Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Quarterly Newsletter

October November December 2017

Message from the Chairman, Dean Wang

This Quarterly Newsletter brings a tale of two weeks. Last week on Wednesday, the 13th, we preconditioned the heifer calves. It was 90 degrees and unbearably dusty.

Today it's 62 degrees and we've received 2.25+ inches of rain, beginning last Friday. The precipitation was Statewide for the most part, and certainly provided great relief on many fronts.

On this morning's monthly conference call, we welcomed two new Steering Committee Members: Lane Nordlund, Media Representative and Jen Obrigewitch, Society for Range Management (SRM) Representative. Thank you for your willingness to serve and participate.

Also, thank you to Haylie Shipp for her time and contributions to the GLCI Committee.

The monthly Montana GLCI committee conference calls continue to be well attended. Thank you for your participation and input.

The 7th National Grazing Lands Conference is scheduled for December 2018 in Reno, NV. Please plan to attend. I'm already looking forward to the drive across MT, eastern and southern ID and northern NV. The views will be second to none in December.

As grazers and land stewards, this year will continue to challenge us. Last week, we discussed the projected carrying capacities of the pastures at the ranch. We project to begin feeding on December 1st. We typically do not feed much hay until February 1st.

Sixty days of hay at 25# per head per day equals an additional 1500# of hay per cow, in an already short hay year. At $150/ton, that is $112.50 per head in additional, unanticipated cost.

In conclusion, suddenly the wheat harvest is complete, corn is chopped, and shipping is just about upon us. Fall sports are in full swing.

Best wishes and be safe. Please continue to pray for the safety of our troops and the wisdom of our leaders.

Dean Wang, Chairman

Early Weaning: A Good Bet for Beef Producers in Drought-Stricken Areas

Near the end of 2012, what was considered the worst U.S. drought in a half century wasn't getting any better for cattle producers in the Northern Plains. Montana, Minnesota, and the Dakotas had their driest September on record since 1895. Severe environmental conditions like drought threaten cattle production by reducing calf growth and weaning weights. In addition, drought can decrease cow weight and body condition as well as lead to stressful situations that affect the overall health and well-being of animals. Over the years, scientists at the Agricultural Research Service's Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory (LARRL) in Miles City, Montana, have studied management options that minimize the effects of harsh conditions on rangeland while maintaining an economically sound level of production. Animal scientist Richard Waterman and reproductive physiologist Thomas Geary at LARRL collaborated with researchers at Montana State University and the American Simmental Association in Bozeman, Montana, to evaluate early weaning—removal of animals from their mothers—of beef calves and its impact on cow, heifer (young female cow), and steer performance. Early weaning improves body weight gain of calves and the overall condition of the cow herd. The team confirmed that early weaning of spring-born calves offers a beneficial production alternative for beef producers when forage is insufficient. "When a calf is weaned or removed early from its mother, all nutrients that normally contribute to producing milk can go directly to the cow, which helps increase or sustain her body weight and condition," Waterman says. "The cow also eats less forage, which is especially important during drought."

Tallying the Benefits

Ranchers like Dean Peterson, who volunteered his cow/calf operation in Judith Gap, Montana, for ARS research, are no strangers to early weaning management practices. Peterson has been early weaning calves since the 1970s. "An issue of drought is raising enough summer and winter forage for cattle," Peterson says. "We used to run 500 cows and now we run 400, because it's about utilizing the grass and the best thing is to use less. We suffered a loss of income, but we're doing a better job taking care of the land and cattle." In the studies, calves were weaned early at 80 days and at a typical or normal age of 215 days on the Peterson's ranch and at LARRL. When compared, cows that had their calves weaned early weighed more and were in better body condition at the start of winter, which reduced the amount of harvested feedstuffs required to over winter these animals. "We learned a lot," Peterson says. "It confirmed some things we were doing and that early weaning is profitable, but it's a lot of work. If you wean them early, you have fewer problems and control the environment."Studies also demonstrated that early weaning increases the probability of heifers becoming pregnant earlier, Waterman says. In addition, early weaning did not decrease a heifer's chance of being retained as a replacement female in the herd. "The nice response was in body weight, especially with those young 2-year-olds that had their first calf," Waterman says. "It takes a cow about 5 years to reach its mature body weight. When young cows are removed, the demands of lactation ease. The cow can really start partitioning those nutrients towards meat and growth, go into winter in better condition, maintain that condition, and calf at better condition the next year."One objective is to save the body condition of cows, says John Paterson, former professor at Montana State University. "We don't want cows to get skinny or pull body condition down because they're lactating. The way you stop lactation is to get that calf early weaned. Get it off the mother."

