

Fire and Ice: Snow Sets the Stage South Dakota Prescribed Burning

Don Smurthwaite, MSO

Snow and fire is an unusual blend, but that's exactly the combination that allowed about 2,500 debris piles to be ignited on the hillsides south of Deadwood.

A crew consisting of fire personnel from BLM's Ft. Meade Fuel Module, the state of South Dakota and the city of Lead began igniting the debris piles in January, until a lack of snow forced them to temporarily halt the work. Conditions, even in the middle of winter, were just too dry to ignite the slash piles, said Travis Lipp, BLM fuels module supervisor.

"There just isn't any snow in the project area, so we had to shut down," he said. "There's no snow anywhere now in South Dakota."

But when the conditions were right, the crew was hopping, torching up to 600 piles during an eight-hour work day.

Overall, Lipp estimates that 18,000 to 20,000 small piles of slash need to be burned. The cone-shaped piles consist of debris left over from the 2002 Grizzly Gulch Fire. It's all a part of a two-year effort to remove fuel from the 937-acre project area.

"All of the trees we'll burn were killed in the fire and less than nine inches in diameter. If they were larger, we left them for woodpeckers," Lipp said.

The Grizzly Gulch Fire started on private land in June 2002, and quickly burned toward Deadwood. When it was contained more than a week later, the fire had burned 11,589 acres.

The chief purpose of burning the slash is to reduce fuel and thereby decrease the threat from future wildfires.

Overall, the burned area is recovering nicely, Lipp says. Hardwood trees, primarily aspen, are establishing themselves, and in some burned areas, grasses were waist-deep in the summer. The fire also improved wildlife habitat.

"Elk are moving into the area now. Before, we never saw much elk sign this close to town," according to Lipp.

Lipp acknowledges the wait for poor weather is frustrating to him and his crew. They're eager to finish the last 300 acres or so targeted for burning in 2005.

"We're hoping for snow," he says.



IT JUST DEPENDS ON WHO WAS THERE

Some of you may recall hearing me tell the story of being asked by a friend to accompany him, his dad, and a few uncles and cousins on a horseback trip through some rough country in the Beaver Dam Wash area just north of Mesquite, Nevada. The family was intimately familiar with the area as it was immediately adjacent to their private ground, and, for many years, had been part of one of their BLM-administered grazing allotments.

When the desert tortoise was listed as an endangered species a few years before, designation of critical habitat in the three-state region of Nevada, Utah, and Arizona wasn't far behind. And since most of the open range in that area is federally owned, the required tortoise habitat was carved out of existing grazing allotments. So, the trip was a bit on the bittersweet side. A chance to come together once again, not to gather and move pairs from one pasture to another, but, instead, to remember how things used to be.

As the day progressed, the "oldsters" of the group (and no, in that bunch I was considered a youngster!) had one story after another of wild cows they had chased, good horses they had ridden and wrecks they had survived. We ate lunch at a pictograph panel that also showed evidence of the passing of early European explorers and pioneers. And, to top it off, we encountered a group of three wild bovines that, just by their mere presence, prompted a wild chase across gullies and through thick pinyon/juniper stands, until it suddenly dawned on everyone that we really didn't know what we would do with the critters if we caught them.

As we were slowly returning to the horse trailers at the end of the day, the mood became a bit more pensive; I asked one of the old, hard-twisted cowboys how he and his neighbors had gotten along with the Bureau over the years. After several long moments of thought, he finally answered, and his answer was elegant and eloquent in its simplicity: "Well, it just depends on who was there."

In a few words he conveyed volumes about how our relationship with the public is defined. The laws are the same, our policies are the same, but the attitude of "who was there"—the BLM employee—still is a big factor in determining how we get along with our constituents.

What does it take to "get along?" Does it mean that you have to compromise your values? Will it require you to favor one constituency over another? Will it require you to give up some of the "authority" of your position? Is there a manual somewhere that tells you how it's done? Or, is it just something that comes naturally to some, and if you don't have it, you don't have it?

