Taking a look inside the 2014 LaMarche Timber Harvest

Clockwise from top: Sean Steinbach, second from right, Department of Natural Resource Conservation forester and project foreman for the 2014 LaMarche Timber Harvest outside Deer Lodge, points to a section of the LaMarche Creek area that was improved by the harvest. The Deer Lodge Valley as seen from within the harvest area. A slash pile sits below young trees in the harvest area. Cattle from Montana State Prison graze along the road in the harvest area, which is part of the prison’s ranch. Leader photos by James S. Rosien

“Part of the fire hazard reduction included “nutrient recycling,” which is done by leaving material that could not be harvested on the ground so the nutrients get absorbed into the soil and so if a fire does come through the area it goes straight to the ground, leaving its severity, Steinbach said. The diverse ages of the forest – with trees ranging from 20 to 80 years old – also helps reduce the fire hazard and risk from insects, he said. “The prison has always been really proactive up here, they’ve done some real good work. They’re really into the management of their land up here,” Flynn said.

Other improvement included increasing the water quality of LaMarche Creek, as grass was seeded in the area to reduce sedimentation, as well as road reconstruction. “They did an exemplary job... The high quality of work helps us tell the story. It’s not exciting, it’s just straightforward forestry as we practice it today,” Ziesak said. “It does make a significant difference. We’re doing a lot of this in countries that don’t normally see this kind of work.” Forests in Focus grants are awarded every two years, and in the period the LaMarche Creek project was approved it was one of only 10 out of 23 proposals to get the green-light, Ziesak said. “I was amazed at the quality of the grant proposals,” Ziesak said. “Scoring them is hard, that’s why we score them individually – it would be too hard to score them against each other.”

About 4,000 acres of forestland statewide will be treated by the grant by the time it runs its course, Ziesak said.
By Kelley Hirning, Communications Manager, Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

Forest restoration, fuels treatments and wildfire preparedness initiatives are ongoing in the southeastern part of Montana.

Last month, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) organized a tour of different Southeastern Montana forest fuel reduction projects to highlight all the work that is being done in the area to reduce wildfire risk and threats to the public and the environment.

In addition to DNRC studies and projects, the Big Horn County Forest Protection Board is also continuing its work to protect forest lands.

DNRC Eastern Land Office Area Manager Chris Pileski showcased some of the projects that were a result of the partnership of those involved, as well as the various state and federal grants that provided funding.

Since 2009, DNRC has used state and federal funds to help restore forest lands on 30 properties, totaling approximately 4,000 acres of private, tribal, and state trust land, U.S. Forest Service land and on the property of two private landowners.

DNRC Forest restoration, fuels treatments and wildfire preparedness initiatives are ongoing in the southeastern part of Montana. In addition to DNRC studies and projects, the Big Horn County Forest Protection Board is also continuing its work to protect forest lands. The group visited projects on state trust land, U.S. Forest Service land and on the property of two private landowners.

To see funding page 6.

DNRC Eastern Land Office Area Manager Chris Pileski leads a tour of the Ashland Forest Products Mill in Ashland, which is utilizing Forest in Focus funds.

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To see funding page 6.
Continued from pg. 2

...are that affected the Big Horn Reservation again. Joe: Yes, they still are.

BHCN: That and all trash is a big “closed” sign there.

Joe: I do believe all the trash is a big “closed” sign there.

BHCN: Research has shown that the rubber, plastic and flash won’t break down.

Joe: I will, but right now I better get outside and do my thing.

BHCN: I see simple patterns and they don’t take as much synthetic material. They have hopper patterns out there now with lots of rubber, plastic and flash. They look really good, but garbage service is definitely a problem again.

LOCAL:

2016-2017

SCHOOL DISTRICTS 17-1 & NEW STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Go to the school where you want to go!

Craw Agapone School, Grades K-3
Fort Smith Elementary School, Grades K-5
Browns Park School, Grades 6-8
Highland Intermediate School, Grades 6-8
Highland High School, Grades 9-12

Parents or legal guardians must be present.

Bring your Student.

Immediate Indefinite Suspension

MAY BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE PROOF OF RESIDENCE

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ALONG the river

Bringing home the return derches started bringing back many problems. The last time we went, we were able to find a better job.

Joe: Yes, they still are. We’ve got to get it then, they’ll do better than last year.

BHCN: The county has closed all their garbage dumps on the reservation, how has that affected the people?

Joe: There’s been a change there. The Big Horn River Foundation’s project of turning the St. Joe: Well, you’re on hold with the call center. We’re still on it, but it’s on hold.

BHCN: With the dump closed, it did seem like it’s so much easier to get rid of trash. Are you still dumping garbage at the park?

Joe: Yes, that’s where there are now, but there is a big “closed” sign there. Also, I see people have dumped their garbage, so it looks like the remains of a building here and there. Something they just dumped it over the edge of the dump area and let it all slide down into the river. As a result, instead of putting it into the container, they just dump it over the bank into the river, just a real mess. It looks terrible and we have to clean it all up from there.