Steer'ing in the Right Direction

In another experiment, steers were analyzed for body weight gain, feedlot performance, and carcass traits. The early-weaned steers reach maturity sooner and responded a little better. They had a higher rate of growth from the time of early weaning to normal weaning age. Scientists found no differences in any carcass characteristics between steers traditional weaned and early weaned at LARRL. "This research involved cattle that were on Montana ranches, so it was the real deal," Paterson says. "When you early wean and get those cattle into the feedlot, the quality and yield is very nice. A lot of ranchers have now figured that out, because it's an economic issue as much as anything else." However, some early weaned steers actually had a higher yield grid, revealing that early-weaned steers need to be identified prior to entering the feedlot. Producers who are working on a grid will benefit from having a higher quality carcass going into market, Waterman says. The research indicates how you manage early weaned steers can directly impact how they are graded at the packing placement. "Otherwise, the carcasses of early-weaned steers may be too fat and receive less desirable USDA yield grades when compared to those of traditionally weaned calves of similar genetics and age that are harvested around the same time," Waterman says. "If early-weaned steers are detected before entering the feedlot and harvested at an early age, producers can get market value for those carcasses." Scientists confirmed this strategy by closely monitoring the experimental steers from Judith Gap, taking ultrasound measurements of the rib eye area and back fat each month. Early weaned steers were then harvested at an earlier date than the rest of the animals. "When we weaned calves early, we had better carcasses at slaughter," Peterson says. "We had better meat."—**Sandra Avant,** ARS.

This research is part of Food Animal Production (#101), an ARS national program described at www.nps.ars.usda.gov. Richard Waterman is with the USDA-ARS Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory, 243 Fort Keogh Road, Miles City, MT 59301-4016; 406-874-8208, richard.waterman@ars.usda.gov.

New Members of the Montana GLCI Steering Committee

Lane Nordlund

Lane Nordlund, born and raised in Central Montana, has been involved in production agriculture his entire life. He is the owner Nordlund Communications which provides radio, TV and digital programming to Ag. media groups like the Northern Ag Network, RFD TV, the Public Lands Council, American Sheep Industry Association and for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's weekly TV show, Cattlemen to Cattlemen, which airs on RFD TV. In 2016 Lane received the Horizon Award from the National Association of Farm Broadcasting. The award recognizes young farm broadcasters who show promise in the industry. Even though Lane travels across the nation on a regular basis he is still committed to being involved in production agriculture. He and his dad have a small herd of cattle in Phillips County and Lane is always looking for new and innovative ways to make his hobby ranch more sustainable. Lane replaces Haylie Shipp on the steering committee, representing the media.

Jen Obrigewitch

Education: B.S. Integrated Ranch Management, Dickinson State University, 2001; M.S. Animal and Range Science, North Dakota State University, 2005

Occupation: Cattle Rancher; Range Science Lab Instructor at Dickinson State University, since 2006; USDA-NRCS Soil Conservationist 2005-2006.