After spending a number of years ricocheting around the school of hard knocks, I've concluded that involving the public in the business of making decisions about how public resources should be managed is not an option, it's a necessity. And, I'm not talking about the kind of public involvement that is "required," such as workshops and town hall meetings that might be connected to a major

planning effort. What I'm referring to is the much more labor-intensive kind of involvement that requires, for example, a range management specialist to ride through an allotment with a permittee to share ideas of what is needed to improve forage production and habitat preservation; or, a field manager to meet with a special interest group—on its "home ground"—to share ideas, philosophies and points of view; or, a field office staff that, together and individually, commit to becoming totally integrated into the local community.

That kind of involvement comes under the general heading of "good neighbor." It doesn't cost, it pays. There is no requirement to give anything up to anyone or anything, but there is a requirement to share. It doesn't require any special talent or ability, but it does require (sometimes) the setting aside of egos and the willingness to be open and human. It builds trust, respect, understanding and civility. And, importantly, it goes to one of the Bureau's top priorities which is, "To cultivate community-based conservation, citizen-centered stewardship, and partnership through consultation, cooperation, and communication."

Is it happening here in the Montana/Dakotas organization? I think it is. I see it in how we do our planning; how we involve ourselves in local community activities; how we're integrated with other agencies and organizations in our fire program; the high level of discourse and cooperation we have with our grazing permittees, and in our efforts to work with energy companies and local landowners to minimize the effects of energy development on other resource values. But, there is still work to do.

My personal commitment for the upcoming year is to help strengthen relationships with other groups, organizations and individuals that have not been included in our work to the extent that they have needed or wanted to be. Join with me. Let's work a little harder at ensuring that the person "who was there" for BLM makes an extra effort to stop by and say hello, and listen more than talk. Experience has taught me that it will be well worth the effort!

Martin C. Ott



Martin C. Ott
State Director

Windmills Work for Area Fisheries

Story and photo by Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City Field Office

CUSTER COUNTY – It's not what you'd call a "typical" windmill. Standing shy of 20 feet tall it harnesses the seemingly endless supply of prairie wind to do its job. However, instead of pumping water to the surface, it pumps air—under the surface of a few local reservoirs.

In this instance, it will be the aquatic residents, instead of the terrestrial denizens of eastern Montana that will reap some wind-driven benefits.

The idea to harness the wind to aerate local BLM reservoirs was hatched by Joe Platz, a fishery biologist who works for the BLM in Miles City. Platz formed the notion after a discussion with a local rancher who voiced concern over winter killed fish within the area of his operations. After some consideration, Platz followed up with a visit to inspect some fish-friendly windmills operating in the Havre area and hatched an idea for the Miles City Field Office. A convincing pitch to his superiors, some wrangled funding and voila. Windmill aeration was on its way.

A typical challenge for fisheries managers in eastern Montana is keeping fish alive and growing in small ponds and reservoirs through the winter. Water levels, heat, organic decomposition and ice are factors in dissolved oxygen levels, which if they drop too low, kill fish. Although restocking is a frequent option, the fish rarely survive the winter.

"Winter kill has the biggest impact on these reservoirs," said Platz. "Fish are usually hit first, as

far as low dissolved oxygen levels are concerned. Aquatic insects are usually better than fish at surviving, but they can winterkill also."

That is where the windmills come into play. According to the manufacturer, Koenders Windmills Inc. from Saskatchewan, the 12-foot tower supports a 12-blade turbine which harnesses winds as low as 5 mph. The crankshaft provides a ½ inch stroke on a 9-inch diaphragm, producing 1.5 cubic-feet of air per minute at 5 pounds per square inch.



WINDPOWER FOR FISH—The wind-generated aeration system needs only a 5 mph breeze in order to keep five-acre feet of water oxygenated. A by-product of aeration is thin ice. Individuals are encouraged to avoid an unpleasant soaking by staying on dry ground during the winter months.