BHCN: My understanding is that the Tribe is signing an agreement with the county.

Joe: That’s true. Several years ago, when the garbage dumps went on strike in New York, many people were trying to pile up the side of the river. They were having a hard time.

BHCN: How long is the agreement that they may be opening up the dump on the reservation again?

Joe: You know, I haven’t heard anything about that, but next year they may be opening it up. They may be using the west side.

BHCN: So, the county has closed all their garbage dumps on the reservation, how has that affected the people?

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Joe: That’s true. Several years ago, when the garbage dumps went on strike in New York, many people were trying to pile up the side of the river. They were having a hard time.
Hazardous fuel reduction, logs for jobs, stream restoration and improved habitat for fish, wildlife and cattle on the Montana State Prison ranch are the result of a Forests in Focus Initiative (FIFI) project.

The after-effects of the catastrophic mountain pine beetle outbreak has resulted in a forest health crisis throughout Montana and the West, and the availability of timber continues to be a challenge for Sun Mountain Lumber and other mills.

FIFI is a $3 million, state-funded cost-share program designed to increase the rate of forest restoration and/or hazardous fuel reduction, put logs on trucks for jobs, and to improve watersheds and wildlife habitat on non-industrial private, state and tribal lands. Since FIFI was started in 2014, there have been 24 projects across the state completed.

“So far it’s been a good program,” said Roger Ziesak, grant manager and forest practices specialist with the Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). “We’re getting some really nice work done all around the state. This project benefits the MSP ranch and local business.”

Sean Steinbach, DNRC forester and project foreman, explained that in 2009-10 federal stimulus funds were used on the south end of MSP ranch property to jump start harvest and restoration by picking up beetle killed timber that was sent to the pulp mill. He and Steve Flynn, with Sun Mountain Lumber, agreed it was expensive because the steep terrain required 800-1000 feet of cable to bring the timber uphill.

“There was a lot of dead timber lying on the ground, but I’m really happy that is cleaned up in case there is a fire,” Steinbach said.

The $200,000 grant from the state FIFI Fire Suppression Fund and a collaborative effort by DNRC, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Sun Mountain Lumber and Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) made the recently completed commercial forest thinning project possible. The grant was awarded in February 2015 with work starting last summer.

Steinbach said, “Sun Mountain Lumber put in more money than the state; the only grant where more money was contributed by a partner than the grant.”

Rich Lane, of Willis Enterprise that operates the Bonner pulp mill said, “This is state money and we want to invest wisely; that has been done here.”

Recently DNRC representatives, county commissioners, and industry partners toured portions of the completed 470-acre project on the north end of the prison ranch where more than two million board feet of timber was harvested.

Sun Mountain Logging did commercial thinning of Douglas fir and Lodgepole pine at 30-foot spacing for a natural forest look with trees left being a variety of sizes and ages to reduce the potential for insect infestation and the possibility of a forest fire starting. It will also force a crown fire to the ground where firefighters can battle it. The work provided 550 loads of saw logs to Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge, 60 loads of pulp logs to the pulp mill in Bonner and 200-300 tons of rails to build a fence along LaMarche Creek.

Ziesak said best management practices (BMPs) were used in every aspect of road construction and harvest to ensure minimal soil disturbance, to protect water quality and disturbed areas will be seeded with grass.
FWP was concerned about a pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout in LaMarche Creek that was being affected by sediment flowing into the stream from poorly maintained roads after storms.

The project included road maintenance to prevent sediment, obliteration of a number of unnecessary roads, realignment of the stream that had ‘blown out’ its banks in places, and installation of culverts. Now a 2.5 mile fence will be built along both sides of the stream to protect the riparian area, with water gaps installed for the cattle to use.

In addition to the logging, sawmill and pulp mill jobs, and watershed restoration, MCE received money from the timber sale that Ross Wagner, MSP ranch manager, said will be used for vocational training of inmates and DNRC trust land on the south end made money for the school trust fund.

Steinbach said, “This project could not have been done if the sawmill were not here.”

Side Bar:
Since 1990 more than 30 Montana sawmills have closed and the Montana Wood Products report for 2015 states only 15 mills with more than 10 employees are left in the Montana. In 2013 the manufacturing segment of Montana’s economy contributed $14.1 billion to the state’s economy. Of the 22,148 manufacturing jobs in Montana, wood products manufacturing ranked first with about 7,000 workers.
Steve Bullock and is aimed at wildfire suppression money to the end, we are utilizing excess real gem that should be a model of logging and litigation this is a proposal.