Other Information: I have been a member of the Society for Range Management since I began grad school in 2002 and have attended eight national meetings. I presented my graduate research (Burning and Grazing System Interactions on Native Mixed Grass Prairie) at the 2004 meeting in Salt Lake City, UT and was awarded first place in the graduate student presentation competition. I was the secretary-treasurer for the North Dakota Chapter for five years and served one term as on board of directors for the Northern Great Plains section. I am the president-elect for the Northern Great Plains SRM section for 2018. In my time at Dickinson State, I started a range club at and have enticed over 20 students to join SRM and attend the national meeting. Although new to Montana's Grazing Lands Coalition, I have collaborated with several members of NDGLCI on tours and workshops. When not on the computer, I spend my time competing in rodeo and ranching with my husband three children north of Wibaux, MT. Jen replaces Chase Hibbard on the steering committee representing the Society for Range Management (SRM).

Top 10 Traits of a Successful Grazing Land Manager

By Jeff Goodwin

Pasture and Range Consultant, Nobel Foundation

Posted: April 1, 2017

According to recent data, the number of people moving to Southern Great Plains states like Texas is more than 1,400 per day. Private lands in the U.S. are undergoing significant changes. For example, more than 1 acre of farmland is lost per minute. Most of these lands are privately owned and play an unseen yet critical role in water and food sustainability, and both national and energy security. Recent data from Texas A&M University suggests that of the 26.9 million residents in Texas, less than 10 percent of those live in rural areas and less than 1 percent are private landowners.

That less than 1 percent of the Texas population encompasses the land stewards of today and tomorrow. Recent data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service also estimates the average age of today's agricultural producer is 58 years old. It's more important now than ever that we recognize and support successful land stewards providing the other 99 percent of the population ecological services such as clean water, clean air, sustainable livestock products and wildlife habitat across the Southern Great Plains. A survey was recently conducted of 14 resource professionals who have spent their entire working careers assisting these land stewards through the good and tough times. These professionals are from respected institutions such as the Noble Research Institute, Texas Christian University Ranch Management Program, the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and several private consultants. Together, these professionals total more than 469 years of experience. Based on their responses, we organized the top 10 traits of successful grazing land managers below.

10 Cautious risk taker

A cautious risk taker is someone with an open mind and willing to consider more effective and efficient methods of doing things. They often carefully consider new technologies and might implement a test on a small portion of their operation. Many times, they are willing to try new ideas and concepts. They take risks based on knowledge, experience, and sometimes hunches, but on a limited basis. They rarely risk everything and always operate within a safety margin.

9 Willingness to share knowledge

George Bernard Shaw once wrote, "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas." Most producers who are successful often get great ideas from their peers. They talk and learn from each other, many times gaining more satisfaction from seeing others succeed than themselves.

8 Have clear, measurable and attainable objectives

Successful outcomes are very often a result of carefully planned objectives. Clearly stated objectives keep sideboards on expectations. In order to achieve success, you must also know when you get there. It is often stated, "You can't manage what you don't measure." From available forage to production costs, it's hard to take advantage of an opportunity if you don't know you had an opportunity in the first place. Monitoring and keeping good records is a common practice among successful ranchers. A recent study conducted by Texas A&M indicated that less than 15 to 20 percent of producers monitored their forage, indicating 80 to 85 percent may not know how much forage they have or need. Most successful producers, at a minimum, consistently monitor rainfall, available forage, body condition score relative to class of livestock and reproductive stage, and market tendencies. Then, they act on monitoring triggers.

Top 10 Traits of a Successful Grazing Land Manager

7 Have a conservation ethic

In 1949, Aldo Leopold stated, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Successful managers want to leave their properties for the next generation better than when they received it. This requires an inner conviction to be a responsible caretaker of the land and all its parts.

6 Big picture thinker

Big picture thinkers don't get caught up in the weeds. Meaning, they focus on big picture outcomes and don't get derailed by minor setbacks. Where others tend to find problems, they try to find opportunities and structure their business to decrease risk and be positioned to capitalize on opportunities inherent in turbulent conditions. They understand how all the pieces of their operation are interrelated and find leverage to change the system for the better of the entire operation.

5 Lifelong learner

Successful managers often stay up-to-date of new techniques and technologies, and they are not afraid to cautiously try them. Often, they keep updated by staying active in professional development and associations. However, being involved is not enough. They have the ability to not just hear but listen. They understand that they can learn something from anyone, often learning the most valuable lessons from the most unlikely situations.