The pressurized air is pumped through 3/8-inch plastic tubing to a 9-inch air stone anchored in the bottom of the pond or lake and ejects a fine column of bubbles. The bubble cloud injects oxygen and de-stratifies the stagnant, oxygen deprived under-layer.

The rising bubbles also bring accumulated, fish-toxic gases from the bottom to the surface. Hydrogen sulfide, ammonia and carbon dioxide—dissipate into the atmosphere. This type of pond aeration

can increase zooplankton production while decreasing the abundance of the blue-green algae which causes the mid-summer "pea-soup" conditions which may become toxic to wildlife and livestock.

When the temperatures drop, the windmills use a back pressure monitoring, automatic drip system that releases isopropyl alcohol to thaw the air line. The entire apparatus—windmill and all, is surrounded by a fence to keep livestock from damaging the tower.

However, another by-product of aeration is thin pond ice during the

winter. During freeze up, the constant release of bubbles tends to create an ice free area in the middle of the reservoir. The warmer water circulated from the bottom of the reservoir tends to keep the water body open well-past normal ice-over periods.

This can be a hazard as during periods of calm. The reservoir may form thin ice, only to melt again once the wind picks up and the windmill renews pumping. Winter visitors to these areas should be extra cautious and avoid getting on

the ice, cautioned Platz.

So far, the BLM has erected three windmills. Locations include Boulware Reservoir in the Knowlton area and the Silvertip and Grant reservoirs north of Terry. More windmills are in the works.

"Our hope is that we'll be able to hold over fish—and grow bigger fish," explained Platz.

And as long as the wind blows in eastern Montana, that remains a distinct possibility.

Our Recreation Attractions . . . Check 'em out!!



Lower Blackfoot River

Location

Approximately 40 miles east of Missoula, Montana.

Description

The spectacular Blackfoot River was the subject of the best-selling book and popular movie entitled "A River Runs Through It." The river's deep pools, charming riffles, mossy overhangs, and challenging whitewater runs provide exhilarating floating, as well as great habitat for trout and world-class fly fishing for visitors.

Firs, willows, and larch line the river, whose clear, emerald water flows between banks that are an average of 75 feet across.

Directions

From Missoula, drive about 9 miles east on Interstate 90, exit at State Highway 200, and continue east. The highway crosses the river four times within 30 miles, and offers several marked river access points.

Visitor Activities

Wildlife viewing, rafting, boating, bird watching, scenic drives, and fishing.

Special Features

Millions of tons of ice and a glacial lake formed the modern Blackfoot Valley; glaciers once extended from the high peaks to the valley

floor, grinding and sculpting the landscape as they moved. In their wake, they left extravagant handiwork, including the boulders and cobbles now jutting from the river's surface.

The Blackfoot Valley provides habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals, including grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, moose, elk, osprey, bald eagles, pileated woodpeckers, and neo-tropical migrant songbirds. Both the native bull and westslope cutthroat trout are abundant in the river -- a "Blue Ribbon" trout stream -- which provides crucial habitat for these and other fish species. Explorer Meriwether Lewis and his party followed an Indian trail that paralleled the Blackfoot River on the 1806 return trip from their famous expedition. Today, this mountain river remains largely pristine.

