

## Nest Dragging Protects Migratory Bird Nests

*Fritz Prellwitz, Malta FO*

Nest dragging. It's a low-tech, cost effective and time efficient means of helping the BLM (and industry) minimize adverse impacts to migratory birds across public lands in north central Montana.

Nest dragging is not a new management tool for wildlife biologists. It normally involves the pulling of a long piece of cable with trailing loops of chain between two vehicles, with several people watching for birds flushed from their nests as the device passes over them. Nests are rarely damaged and almost none are missed.

Nest dragging allows a biologist to precisely locate the ground nests of a wide variety of birds and use that information in time sensitive land use decisions. Ground nesting birds include many grassland songbirds, waterfowl and upland nesting shorebirds.

The nesting season for most migratory birds in northern Montana runs from approximately April 15 to July 15, which is a busy time of the year on our public lands. Oil and gas development, reservoir and fence construction and various public uses just to name a few, could create negative impacts to birds trying to nest in grassland habitat.

The Malta Field Office began nest dragging during the 2004 nesting season when drilling for several natural gas wells was proposed in late April. Industry has been very supportive of this process and one of the gas companies has occasionally supplied a second person to assist Fritz Prellwitz, a BLM wildlife biologist in Malta, with nest dragging on proposed well pad sites prior to construction.

As nest dragging became a more common BLM management tool, Prellwitz began modifying the device. He soon learned that a simple drag made of plastic pipe and rope and pulled by only one person was more practical.

The improved nest drag consists of three 10-foot pieces of 1½-inch plastic pipe that can be hauled in the back of a pickup truck and then connected with

clips on-site to create a 30-foot wide drag. The drag is completed after loops of rope with trailing tin cans are connected to the plastic pipe. One person can easily pull the drag across native prairie with little or no sagebrush and flushed birds often fly toward and past the wildlife biologist, providing ample time for species identification.

The located nests are flagged with a small pin flag and the locations are provided to the gas company, helping them make decisions about avoiding the nest(s) or delaying construction. A 160-foot by 200-foot well pad can be dragged in about 10 minutes. The drag assembles in just a minute or two.

The gas companies have been very supportive of nest dragging as it helps them know when they can work on a site or when disturbance could lead to a



This chestnut-collared longspur nest on a gas well pad would probably have been destroyed if not found by the nest drag. The nest was protected during pad construction and the young eventually fledged. *Photo by Fritz Prellwitz*

violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This act strengthens migratory bird conservation by identifying and implementing strategies that promote conservation and minimize adverse impacts to migratory birds. Companies have installed pipelines and prepared well pads around nests, delayed construction until after nests have hatched, or moved to an

other well pad where nests weren't a concern in order to comply with this act.

Four years of nest dragging in the Malta Field Office has located 18 nests on proposed well pads, along proposed pipeline routes, and along access roads. Fourteen of the 18 nests later hatched. Most or all would have been destroyed if construction activities had been allowed without nest dragging.

Eleven of the 18 located nests have been those of BLM Sensitive Species, including 10 chestnut-collared longspur nests and one Sprague's pipit nest. Other species found nesting include lark bunting, gadwall, horned lark, blue-winged teal, American wigeon, and common nighthawk.

The Malta Field Office has increased the use of nest dragging as an efficient means of inventorying nesting migratory birds along



Fritz Prellwitz, wildlife biologist for the Malta Field Office, pulls a nest drag across a proposed natural gas well pad while searching for migratory bird nests that could be impacted by construction activities. *BLM photo*

proposed natural gas developments, pipeline routes to stock tanks, and areas proposed for prescribed burning.

## Horsepower in the Wilderness

*Vickie Anderson, Butte FO*

On an open, grassy mountain slope, 13 members of the Mile High Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen (MHBCH) loaded their pack animals with fence materials and headed down a steep drainage. In between trips, the equines dined on the lush grass with sweet abandon.

For two beautiful June days, the volunteers strapped steel posts, rolls of barbed wire, and wood posts/braces onto horses and a mule and carried them into the rugged Humbug Spires Wilderness Area. The materials would be used to build a fence to keep cattle grazing the nearby Forest Service allotment from crossing into the wilderness area.