4 Have an inquisitive and passionate mind

Inevitably, if you ranch long enough somebody's going to say, "You're doing it wrong." Inquisitive and passionate ranchers often are the innovators in the crowd, asking questions and continually evaluating everything. Most are quick to disregard practices that do not work and search for new solutions. This requires a creative and innovative mind that is always thinking. They often reject the "that won't work here" or "this is how we've always done it" paradigm. They are keen observers, and many come from a nontraditional ranch background.

3 Understand ecological principles

Most successful managers have the ability to observe climate, animal and plant interactions, and they make management decisions that capitalize on those conditions. They understand the real purpose of roots versus leaves and where the plant makes its food. They may not know the name of the plant, but they understand plant selectivity and production differences. Most certainly, they understand soils are the building blocks. They know that soils are teeming with life and that biology drives most systems such as nutrient cycles, water cycle, etc.

2 Manage the ranch as a business

These are managers who make decisions based on the physiological needs of the vegetation, the nutritional and habitat requirements of the animals, and the financial realities of the ranching business enterprise. They scrutinize every dollar spent, limiting unnecessary and non-profitable inputs. They completely understand that profitability will often come down to how he or she controls costs.

1 Flexible and adaptive

Most successful managers are continually updating plans based on new knowledge. Many times the reason for their success is they are not rigidly managing. Stocking rates are the most critical decision a producer has to make, and this decision should be flexible with weather and markets. Many of the biggest ranch failures, ecologically and economically, have come from having rigid stocking rates despite changing forage conditions. Successful grazing land managers understand there are no easy answers, no simple solutions, no cookbook recipes for success, no magic wonder grass, no magic breed, and no magic herbicide. They succeed because they are flexible and adapt.

Concentrating on developing any single trait on this list is a move in the right direction. However, the best grazing land managers will possess some aspect of all of these traits.

Taken From: https://www.noble.org/news/publications/ag-news-and-views/2017/april/top-10-grazing-manager-traits/

Expert offers tips on how to help burned-out pastures recover *By Kay Ledbetter*

When working to recover pastures burned by wildfire, remember nature's time isn't banker time.

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Wildfire in the Great Plains seems to have become just another natural disaster, like blizzards and drought, which ranchers have to deal with. But a wildfire is different—it's more destructive, more devastating and seemingly more permanent.

But the prairie is an ecosystem accustomed to wildfires and from the ashes, the land will recover.

That's what a traveling caravan of ranchers, resource managers and others learned in a tour of the burned-out areas of the Texas Panhandle. The tour covered two counties in the northeast Texas Panhandle five months after the March wildfires to see how the burned land was healing.

"A wildfire is never a good thing, but we had good subsoil moisture and good follow-up moisture afterward and the fire was moving swiftly, so it didn't just cook plants, so recovery should be relatively quick," said Tim Steffens, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Service range management specialist in Canyon, who traveled with the producers to discuss pasture health. "That's what we want to look at, how is this land recovering?"

Plant responses and water are primary considerations, he said.

"It's all about the water in this part of the country," Steffens said. "We can't do anything about how much water falls, but we can do something about how much water gets in the ground, how long it stays there or whether it evaporates or goes through a plant first."

The key to stopping wind and water erosion across the burned countryside is to get cover; leave the vegetation, any vegetation, he said.

Steffens said many ranchers were calling after the fire inquiring about what to do with weeds.
"There's no such thing as bad cover after a fire," he said. "I don't care what is growing there, I just want something to grow there to hold the ground down, slow the wind down, cut the evaporative loss, get the ground covered up. Next year if you want to kill weeds, then maybe, but the first thing you need to do is get the ground covered up again.

"One thing I look for is a diversity of plants – some deep rooted, some fibrous root," Steffens said. "Some of you might not like old wild alfalfa and the cows might not eat it, but it has a large root that will get water deeper into the profile. It's a legume that will get nutrients to the grasses."

Another thing to look for is the density and continuity of cover, Steffens said. "Is that ground covered – every square inch – with something on top of it?"