In the lower Blackfoot Valley, eight Clearwater-Blackfoot Project and place on The Nature Conservancy's local mills. The operation will take supply 3,166 tons of materials to between this December and trees that are left.

create well-paying jobs and program will make homes safer, Montana's Forests in Focus Submitted by The Nature Forest Restoration Creating jobs in Western Montana Submitted by The Nature Conservancy HELENA - A new grant from Montana's Forests in Focus program will make home safer, create well-paying jobs and improve forest health -- all at the same time. The $249,535 grant will be used to thin out dense forest to reduce the hazards posed by wildfire. Besides reducing the fuel load for any potential fire, the work will open up the forest, allowing more light and moisture to nurture the trees that are left.

The work will create 17 jobs between this December and November of next year and will supply 3,166 tons of materials to local sawmills. The operation will take place on The Nature Conservancy’s Clearwater-Blackfoot Project and neighboring properties located in the lower Blackfoot Valley, eight miles east of Bonner.

Jeff Holliday, owner of Timber Trail and Spar, who will perform the thinning, took the initiative to connect the landowners and put together the successful proposal. “In the highly contentious world of logging and litigation this is a real gem that should be a model for states around the country. In the end, we are utilizing excess wildfire suppression money to improve Montana forests to the benefit of everyone and everything involved,” said Holliday. The Forests in Focus program is an initiative created by Governor Steve Bullock and is aimed at promoting sustainable forest management across the state. The program is funded by the Department of Natural Resources’ fire suppression fund. In 2013, the Montana legislature passed a bill that allows some of these funds to be spent on fuels reduction and forest restoration.

Key strategies of Forests in Focus are targeted at increasing the scale and pace of restoration on forests in Montana. Montana’s Forests in Focus Program is a wonderful way to bring together multiple landowners to reduce the fuels that feed wildfires that put homes, lives and habitat at risk,” said landowner Steve Atkins, whose land will be part of the thinning operation under the grant. “The governor and legislature are to be commended for working together to make this possible.”

That’s a sentiment echoed by Chris Bryant, Western Montana Land Protection Director for The Nature Conservancy. “Governor Bullock has continued to demonstrate his commitment to sound forest management and rural economies through the Forest in Focus grant awards,” said Bryant. “The Conservancy is happy to have partnered with neighboring landowners and a local forestier with the initiative to put this project together.”

The ultimate goal of the operation is to restore the open, park-like condition of the fire-dependent ponderosa forests common before a century of fire suppression allowed them to become crowded with young and unhealthy Douglas firs, and social submit and complete monitoring projects. Examples of monitoring that has occurred in part due to this funding include citizen science stream monitoring conducted by students and partners, efforts to look at turbidity, flow and temperatures of local streams; interested foresters and partners to evaluate effectiveness of treatment; and preliminary testing to determine efficacy of seed mixes used on disturbed areas. The operation is designed to detect forest carnivores through winter track surveys and bait stations.

As in every year since selection as a CFLRP project, the 2016 fiscal year report for all three ranger districts has been summarized and presented to Congress. Accomplishments are tallied to meet quantitatively-measured goals set by the SWCC and also described in a narrative. Examples of 2016 reported accomplishments include: 1,267 acres of invasive weed management; 30 miles of stream habitat restored; 16 miles of system road maintained; 12,213 CCF volume of timber sold and 2,515 acres of hazardous fuels treated.

To date, we have exceeded our 10-year goal for six of our 18 targets (vegetation management; road storage or decommissioning, stream crossings improved, trail decommissioning and improvement, and campusec) and our national audience. We are at least 60 percent of the way toward reaching another five targets. We are less than 50 percent of the way toward six of our targets (vegetation reduction outside the WUI, road Best Management Practice (BMP) work and maintenance, road storage or decommissioning, stream crossings improved, trail decommissioning and improvement, and campusec) and our national audience. We are at least 60 percent of the way toward reaching another five targets. We are less than 50 percent of the way toward six of our targets (vegetation reduction outside the WUI, road Best Management Practice (BMP) work and maintenance, road storage or decommissioning, stream crossings improved, trail decommissioning and improvement, and campusec). However, many of these goals are included in activities that haven’t been identified and proposed in the Center Horse Landscape Restoration project we are looking forward to a Record of Decision this year. It is an honor to share the news that this year USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell recognized the SWCC and the monitoring Award for Sustaining Forest and Grasslands. We sincerely congratulate and thank the SWCC for their dedication and commitment that has led to successful outcomes. Building on past successful collaborative efforts, the SWCC has continued working relationships built on trust and a shared commitment to the future of this incredible landscape where we are privileged to work.

In addition to the ongoing CFLRP program that we coordinate with Lincoln and Swan Lake Ranger Districts, we also have our regular programs that are also critical to offer the goods and services desired by the local community and our national audience. We continue to sit at the table with the local trails planning group led by Clearwater Resource Council, we are actively engaged in wilderness stewardship management of the Scapegoat Wilderness as part of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, we administer a lands program which permits uses of the National Forest for everything from road use, recreation residences and recreation events.