Permits, Fees Limitations

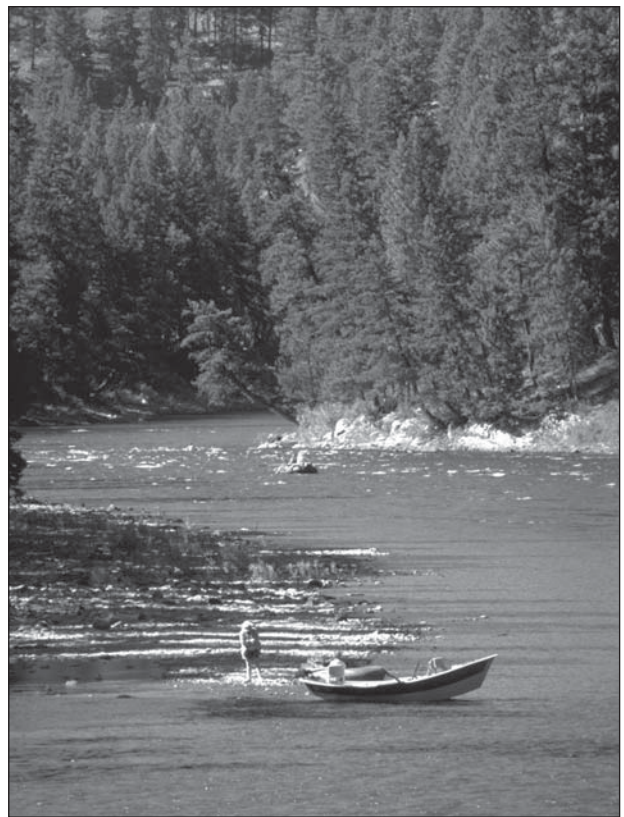
None.

Accessibility

Restrooms are accessible.

Camping and Lodging

Several small campgrounds and day-use areas are located along this stretch of the river, which is accessible via McNamara Road, off State Highway 200. Parking areas are provided, but there are no RV hookups. The nearest lodging is in Missoula.



Food and Supplies

Food and supplies are available in Missoula.

First Aid

The nearest hospital is in Missoula.

Additional Information

Maps and additional information are available from BLM.



Contact Information

BLM - Missoula Field Office
3255 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Tel: (406) 329-3914

Fax: (406) 329-3721

www.mt.blm.gov/mifo

Interns Study Habitat in Valley County

With the help of two interns from the Chicago Botanic Garden, the Glasgow Field Station is making headway in assessing winter habitat for greater sage-grouse in Valley County.

Amy Hladek of WaKeeney, Kansas, and Meagan Gates of Bend, Oregon, have been stationed at Glasgow FS for the past five months and were recently extended through the BLM internship program for another five months. Throughout their internship, they have been assessing both summer



and winter habitat in addition to conducting other wildlife-related tasks.

Winter habitat assessments consist of measuring snow depth as well as the height of sagebrush above the snow. Canopy cover is also recorded. This information will be used to better understand the habitat requirements of greater sage-grouse during the winter and to assist in mapping greater sage-grouse winter range.

When asked about the difficulties of winter habitat assessments, Meagan quickly replied, “Braving the harsh weather conditions and actually finding birds are probably the most challenging parts of conducting the assessments.”

Amy commented that the recent warm weather is affecting their winter assessments. “The snow is melting faster than we would like, but all in all, we are still locating birds and collecting useful data.”

John Carlson, wildlife biologist at the Glasgow Field Station, is their supervisor and he is extremely pleased with the work that Amy and Meagan have done. “This program provided me with two great workers and has enabled me to get additional wildlife work completed that otherwise would have gone undone.”



They proceeded on . . .

Spring 1805



April 29

Proceeding into what is now Montana – farther west than any white men had ever gone on the Missouri – Lewis and Clark are astounded by the wildlife: herds of buffalo numbering up to 10,000, and other game “so plenty and tame,” John Ordway writes, “that some of the party clubbed them out of their way.” (The men are eating nine pounds of buffalo meat a day.)

This day, past the mouth of the Yellowstone River, Lewis and another hunter kill an enormous bear – a grizzly, never before described for science. At first, Lewis believes that Indian accounts of the bears’ ferocity were exaggerated, but in the days to come, as grizzly after grizzly chases the men across the Plains and prove nearly impossible to kill, he writes that the “curiosity of our party is pretty well satisfied with respect to this animal.”

May 20

The captains name a river “Sah-ca-gah-we-a or bird woman’s River, after our interpreter the Snake [Shoshone] woman.” As they map new territory, the captains eventually give the names of every expedition member to some landmark.