Utilizing a weighing lysimeter, a study of different amounts of cover on the soil surface showed no consistent difference in evaporative losses for ground with 0% to 75% cover, he said. There was some improvement when cover reached 90%, but there was a big decrease in evaporative losses at 100% cover.

"The more cover we can get and the longer we can keep it there, the less water we will have run off and the less soil will be carried away and the better things are going to do. The litter cover and leaf cover will keep that soil from blowing away.

"That's what we hope for if we give the pastures enough time to produce the regrowth and cover up the ground," Steffens said. "Also, standing cover will help collect the snow and keep it from blowing off; 10 inches of snow is about an inch of moisture and that can make a big difference at spring green-up."

After a disturbance like fire, forbs, what many folks call weeds, are often some of the first plants to come in, he said.

"You might get some weeds or forbs first, and some may not be exactly what you look forward to having in your pasture – wavy leaf thistle, buffalo burr, silver leaf nightshade," Steffens said. "Why are the forbs there? Mother Nature is not a nudist – she covers herself up with whatever she has to grow."

In addition to being deep tap-rooted plants, some forbs are actually higher in protein, which can improve diet quality and animal performance when mixed with grass. And, their deep roots loosen the soil up and break up compaction. They provide cover and help get more water into the ground eventually.

Expert offers tips on how to help burned-out pastures recover *By Kay Ledbetter*

"Might we need to kill those weeds/forbs at a later date? Possibly. But often, as you heal things up, they tend to go away," Steffens said. "Don't worry so much about what you don't want in the pasture, worry more about taking care of the stuff you do want.

"You might get three awn, scurfpea, curlycup gumweed, annual broomweed. If they aren't spreading too quickly, a few are OK. Ask yourself if anything you're doing may be affecting them. If you are getting less and less with what you are doing, you are good."

He said the questions to ask are: What does it take to kill it and what else might come in?

"Be careful what you wish for," Steffens said. "Make sure you know why you are using herbicides. You need to understand why things are how they are and fix that before treating. Is it a problem with lack of cover as a result of repeated grazing or other disturbance or what?"

He said in cases where the fire only burned a portion of a pasture and the cattle need to be grazing there, it might be prudent to fence off the burned areas at least temporarily to help it recover.

"When the cattle are brought back into a pasture, they will pick the burned area first to graze because it has a higher proportion of green material and less old dead grass," Steffens said. "They will be hard on it because that's where they concentrate. If you don't want them there, you have to do something to keep them off, until the cover is back. I have seen the preference for these burned areas last as long as two years."

Another thing to understand, he said, is cattle will usually graze the native pasture before they will graze the introduced grasses like Old World bluestem or weeping lovegrass.

"If you have 200 acres of weeping lovegrass and 200 acres of native grass inside the same fence, you really only have 200 acres to graze," Steffens said. "If part of a pasture burned, the burned part is how much will actually be grazed, because that is where the cows are going to go unless they are fenced off. You need to take this into consideration when you are deciding stocking rates."

Wrapping up, he said the take home lessons are: "We are not saying don't ever spray weeds; we are not saying always come in and graze or don't come in and graze, or to stay out for a set period of time. What I feel comfortable saying is that right after a fire, I don't think the forbs are causing a lot of problems.

"You have to be careful drawing sweeping conclusions when there are a lot of factors that enter into every situation," Steffens said. "There are a lot of things that enter into the decisions, everyone doing what they think is best. Try to be sure it is going to pay for itself over the course of time. Think about what you do want and manage for that, don't worry so much about what you don't want that may go away as you nurture those things you like."

After looking at many different pastures under different circumstances, he said the best thing to do is watch how these develop over time and learn what to expect.

"No matter what has been done, no threshold has been crossed because of the wildfire that a pasture can't come back," Steffens said. "Since the ice age, this area has been burned under all kinds of conditions and life goes on. Maybe

you spray next year. Maybe you shred. Maybe you get cows to eat what you don't want in there.