We have been working closely with the Drift Riders Snowmobile Club to permit a new grooming shed which will provide better access and use for this maintenance activity which is tied to our agreement with them and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

We are looking forward to working with Camp Paxson on a proposal to utilize this awesome and historic facility year round.

We are responding to the Federal Highway Department on their need to clear trees to facilitate safer travels. We will continue to keep you informed of projects and activities.

The Seeley Lake RD of the Lolo National Forest is looking forward to greeting community members and meeting new faces at our Christmas Cowboy Breakfast and Tree Dec. 15 from 4-6 p.m. Appetizers and beverages will be served - up for 100 miles range. We will be happy to share information about our past season and upcoming program of work for the winter and coming year. We hope to see you there!

To our health, Rachel Feigley by Rachel Feigley District Ranger, Seeley Lake Ranger District, Lolo National Forest

As District Ranger for the Seeley Lake Ranger District, I’ve been sharing with you, through the Pathfinder, some of the details of the project work that the Seeley Lake Ranger District was involved with and what that provides to the community of Seeley Lake and the Seeley Lake RD, along with this edition, I wanted to share some information about one of the things that makes the Seeley Lake RD unique and successful in its ability to get work done on the ground: its designation as a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) landscape.

Congress under Title IV of Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, established the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (http://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/CFLRP/overview.shtml). This law allowed that areas were selected in collaborative efforts to obtain funding to implement landscape restoration. It is too much information to share everything here but I want to provide a brief synopsis.

At about this same time the CFLRP Act was enacted, the South West Continent Collaborative (SWCC) was actively engaged in developing a vision for the 20-year goals and a restoration strategy for what became known as the SWCC landscape. It was delineated to be approximately 1.5 million acres in size, consisting of portions of the Blackfoot, Clearwater and Swan River watersheds and home to the small communities of Condon, Seeley Lake, Greenough, Ovando, Helmville, Postonac and Lincoln. The SWCC’s goals and strategies represent diverse interests, including community conservation, rural development, recreation, federal and state management agencies, timber industry, habitat quality, watershed protection, recreation, rural development and educational interests. The SWCC was involved in a formal proposal to Congress and the SWCC landscape encompassing the Seeley Lake RD and neighboring Lincoln RD and Swan Lake RD, was selected as a project. The purpose of the CFLRP is to encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of the nation’s forest landscapes. We are headed into the eighth, of 10 years, provided for CFLRP as a part of the SWCC landscape restoration strategy. The project is specific to the Seeley Lake RD, and has enabled the Seeley Lake RD to implement a variety of projects that are specifically aligned with or designed to meet goals that were developed by the SWCC including restoring forest and aquatic ecosystem function, improving landscape-level resilience, and accessibility, enhancing recreational experiences and to reduce risks for those living in the wildland urban (WUI).

Of the funding received, the CFLRP received that 10 percent be spent toward monitoring. Four monitoring subcommittees for vegetation, wildlife, aquatics, and social submit and complete monitoring projects. Examples of monitoring that has occurred in part due to this funding include citizen science stream monitoring conducted by students and partners, efforts to look at turbidity, flow and temperatures of local streams; interested foresters and partners to evaluate effectiveness of treatment; and preliminary testing to determine efficacy of seed mixes used on disturbed areas. The operation is designed to detect forest carnivores through winter track surveys and bait stations.

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To our health, Rachel Feigley

Stay in touch with the Valleys!
Hungry Horse News

By ANNA ARVIDSON

A forest project in Bigfork is helping a mill in Columbia Falls and keeping a homeowner’s property safer from wildfires.

Dr. John Christiansen is using grant money from the Forest in Focus Initiative to improve the forest on his land.

Started in 2014, the Forest in Focus initiative, driven by Gov. Steve Bullock, sets aside $2 million for work on private, state and tribal lands, and another $1 million for federal lands. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation is tasked with dispersing grants.

The goal of the work being done on Christiansen’s 7.3 acres is fuel reduction and restoring the forest’s health.

“We’re thinning out the trees with the goal to reduce fire hazard and improving the health of the forest,” said Jerry Okonski, owner Great Northern Land Services.

Okonski spearheaded the Christiansen project, as it is being called, and has also worked on several other projects in the surrounding area.

After reaching out to Dr. Christiansen and other landowners, Okonski developed a project proposal and requested the funding being used for this project when Forest in Focus initiative funding first became available in 2014. He was granted $148,407 for his proposed work on 121 acres of private forest land. The Christiansen Project received $8,760 of this grant.

F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company has been a major purchaser on the project, taking saw logs off of the land.

“It’s been a great benefit having this project available,” said Chris Damrow, a forester for Stoltze. “We have the ability to treat stands that ordinarily would be uneconomical.”

Damrow said the project, and the wood it provides the mill, has been beneficial to the company.