MHBCH volunteers Frank Olenick and Darrell McDaniel (also a retired BLMer) and Butte FO employees Pete Armstrong and Vickie Anderson headed up the work party. It took 26 loads to transport 20 rolls of barbed and smooth wire, 130 steel posts, 200 metal stays, 10 wood posts, 12 wood braces, and 68 wood scabs to four different staging areas.

In July, a Montana Conservation Crew (MCC), led by maintenance worker Pete Armstrong, built a little over one mile of fence in the rugged terrain. The

fence will be completed next summer.

Since no motorized vehicles or equipment are allowed in wilderness study areas, the Backcountry Horsemen volunteers were instrumental in getting the materials to the fence location nearly one mile away. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

This first cooperative effort between the MHBCH and the BLM Butte Field Office resulted in 205 volunteer hours.



Mile High Back Country Horsemen members Darrell McDaniel (left) and Jason Speers secure fence materials onto Jason's horse "Chevy" while Jocelyn Dodge (USFS) holds their riding horses. The north side of the Humbug WSA is in the background. *Photo by Vickie Anderson*

## Greetings!

Well, here it is, fall already! I can not believe that I've been in Montana almost a year now. Time sure has flown by.

We've made a lot of progress over the past year. We've moved forward on our land-use planning efforts, accomplished a lot of on-the-ground projects, established new partnerships, strengthened existing partnerships, and responded to new challenges in a constructive and proactive manner. When faced with potential setbacks, we've pulled folks together, discussed our options and kept the ball moving forward. Your hard work and dedication is what made all of this possible.

I would like to specifically recognize the efforts of the folks working within our fire organization and those of you who helped out in the fire arena this past year. The level of interagency and local cooperation was amazing and impressive to watch! Your efforts over the past few years are paying off big time. I attended a couple of meetings recently where we were singled out and praised for our cooperation, and more importantly, recognized as being a catalyst for making it happen. And on top of that, we've had a safe fire season. Congratulations on a job well done!

Speaking of safety, Howard and I want to thank all of you for your attention to making this a safe year. We have come through this fiscal year without any major incidents or accidents. As we head towards winter, it's time to start thinking about those actions that will ensure continuation of our safety record. It won't be long and we'll have to watch out for the ice on those bridges and roads. Keep up the good work and stay safe!

This year has also brought a lot of change (whoever coined the phrase, "the only constant in life is change," sure knew what they were talking about). We have a new secretary, assistant secretary and director. With them also comes a shift in emphasis. While not major, for those of you who watched the broadcast with our new director, I'm sure you picked up on the areas he wants to emphasize this coming year, one of those being the National Landscape

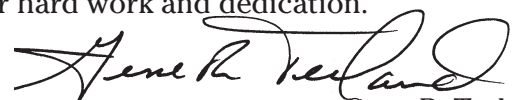
Conservation System.

We, as a bureau, are continuing to look for ways to improve how we do business, either organizationally or procedurally. We've had individuals retire or move on, and new folks join us.

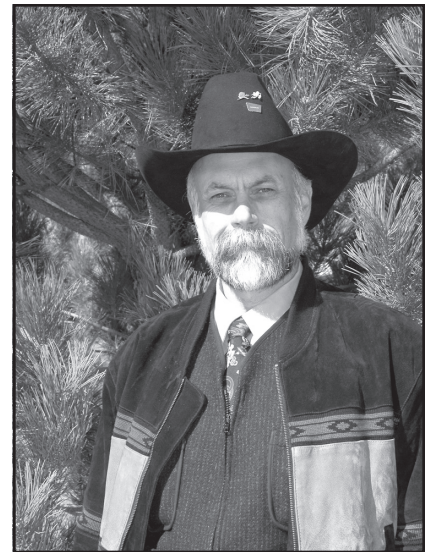
We've had new groups that have questioned our decisions or actions. In spite of these challenges, what impresses me is the response to these changes. Rather than throw up their hands, folks approached these changes as opportunities, looking for ways to improve communications, improve processes, or improve our decision making. That approach serves our organization well.