"The wonderful thing about all of this is you can't mess it up so bad in a year, I don't think, that you can't get it back, eventually. But bear in mind, nature's time ain't banker time. A little deferment and TLC now can make for a quicker turnaround."

Ledbetter is a writer for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service based in Amarillo, Texas.

http://www.beefmagazine.com/pasture/expert-offers-tips-how-help-burned-out-pastures-recover, August 24, 2017

2017 Montana Range Tour by Marni Thompson, NRCS, Great Falls, MT

As NRCS employees, deadlines and paperwork can be overwhelming, but attending the Montana Range Tour and hearing producer's excitement over changes they had made were just what the doctor ordered. We loaded the buses on yet another smoky September day and headed to the Dovetail Ranch located in the boonies, 45 minutes north of Winnett.
Craig Iverson gave a great presentation of his large scale water development that included a deep well, 2- 15,000 gallon storage tanks, 25 miles of pipe & 19 water tanks. The water development and 19 miles of cross fences converted a 3 pasture system to a 9 pasture system. The new grazing system includes full season rest for one pasture each year followed by a deferment for the other pastures. Grazing in each pasture is no longer than 30 days. All of Craig Iverson's cross fences were 2-wire permanent electric. Craig is sold on his new fence and won't be converted back to barbwire. The Iverson Family, with typical rancher innovation, marked the fence for sage grouse with heavy duty twine instead of vinyl markers. It has worked really well once they figured out the right knot that wouldn't slide on the smooth wire.
After a quick bite to eat at the old Watzenluft homestead, we loaded the dusty bus and headed to the 44 Ranch ran by the Delaney Family. I think NRCS had their quota for compliments filled just after Mike Delaney started his presentation. Mike was originally very skeptical of the government but couldn't say enough good about all of the help he has received from the NRCS. Mike installed water developments, and cross fences to facilitate a grazing system which incorporated a year of full season rest followed by a year of deferment. Mike can't believe the difference a full season of rest has made to his rangeland. Even in a drought year he has plenty of grass and is seeing more sage grouse than he has in years. Mike Delaney and his family also recently entered into a permanent easement with Montana Land Reliance. Mike helpfully gave some tips for planning an easement, especially on the tax consequences. We ended the tour with an awesome demonstration of drones and Cowcams, which are used on the ranch to check cows and water tanks. The day concluded with great tasting beef at the Eagles in Lewistown and our uplifting keynote speaker Lane Nordlund.
The second day started under the shade of a cottonwood tree on the banks of Big Spring Creek. Karen Hoffman and an FWP biologist explained the Big Spring Restoration project which was no small feat. The large spring creek was straightened in this section in 1961 and has since been experiencing severe erosion that has actually affected landowners both up and down the creek as well as the town of Lewistown. The effects of the creek straightening was the beginning of the 310 law in Montana. The project included adding meanders back to the creek, tree plantings, grass seeding, and fencing. Trout are already responding to their new habitat. This was a very expensive projects and included lots of partners that came to the table. After wandering the banks and watching trout sipping flies, we headed to the big town of Winifred. We had awesome burger at the community center and had an unexpected tour of the museum, sign shop and International Suites. Yes, International Suites in Winifred. It is a hotel with each room representing a certain location in the world. The master suite includes statues brought in from Greece. Pretty fine digs for hunting in the breaks.
The tour ended at the Wickens Ranch hunting lodge where Matt and his wife operate a diversified operation consisting of livestock, feedlot and an outfitting business. Matt Wickens inspired the group with some major changes he has made on his operations with yearlings, temporary electric fence, water developments and intensive grazing. Matt can't believe the positive changes that he has seen on his rangeland by incorporating a grazing system that allows adequate recovery time for his plants. Other interesting operation changes are the use of swath grazing vs. feeding hay bales in the winter time and changing his calving date from Feb/March to May/June. In conclusion, we would like to thank the Petroleum and Fergus Conservation Districts who hosted a great tour and are an inspiration to all.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Stacey Barta, Coordinator
Rangeland Resources Program

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September 26, 2017

DNRC cuts interest rates on rangeland loans

HELENA, Mont. – Montana ranchers considering rangeland improvement projects received a boost this month, when the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) reduced interest rates for Rangeland Improvement Loans from 3 percent to 1.5 percent.