“I look at what needs to go, what needs to stay, and areas where I can fall everything and minimize impact,” Evans said. He added that his goal is to leave green spaces.

“At times it’s been really difficult. It helps to have the bay in the view,” Evans said. “It’s really helping with recovery.”

“Aesthetic also goes into planning. If I see a nest in a tree, it stays. There’s falcons, hawks, eagles... the land owners like their birds, and it adds value to the project,” he said.

White pine, a once abundant species that has succumbed to blister rust across much of its range, is also benefiting from this project.

“We’re finding a lot of white pine, and we’re collecting cones from the ones that are resistant to blister rust,” said Rick Moore, a Service Forester with the Montana DNRC.

Non-merchantable trees, including those that are rotten, are being directed to Willis Mill in Bonner to become pulp.

“Maintaining the forest’s health is a concern for both parties,” Damrow said.

Dr. Christiansen is using grant money from the Forest in Focus Initiative to improve the forest on his land.

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When more grant money became available this year, Okonski was granted another $50,725 to continue working on 53 additional acres of land in Flathead County.

Private timber sale benefits F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber mill
Burglars make off with the kitchen sink

By MEGAN STRICKLAND
Daily Inter Lake

After a summer of fixing up a house to call home, a Columbia Falls family is reeling after burglars made off with more than $30,000 worth of loot, leaving hardly anything behind.

Jim Woody said his family had just started moving belongings into their new home off Montana 326 near the Bake Rock Fire station last week.

The family was working on the house the night of Oct. 14 and locked it up before they left. After Wood went to his son’s soccer game the next morning he returned home to find that a lock on the back window had been broken. The house had been completely ransacked, and tools and valuables taken.

The family’s winter clothes and a filing cabinet that contained important documents like birth certificates were stolen.

“They took my sink,” Woody said. “We got a brand new kitchen sink. They even took that. They left a few boxes, but not a whole lot.”

Woody said the monetary estimate of what was taken was about $3,000 to $5,000. It included a 1968 Mustang that was stolen.

The car has a vinyl top and belonged to Woody’s grandmother. A couple of weeks prior to the burglary Woody said one of the outbuildings had been rummaged through by someone who left a card saying he or she had been looking at the property and wondered if it was for sale.

Woody called the number but never received a response. Now he thinks that the card was meant for him.

MARK BOARDMAN, a forester for F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Co., speaks to a group at the Spring Brook Ranch fuels reduction project near Kalispell during the 2016 Flathead Timber Tour on Thursday. (Aaric Bryan/Daily Inter Lake)

Burglars make off with the kitchen sink

By SAM WILSON
Daily Inter Lake

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“They took my sink,” Woody said. “We got a brand new kitchen sink. They even took that. They left a few boxes, but not a whole lot.”

Woody said the monetary estimate of what was taken was about $3,000 to $5,000. It included a 1968 Mustang that was stolen.

The car has a vinyl top and belonged to Woody’s grandmother. A couple of weeks prior to the burglary Woody said one of the outbuildings had been rummaged through by someone who left a card saying he or she had been looking at the property and wondered if it was for sale.

Woody called the number but never received a response. Now he thinks that the card was meant for him.
BURLGARS from A1

Steve Jopek, owner of 10 Spoon Wines in Missoula, echoed Jopek's concern. "It's a real competition issue," Jopek said. "Montana's wine industry remains a significant part of our economy and would like to see more incentives and help for producers." Jopek said, "We need thoughtful solutions." You guys approach the standpoint of economic development." Tester said at the roundtable discussion that economic development was the focus of the session. "We need to take a look at the migrant workforce, Johnson said. "Montana's unemployment rate remained at 4.3 percent in September. "The country had a work force of 4,006,000 people in September, compared to 3,961,000 in August, according to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. Commissionaire Pum Bury. "Commissionaire is the country's job growth provides an annual report on workers' productivity, increasing wages and businesses that want to be part of their workers to provide workforce solutions," Bury said.

Wines and brandy are produced in the Flathead Valley.

Michael Johnson, owner of Village Winery in Columbia Falls, said the uncertainty about the migrant workforce "is a concern." "It is important for our industry to know that we have access to a food scientist," Johnson said. "At Cornell you could access to a food scientist," Johnson said. "We need to work together with ag innovators and food scientists to help reduce the number of migrant workers, Bury said. "We need to work together with ag innovators and food scientists to help reduce the number of migrant workers, Bury said. "You guys approach the standpoint of economic development." Tester said at the roundtable discussion that economic development was the focus of the session.

Timber from A1

Timber used in home building is up, according to the Montana State University Extension Service. "We need thoughtful solutions," Tester said at the roundtable discussion that economic development was the focus of the session.

Letters from A1

Passing last year by the state legislature, the water bill signed by Montana Governor Steve Bullock, has stirred up considerable controversy due to its impact on state water rights holders on both the upper and lower Flathead River.