What will this next fiscal year bring? My bet is more of the same. There will be increased emphasis on addressing resources on a landscape/watershed basis. Multiple partners, including non-profit organizations, will need to establish common goals and objectives on cross-boundary projects to improve land health. We'll see increased emphasis on our National Landscape Conservation System units. We'll see continued emphasis on cost sharing, energy development (both conventional and renewable), interagency coordination and consultation. What will we see as far as budget? Well, discussions in Congress have looked favorable thus far. We'll just have to wait and see.

So, as we close this past fiscal year and begin a new one, Howard and I want to thank each of you for your contributions to our organization's accomplishments, for positioning us well for the coming fiscal year, and in general, all your hard work and dedication.



Gene R. Terland  
State Director



## Iron Mask Ranch Now in Public Ownership

*Marilyn Krause, BLM Western Montana Zone*

The fourth and final phase of the Iron Mask Ranch acquisition is now complete with the transfer of 2,472 acres to the Bureau of Land Management in July. The acreage on the east flank of the Elkhorn Mountains northwest of Townsend completes the transfer of the 5,548-acre ranch into public ownership.

The property blocks up public land in the area with the Forest Service, BLM and the state of Montana. It is an important piece of real estate because it provides critical winter range for elk and bighorn sheep and year-round habitat for elk, antelope, mule and white-tailed deer.

"Thanks to our partners in this effort – The Conservation Fund, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Montana's

congressional delegation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, this important acquisition is now a reality," stated Rick Hotaling, BLM Field Manager in Butte. "BLM is pleased to have played a role in facilitating this acquisition for the public."

Funding for the final phase came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which receives revenue from offshore oil and gas drilling. Annual appropriations are made by congress for projects that meet the criteria and have public support.

Last year the Iron Mask acquisition was featured in a series of three articles in the Bugle magazine (July/Aug 2006), the official publication of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. To view the articles, visit [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org)



Critical winter range is provided by the mix of grassy slopes and sheltered draws on the Iron Mask Ranch. Photo courtesy of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

and click on news and media.

Iron Mask has been a focus of the Elkhorn Conservation Initiative, launched in 2003 by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Forest Service, BLM, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The goal of the initiative is to bring communities, landowners, and hunters together in a five-year effort to protect and enhance at least 20,000 acres of wildlife habitat in the Elkhorns.

## ATF Commends BLM Rangers

*Bart Fitzgerald, MSO*

Jason Caffey and Chuck Ward were recently recognized by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms for their law enforcement work at 17-Mile Shooting Area north of Billings.

ATF Resident Agent in Charge Ken Brey presented plaques to Rangers Ward and Caffey on July 12 at the MSO, expressing appreciation for their efforts in our nation's fight against violent crimes.

During routine patrols, both Chuck and Jason talked with many people about litter and other resource problems at the shooting area. As part of their investigative duties, Chuck and Jason observed suspicious activities and heard comments that helped them identify some target shooters as criminals prohibited from carrying or shooting firearms – on public lands or anywhere. In the last year, Chuck and Jason's efforts have lead to "felon in possession" federal indictments and convictions on several individuals.

Jason is a state staff ranger who works out of the MSO, and Chuck is a field staff ranger for the Billings FO.



Bart Fitzgerald, special agent in charge; Chuck Ward; Ken Brey, ATF resident agent in charge; Jason Caffey; and Howard Lemm, associate state director, at a July 12 ceremony recognizing Ward and Caffey for their law enforcement work at the 17-Mile Shooting Range north of Billings. Photo by Chris Tincher

# Limekiln Canyon Trail Completed

*Craig Flentie, Lewistown FO*

It's taken seven years and a long list of trail enthusiasts and supporters, but the last segment of the Limekiln Hiking Trail in the Judith Mountains northeast of Lewistown was recently completed.

The trail can now take hikers on a seven-mile loop through some great scenery on public and private lands around Limekiln Canyon.

The BLM's Lewistown Field Office began planning the hiking and horseback trail in 2000. Since then, many organizations and individual volunteers have worked to bring the trail to completion.

The Limekiln Trail would not be a reality today if Earlene Duvall had not allowed the BLM to purchase an easement across her private property along the South Fork of Burnette Creek in Limekiln Canyon. The parking lot, trailhead, informational signing and the portion of the trail that provides access for those with disabilities are all located on this easement.

With this easement serving as a starting point, BLM engineers began staking the trail location along contours, beside the South Fork of Burnette Creek, up to the Lewistown Overlook and then along the ridge around the canyon.