"It's been a challenging summer for our farmers and ranchers," said Stacey Barta, Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). "The state's Rangeland Resources Executive Committee requested the interest rate reduction to support producers dealing with the impacts of wildfires and drought."

Started in 1979, the low-interest loan program provides added incentives for producers to undertake rangeland improvement and development projects. Water storage, fencing, and stock water tanks are a few of the more common improvements. In addition to benefits for the ranch operation, Barta said the projects often improve streams and riparian areas and rangeland health, which in turn benefit wildlife, combat invasive weeds and reduce soil erosion.

The maximum loan amount is $75,000, with repayment scheduled for a maximum of ten years with annual installments. Producers apply to their local Conservation District; the application is then reviewed by DNRC.

For more details, contact Bill Herbolich with DNRC at (406) 444-6668, or visit http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/conservation-districts/range-improvement-loan-program

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

2017 Report of Projects and Activities

Demonstration Projects

Montana Range Days- June 2017

Montana GLCI has been a long-time supporter of Montana Range Days. This premier range education event is Montana's largest venue and started in Jordan in 1977. This event is held annually and rotates across the state to draw in people from all corners of Montana. In 2017, Montana Range Days was held in Red Lodge and hosted by the Carbon Conservation District.

Lake County Grazinglands Soil Health Assessments

This project is centered in Lake County and all data collected and analyzed will take place on private working agricultural lands. A total of 10 landowners have agreed to participate in these soil health assessments. The purpose of the study is to attempt to quantify soil health changes that occur as a result of management-related grazing improvements and on a broad scale with multiple producers. This project is expected to run for 10 years.

The Rumen and the Root: Exploring the Correlation between Herd Efficiency and Soil Health in Grazing Systems

The project includes four producers that represent the typical grazing scenarios in Pondera County. Two producers are located approximately 30 miles east of Conrad, where grazing systems are mainly introduced pasture and a limited amount of native range. The other two producers are located 45 miles west of Conrad, on the Rocky Mountain front, where grazing systems are predominately native range. With a national spotlight on soil health, producers in Pondera County are focusing more and more on this topic. Historically, soil health studies in Pondera County have focused solely on cropping systems, with little to no emphasis on grazing. Producers want to know how incorporating grazing in cropping systems will affect the system, how different grazing strategies affect soil health, and if there is a correlation between soil health and herd efficiency. This project will investigate all these questions by monitoring four distinctly different grazing systems found throughout Pondera County.

Annual Events and Educational Activities

Winter Grazing Seminar- January 2017

The Winter Grazing Seminar is an annual event, sponsored by the Rangeland Resource Executive Committee and the local conservation district. The event rotates across Montana. In 2017, Valley County Conservation District hosted the grazing seminar in Glasgow.

Rangeland Day at the Capitol Rotunda- February 2017

The first ever Rangeland Day at the Capitol Rotunda was held on Friday, February 17, 2017. The event was hosted by the Rangeland Resources Executive Committee (RREC) and joined by agricultural partners in rangeland resources from across the state. The day was a celebration of rangeland, Montana's largest natural resource, through education and awareness. It was also an opportunity to showcase rangeland's economic, social, and environmental importance to our state.

Pictured left to right: Jay Bodner, Montana Stockgrowers Association and ex-officio Montana GLCI; Diane Ahlgren, RREC; John Hollenback, Montana GLCI and RREC; Carole Hollenback; Kirt Walstad, NRCS and Montana GLCI co-coordinator; Lisa Coverdale, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana, and Nikki Rife, NRCS.