Separately, a proposal by Arlington-based Maine and Siskiyou Water Co. to construct a water treatment plant near Glacier National Park has prompted quite a bit of debate from residents concerned about the impact of proposed projects on the park, including the availability of water on the park's north boundary.

Kathy Olsen, manager of the Flathead Regional Water Office in Kalispell, said the bill would make it more difficult for small water rights holders in the two historical areas to grow their business further, along with the other issues, which she said could lead to a new bill on the ongoing adjacencies for the historic river basins.

"The bill is just helping the water court through this initial process of getting it right," Olsen said. The water bill applies to large water rights holders on the north and south ends of the river and to those currently in operation, and there isn't currently a full court for clarification, or call 406-329-4399.

Boardman said赞同的, stating that the bill is not enough, and would like to see more innovation among state water rights holders on both the upper and lower Flathead River.

The bill, which was signed by Governor Bullock in June, also includes a provision that would prohibit the state from issuing new water right permits.

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The group toured the Ashland Forest Products Mill in Ashland and were able to see all the work the revitalized mill is undertaking. Reopened in the fall of 2014, the mill is producing lumber products out of logs from trees killed in the wildfires of 2012, including logs from projects that were on the tour.

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Since 2009, DNRC has used state and federal funds to help restore forest land on 30 properties, totaling approximately 4,000 acres of private, tribal, and state lands in the southeast region of Montana. One of the funding sources was the Montana Forests in Focus Initiative, which has disbursed $4 million dollars for projects on tribal, state and private forests and $2 million dollars to USFS lands for fuel reduction and forest restoration. Tom Trusler Jr, a fifth generation rancher and grant recipient said, “By utilizing the Forest in Focus money, this advanced us at least 20 years...with the Forests in Focus program, it’s here now.”

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Brian and Maggie Dice remember that day like it was yesterday, and just talking about it brings tears to their eyes. Through the Rosebud Conservation District they also utilized the Forests in Focus funds. As Mrs. Dice stated, “it’s just nice after a catastrophic fire to have the resources we need, because we couldn’t have done this without them.”

Forests in Focus funding helps speed up fire and conservation projects

By KELLEY HIRNING

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Neil Simpson of the Department of Natural Resources shows off the new view after a hillside was cleared of property. A long driveway beyond fuels reduction project on their federal forests, and promotion of wood roadmaps for implementing key to climate change, “Obama wrote.

Canada appears reluctant to follow evidence of voter fraud and that Linda McCulloch, a Democrat, about voter fraud and “simply removed them off the (voter) rolls.”

The Congressman does not mention what job he held during that time, but he said later that he would not have voted for the measure if he had known of the allegations of fraud and deceased voters. He said that some people have been convicted of being part of the Montana Democratic Party’s attempts to change election law.

That was a real concern in 1985,” she said.

Concerns about voter fraud have been raised in the past. McKeon took the rare step of issuing a statement that:

The United States has provided funds to an area around the most of Montana, but has also acknowledged that it is likely that the issue of voter fraud will continue to be a concern. If the issue of voter fraud were to be resolved, it would be part of the Montana Democratic Party’s attempts to change election law.

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The Ash Creek fire in 2012 was one of the largest Montana had seen in many decades. It scorched almost 290,000 acres in Southeastern Montana in less than 2 weeks. The tour included sites that were affected by this quick moving and devastating fire.

Brian and Maggie Dice remember that day like it was yesterday, and just talking about it brings tears to their eyes.

Through the Rosebud Conservation District they also utilized the Forests in Focus funds. As Mrs. Dice stated, “It’s just neat that a catastrophic fire has to have the resources we need, because we couldn’t have done this without them.”

DNRC organizes tour to show fuel reduction projects; work done to reduce wildfire threats
Local church celebrates a century mark of service

By Shannon Ruckman and Kelley Hinrichs

DENTON, Montana – A joint stewardship project between the timber and ranching communities is improving forest and range health in central Montana.

Local rancher David Snapp is partnering with Shawn Nicholls of Prairie Logging (Moore, MT) for a project on his property using grant money from the Montana Forests in Focus Initiative. The goal: to improve his forest. At the direction of Governor Bullock, since 2014, this initiative has disbursed $7.5 million of state funds to help private, state, federal and tribal landowners restore forests and reduce wildfire hazards. $1 million has also been used to develop new wildland fire engines for use by local government fire departments across the state.

Nicholls has Ed Moore of Moore Logging (Moore, MT) and Tony Miller of Miller’s Tracking (Judith Gap, MT) aiding him to thin the forest on the Snapp Ranch.

Before the logging project began in September, Snapp said the trees were so thick he had difficulty moving his farming equipment, the grass was sparse in the forested pastures and the roads were icy over all winter because the sun couldn’t shine through the thick tree canopy.