The task of finding a way to complete the construction work was under the purview of Rod Sanders, a BLM recreation planner in Lewistown. With minimal budgets at hand, Rod began promoting the trail construction work as National Public Lands Day and National Trails Day events, and the response from Lewistown has grown over the last several years.

"With hiking trails playing a larger and larger role in community development, we've

had great support from the local area when we've asked for help," Sanders offered. Outdoor enthusiasts such as Jim Hanson, Dave Mari, Hans Stokken, and many other individuals and organizations have contributed their time and effort to help with the trail work.

"The Montana Conservation Corp - Great Falls Chapter (MCC) has also been instrumental in constructing this trail; without such a great organization, the project wouldn't have gotten anywhere. The MCC invested hundreds of hours of hard work with shovels, axes and other hand tools on this trail," Sanders added.



Members of the Montana Conservation Corps were instrumental in completing this increasingly popular trail. *BLM photo*

The Judith Basin Backcountry Horsemen have also been great contributors. Their members have packed weed spray into remote portions of the trail to help control noxious weeds, cleaned and maintained the trail and helped locate potential new trails in the area. "We will certainly pursue more trail opportunities with them in the future," Sanders said.

This past summer the military also pitched in to help with trail



Firefighters from the Central Montana Fire Zone rolled up their sleeves and built trail like there was no tomorrow. *BLM photo*

maintenance. Six personnel from the Air Force's 819th Airborne (also known as the Red Horse Mechanized Squadron) from Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, cleared massive amounts of timber blow-down that littered the trail since severe storms blew through the area last winter and spring.

Numerous local BLMers also rolled up their sleeves to work on the trail. Staffers and managers from the Lewistown Field Office helped build, clean and maintain various segments of the trail during several National Trails Day events. They installed water bars, picked up litter, and sprayed noxious weeds on the trail and in the canyon bottom.



Members of the Red Horse Mechanized Squadron from Malmstrom Air Force Base helped groom portions of the trail. *BLM photo*

However, the trail wasn't finished until 20 seasonal firefighters from the Central Montana Fire Zone recently finished the last half mile of trail to complete the loop route. As Mother Nature would have it, this area hasn't had many fires and these firefighters were eager to do

some public service work. Their hard work to complete this loop trail is certainly appreciated.

"All in all there were many people and organizations with diverse interests and goals who pitched in to support this worthwhile effort. The Limekiln Hiking Trail will be a valuable

recreational asset that benefits area residents and visitors for years to come," according to Sanders.

For more information about the Limekiln Trail, please contact Rod Sanders at (406) 538-1905 or stop by the Lewistown BLM office at 920 NE Main Street.

## We 'Dig' Dinosaurs!

*Russ Pigors, South Dakota FO*

BLM employees from the South Dakota and North Dakota field offices were afforded the intriguing opportunity of taking part in one day of a weeklong paleontological dig at Mud Butte, near Rhame, N.D., this summer.

Lots of congenial folks participated, including retirees who volunteer nearly full time at the Pioneer Trails Regional Museum in Bowman, N.D.; Dean Pearson, the head of the local paleontological department; and John Hoganson, the North Dakota state paleontologist.

BLM employees who took part were Terry Chaplin, Bill Monahan, Meghan Monahan (volunteer), Russ Pigors, and Dennis Bucher from the South Dakota FO, and Lonny Bagley, John Hartley, and Marty Bonorden from the North Dakota FO.

We were excavating dinosaur bones from three dinosaurs at once: a triceratops, a hadrosaur, and one as yet unidentified. We observed one of the world's best terrestrial records of the K-T (Cretaceous - Tertiary) boundary, marking the extinction of the dinosaurs. The Mud Butte site has some excellent stratigraphic evidence of this K-T layer and may yield some excellent data about the environment of dinosaurs near the time



Site of the dinosaur dig at Mud Butte in North Dakota. *BLM photo*



John Hoganson works at the dig site. *Photo by John Hartley*

of extinction. Dean Pearson and John Hoganson believe this may be the site of the highest (latest) dinosaur found closest to this contact.