Montana GLCI Steering Committee

Dean Wang, Chairman, Baker
Montana Stockgrowers Association

Jim Willis, Vice Chairman, Wilsall
Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Bob Lee, Lewistown
National Cattleman's Beef Association

John Hollenback, Gold Creek
Rangeland Resources Executive Committee

Lon Reukauf, Terry
Montana Association of Grazing Districts

Ben Lehfeldt, Lavina
American Sheep Industry

Lane Nordlund, Bozeman
Media (Nordlund Communications, LLC)

Ron Stoneberg, Hinsdale
Montana Association of Conservation Districts

Vacant
Society for Rangeland Management

Co-Coordinators

Carla Lawrence, Boyd
Dba Carla at the Ranch

Kirt Walstad, Bozeman
Natural Resources Conservation Service

GLCI

Montana Range Tour- September 2017

This annual RREC, Montana GLCI partner, outreach event rotates across the state. In 2017, this event was held in Lewistown and hosted by the Petroleum and Fergus County Conservation Districts.

Get on the Bus! The Soil Health Bus: September 2017.

This bus tour, hosted by the Montana Soil and Water Conservation Society, will leave Billings, MT, and head into North and South Dakota looking at research and on-the-ground improvements in soil health.

Recent News and Activities

Texas Grazing Conference

Bob Lee, member of the Montana GLCI and the National Grazing Lands Coalition, was a featured speaker during the Texas Grazing Conference held this past August in Waco, TX.

Cherry Creek Ranch Tour

The Cherry Creek Ranch, owned by Lon Reukauf, is currently in a drought situation that Prairie County hasn't seen the like of since 1931. Every time we talked in the past month, Lon would say, "If I'd known it was going to be this bad, I don't think I would have volunteered to host a tour."

But it became an opportunity to have a boldly illustrated conversation about resilience, planning ahead, the value of conservation, stewardship and doing the best you can with what you have.

The attendees included ranchers, chefs, foodservice professionals, journalists, conservationists, wildlife advocates, researchers, academics....cow people, bird people, fish people, food people, word nerds, radioheads, and on and on. I think each of them walked away with a better understanding and greater respect for the challenges the ranching community faces to produce the food they enjoy.

"What you do during the drought, once it's that dry, really isn't that relevant. It's what you do before and after that grass is dry and dormant that's really going to matter," Lon says.

Photos and writing courtesy of Laura Nelson, owner LCN Communications.

Lon Reukauf, Cherry Creek Ranch, Montana and Regional Environmental Stewardship Award winner for 2016 and member of the Montana GLCI, takes a knee during the tour

Participants of the Cherry Creek Ranch Tour.

Montana

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Co-Coordinators

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7th National Grazing Lands Conference

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

DECEMBER 2nd -5th, 2018 RENO, NEVADA
7th National Grazing Lands Conference (7NGLC)

The National Grazing Lands Coalition's Board of Directors are hosting a 7th National Grazing Lands Conference! The 7NGLC will be held at the Peppermill in Reno, Nevada, December 2nd-5th, 2018. Be sure to subscribe to our eNewsletter and the Grazing Conference Updates to stay abreast of our planning progress, speakers and other events surrounding this MUST ATTEND conference!

Random Acts of Kindness

The Holiday Season is the not the only time to practice Random Acts of Kindness. Here are some ways you can practice Random Acts of Kindness everyday.

1. Thank a Veteran; 2. Help someone carry their groceries to the car; 3. Pay for coffee for a person in line ahead of you; 4. Let someone go ahead of you in line; 5. Cook a meal for a neighbor or elderly person; 6. Smile at a Stranger; 7. Shovel the walk for a neighbor; 8. Write a friend a letter, a real letter on paper. 9. Bake something delicious for the office; 10. Call someone you have not talked to in a long time; 11. Give someone a hug for no particular reason; 12.Take an umbrella to work and lend it out if it is raining; 13. Help a neighbor with their broken down equipment; 14. Hold the elevator; 15. Cede the parking spot; 16. Take time, even when you are in a hurry; 17. Say I love you to those you love; 18. Visit an old friend; 19. Return someone's grocery cart when you are going in to shop; 20. Tell someone they look great. From the Montana GLCI to you and yours, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! See you in 2018!