“I couldn’t move my combine down the road because there were trees sticking out that would catch my header,” said Snapp. “Now, they’ve taken most of those trees out. They have also cleared the trees along the road so the sun can shine on the road and melt the ice.”

Snapp said he hopes the tree thinning will also improve the range growth and wheat yields.

“I saw how the grass came back on a project logged down the road two years ago. I couldn’t believe how much grass grew back,” he said. “I am hoping the wheat will grow better in the fields along the areas where they cut the trees. Those trees drink a lot of water.”

Most of the trees harvested from the Snapp Ranch are considered less desirable because they have too many branches, are too small in diameter and have forks in the tops. These trees are marketed as pulp trees and sold to the mill in Bonner, Montana, said Nicholls.

“We are taking a lot of the smaller, less desirable trees,” he explained, “and leaving the more marketable trees to mature and reseed. We will let them grow so they can be harvested later as saw logs.”

Saw logs are more valuable than pulp logs and harder to find in central Montana. “Saw log trees grow straight and have less branches,” explained Nicholls. “The saw logs in this job are nominal; we are hauling those to Seeley Lake and to Roundup.”

In addition to harvesting trees, the three logging partners have been developing roads, clearing trees along fences and helping with erosion control by leaving slash and organic matter as fertilizer.

“I think this logging project will help improve everything on the ranch,” said Snapp. “They have done a great job.”

Logging projects like this would not be possible without the Forests in Focus grant to help offset costs such as fuel and marketing less desirable trees, said Nicholls.

“The grant allows for a complete management plan to be implemented—a prescription for a healthier forest,” he said. “With the decline in the market, the project at the Snapp Ranch may not have been completed without it.”

The Forests in Focus grant provides financial assistance to harvest less desirable trees. It also boosts the state’s timber industry, promotes healthy forest stewardship and contributes to wildfire suppression by removing ground cover and increasing the spacing between trees, said Josh Stoychoff, a Forester with the DNRC Northeastern Land Office based in Lewistown.

Check out http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/forestry-assistance/forest-in-focus for more information on the Forests in Focus grant process.

State grant facilitates forest, range health stewardship

By Shannon Ruckman and Kelley Hinrichs

It took many hands to make the 100-year celebration a wonderful event, one that will be treasured for years to come. Above from left, Donna Hayes and Margi Ross with Bishop Michael Warfel. Among the many attendees was Jeff Carille whose ranching family has been in the area for over 100 years. They have been members of Sacred Heart for several decades. Below is one of 18 bird houses constructed by Teresa Harkness for table centerpieces. These were raffled during the meal. The design was based on the original church building which was constructed in 1916. In addition, eight members of the Knights of Columbus Honor Guard, Council 9395, assisted the Bishop and the organizers of the meal too. Currently Father Dave Wilkins serves the parish as well as St. Ann’s in Fort Shaw, St. Peter’s Mission and the University of Great Falls. There are about 150 active members at Sacred Heart. (Courier photos)
State grants facilitate forest, range stewardship

A joint ownership project between the timber and ranching communities is improving forest and range health in Central Montana.

Local rancher David Snapp is partnering with Shawn Nicholas of Prairie Logging (Snapp) for a project on his property by using grant money from the Montana Forests in Focus Initiative to improve his forest. At the direction of Gov. Greg Gianforte, since 2014 this initiative has disbursed $3.5 million of state funds to help private, state, federal and tribal landowners improve their forests, with a focus on reducing wildfire risk.

Nicholls has Ed Moore of Moore Logging (Moore) and Tony Miller of Miller Trucking (Judith Gap) doing him to thin the forest on the Snapp Ranch.

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“With the decline in the market, the project at the Snapp Ranch may not have been completed without it,” Snapp said.

The Forests in Focus grant provides financial assistance to harvest less desirable trees. It also boosts the state’s timber harvest and provides saw timber for use by local government fire departments across the state.

In addition to harvesting trees, the three logging partners have been developing roads, clearing trees along fencing and helping with soil erosion by leaving slash and organic matter in place.

“I think this logging project will help improve everything on the ranch,” Snapp said. “They have done site improvements on the roads before, but since the grazing started, there’s been a lot more grass growing.”

Logging projects like this would not be possible without the Forests in Focus grant to help offset costs such as fuel and marketing less desirable trees, said Nicholas.

“The grant allows for a complete management plan to be implemented — a prescription for a healthier forest,” he said. “With the decline in the market, the project at the Snapp Ranch may not have been completed without it.”

The Forests in Focus grant provides financial assistance to harvest less desirable trees. It also boosts the state’s timber industry, promotes healthy forest stewardship and contributes to the Wyoming Timber/Forestry Assistance Program.

Tony Miller (left) from Miller Trucking and Shawn Nicholas (right) of Prairie Logging have partnered with rancher David Snapp to thin the trees on the Snapp ranch.

