall river management; and manages the Fort Benton River Management Station which is located in the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center.

** Connie manages the interpretive aspect and program functions at the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center.