May 29

Clark comes across a stream he considers particularly clear and pretty, and names it the Judith River, in honor of a young girl back in Virginia he hopes will one day marry him.

May 31

The Corps of Discovery enters what are now called the White Cliffs of the Missouri – remarkable sandstone formations that the men compare to the ruins of an ancient city. (This section of the river is now a national monument and remains the most unspoiled section of the entire Lewis and Clark route.) “As we passed on,” Lewis writes, “it seemed as if those scenes of visionary enchantment would never have an end.”

(source: www.PBS.org)



Lonny Bagley is North Dakota Field Manager

Greg Albright, MSO

Lonny Bagley is the BLM's new North Dakota Field Office manager.

The 47-year-old Bagley is a native North Dakotan and a veteran of 20 years of federal service with the BLM. Prior to his selection to the Dickinson post, Bagley had been stationed in Billings since 1993 as a fluid mineral inspection and enforcement specialist, a position with oversight responsibility for 31 BLM offices nationwide. He also served on a team that assisted the Hungarian government in developing an oil and gas program in 1993. His BLM service began in 1984 as an oil and gas inspector in North Dakota

following an extensive career in the oil and gas industry that included jobs ranging from roustabout to field superintendent.

"Lonny's background and experience are a great match for BLM in North Dakota," said BLM State Director, Marty Ott. "He understands the issues, and as a native son, he has an appreciation for the North Dakota lifestyle."

Bagley grew up on a ranch in Bowman County. He and his wife, Lori, have two children.

He began his work in Dickinson in January, replacing Doug Burger who transferred to a similar position in New Mexico.

June Bailey is New Lewistown Field Manager

Craig Flentie, Lewistown FO

June Bailey began her duties as the BLM's Lewistown Field Manager early in December.

Many BLMers in Montana and the Dakotas remember June from her earlier work with the Bureau in Billings.

June was born in Waterbury, VT and graduated from Champion College. She soon found her way to Montana and began her federal career in October 1975, at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls. Then in 1981, she began working for the BLM. June worked in the Montana State Office as an oil and gas adjudicator and supervisor in the leasing unit; the Billings Field Office as a realty specialist; and the National Training Center in Phoenix, Ariz. as the national lands training coordinator. In October 2001, Bailey became the associate field manager in the BLM-Alaska Anchorage Field Office. She was later selected as the field manager in that same office.

"My husband and I are very happy to be returning home to Montana," Bailey said. "It is a wonderful opportunity and I look forward to working with the community and the BLM employees in Lewistown."

Bailey is quickly learning about the programs and issues involved with BLM lands in the Lewistown area; the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, a quickly approaching Lewis and Clark signature event and a new interpretive center in Fort Benton just to mention a few of the programs involving the Lewistown Field Office.

June brings a lot of energy and a deep appreciation for the principle of shared community stewardship of our public lands to her new job.

June is married to Steve Lender. She has a daughter, Sarah, who lives in Beaverton, Ore. and a stepson, Todd, who lives in Laurel, Mont. Her interests include hiking, cross-country skiing and golfing.



Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association meets on the first Tuesday of odd-numbered months at the Old Country Buffet 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 Bill Noble, PLF Montana Representative, at 406-656-0267 to join.

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.

Retired from Montana/Dakotas BLM since December 1, 2004:

Roger C. Baxter -- 38 years
Land Surveyor, Montana State Office

John Grensten -- 30 years
Wildlife Biologist (Mgmt.), Malta Field Office

Lee Jefferis -- 22 years
Geologist, North Dakota Field Office

David T. Marchant -- 20 years
Cartographic Technician, Montana State Office

Mitch Maycox -- 24 years
Fire Management Officer, Lewistown Field Office

Bonnie Wiederrick -- 31 years
Administrative Support Assistant, Malta Field Office

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Ann Boucher, Editor
Kathy Ives, Graphic Design

Montana State Office
5001 Southgate Drive
P.O. Box 36800
Billings, Montana 59107-6800
Phone (406) 896-5011

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