If we paid attention we could see 67-million year old plant roots, fossil leaves, and some odd little thingamajiggers that might be interesting under a microscope, as well as a live rattlesnake. A member of our group even found a dinosaur bone that the paleontologists hadn't yet flagged for excavation.

The excavation took place on BLM land, for which the Pioneer Trails Regional Museum in Bowman, N.D., received an excavation permit. Unfortunately, this area has had quite a bit of theft of dinosaur fossils in the past.

Part of the reason we were given the opportunity to work on a fossil excavation was to give us a better sense of the paleontological resources that we, in both North Dakota and South Dakota, are trying to protect.

This experience may well also affect how our planning teams address paleontological resources in significant sites like this as we start our resource management plans.

# Less Trash than Last Year!

## *Outreach efforts paying off*

*Dick Fichtler, Missoula FO*

On a sunny Saturday in late July, volunteers from all walks of life scoured the Blackfoot River of northwestern Montana for garbage. For the third year in a row this clean up effort was hosted by the Blackfoot Home and Community Club and sponsored by the BLM, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the University of Montana Campus Recreation Program.

This year more than 258 volunteers, including 38 divers and 30 boats, searched every inch of river bottom and shoreline for trash. This year's clean sweep

from the BLM's Whitaker Bridge to the community of Bonner collected 3,352 cans, 451 plastic bottles, 188 glass bottles (banned on the river), hundreds of pounds of rusted steel scrap, 100 shoes, eight hats, three wallets and two keys. The good news is we had over twice the number of volunteers and yet we found less garbage than previous years.

This year the BLM supported the cleanup work with rafts and staff members. Dick Fichtler, outdoor recreation planner, Jo Christensen, fisheries biologist, and John Wienert, forester, spent the day on rafts supporting two-person dive teams.

The river segment below Whitaker Bridge is an extremely popular section for inner tube floats. With no convenient way to hold on to empty cans, tubers are tempted to sink the empties. In response to this problem, the BLM



Dick Fichtler assists two divers during the clean up effort.



A portion of the garbage collected from the Blackfoot River.

each year purchases over 5,000 cheap mesh bags (really just 5 lb. potato bags) to hand out to tubers before they launch. In addition to being available at popular put-in points, the Blackfoot Home and Community Club also distributes these mesh bags to all of the tube rental and retail stores.

"The fact that we hit it so hard and got less says a lot," said Fichtler. "The public awareness and the mesh bag program are helping."

*(Photos courtesy of the Blackfoot Home and Community Club)*

## Montana BLM Volunteer Receives National Recognition

A longtime Montana BLM volunteer was recently named a National Public Lands Day 2007 Volunteer of the Year.

Illa Willmore is featured on the National Environmental Education Foundation's website ([http://www.publiclandsday.org/managers/2007\\_volunteers.htm](http://www.publiclandsday.org/managers/2007_volunteers.htm)) as one of this year's three winners nationwide. The award recognizes outstanding and dedicated public lands volunteers.

Illa was nominated for the award by Sandra Padilla, a park ranger for the Lewistown Field Office who has worked closely with Illa over the years. Although the award specifically recognizes



BLM volunteer Illa Willmore works on a National Public Lands Day project at James Kipp Recreation Area. As a longtime campground host at the site, Illa suggested the project and then helped see it through. *Photo by Sandra Padilla*

volunteers who participate in National Public Lands Day projects, Illa's volunteer service extends much further than the annual one-day event. In fact, Illa takes care of business at James Kipp Recreation Area throughout the year, and has logged a total of about 16,000 volunteer hours since 1993. Her service has already earned her the national BLM Making a Difference volunteer award, as well as the President's Call to Service Award.

The BLM would like to thank Illa for her years of dedicated volunteer service. Her knowledge of the area, her sincere personality and her willingness to share these traits makes a stop at the James Kipp Recreation Area an even nicer experience for many visitors. Illa is a great ambassador of the area's rural residents and the BLM, and is one reason some visitors return to Kipp year after year.

## 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.

### Retired since June 2007:

Fred Wambolt III – 30 years  
Supervisory Land Use Specialist, Miles City Field Office

Dennis J. Lingohr – 35 years  
Rangeland Management Specialist, Malta Field Office

Joyce Norris – 36 years  
Administrative Officer, Montana State Office

Bureau of Land Management  
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