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Tony Miller (left) from Miller Trucking and Shawn Nicholas (right) of Prairie Logging have partnered with rancher David Snapp to thin the trees on the Snapp ranch.

A Miller Trucking semi out of Judith Gap stands loaded and ready to make the trip from the Snapp Ranch to a mill in Bonner.

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Forests in Focus Funding Helps Speed Up the Process

By Kelley Hirning

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Forest in Focus – Doing More than Restoration

Story & photos by Andi Bourne
Pathfinder

OVANDO The Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA) has been the recipient of two Forest in Focus (FIF) grants, the most recent of which is worth nearly $315,000. Of the 5,609 total acres within the BCCA core, 863 acres have been treated with FIF grants generating around 6,000 tons of saw logs and pulp.

The BCCA is located in the mid-reaches of the Blackfoot watershed near Ovando Mountain. It covers forest ownership and management within the Core 5,609 acres with cooperative ecosystem management for multiple-use across public and private lands for 41,000 acres in the Blackfoot Watershed.

Established in 2005, the community vision for the BCCA is to develop a working landscape that balances ecological diversity with local economic sustainability for the future benefit of the Blackfoot watershed community. This strategy of management and cooperation offer the earliest examples of a community forest in the nation.

BCCA Chair Ben Slaght said the main revenue stream for the BCCA maintenance and projects comes from timber sales, block management, and grazing leases. The Forest in Focus initiative was started in the 2013 legislative session. It authorized up to $5 million per biennium, or two-year period, for the state to request out of the fire suppression fund if it was above $20 million. The primary goal in the legislation was fuels reduction, forest restoration and new rewilding treatments. The secondary goal was putting logs on trucks.

Montana Governor Steve Bullock made the initial request from the federal government in late 2014. The first Forest in Focus grant was for $2 million. Montana received another $2 million following the second request. And the state is anticipating a third grant for $5 million. They have given $2 million total to US Forest Service projects.

“What’s exciting is getting treatments out on lands that normally don’t get treated. This includes projects in the wildland urban interface but the emphasis is on projects that are basically unaffordable and lands that really need treatment,” said Ziesak. “We are trying to balance everything: it’s not just timber ground, not just grazing ground and not just a wildlife area.”

Ziesak estimates 7,500 acres have been treated, 7-18 million board feet of timber have been generated along with 30,000 pounds of pulp.

“The industry is hurting. That is one of the reasons this program was developed. What we are telling folks is give us projects that [they] can’t afford to do without financial help,” said Ziesak. “Log supply was a critical issue for the mills and the infrastructure. As far as the DNRC is concerned we need to have a timber industry in the state. If we can’t supply them with logs, they are not going to hang around and wait.”

Rich Lane purchases the logs for the Bonner Chip Plant. He feels the difference in the Forest in Focus, compared to other federal grants, is that it is Montanans’ tax dollars at work.

“I think the Governor took a great leap of faith when he decided to tackle forest management in this state. This Forest in Focus program is one of the things that has been accomplished from it. Our [state] tax dollars go towards good forestry, not just logs to mills but to all the other good things it does like improve wildlife, habitat, reduce fuel loading and stream restoration.”

Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Inc. Resource Manager Gordy Sanders said Montana Department of Natural Resource and Conservation Program Manager and Forest in Focus grant administrator Roger Ziesak pointing out the vibrant shrub component on this unit that was thinned and logged. He said the shrubs had responded very well to the reduced competition and increased light following the thinning, generating good cover and food for wildlife.
Preventing fires and getting logs on trucks

by Michael Stafford

Historically, the land was timbered by a number of different companies over the years and the result of that has left many stands in poor condition with various stages of regeneration. The current condition also poses a risk for stand-replacing wildfires which would annihilate the existing forest.

George Hirschenberger, a member of the Blackfoot Challenge Board, explained some of the history behind the area and the Blackfoot Challenge as a whole which has been around for 23 years. He said the Challenge has worked with land owners to secure conservation easements and improve water quality among other projects. As to the BCCA area, he said that the Blackfoot Challenge works to try to get about 500 acres per year and that through programs like the Forests in Focus, they are able to work towards that goal, one small piece at a time. Treatment makes those areas less more resistant to wildfires.

As the work has progressed, he said the Blackfoot Challenge is keeping an eye on how the different areas being treated will contribute overall to the health of the entire area.

“We’re still after that big picture question,” said Hirschenberger, “there are still areas we want to target.”

Before the group of attendees, including representatives from the Blackfoot Challenge, private landowners, representatives from the DNRC, a Powell County Commissioner and members of the press, toured the area, Ziesak gave an overview of the Initiative and what it is designed to do. Started in 2014, the Forest in Focus Initiative allows for up to $3 million per biennium to be used from wildfire funds to be re-directed towards projects which will reduce the risk of wildfires and at the same time stimulate the forest industry in operations that would not otherwise be possible without financial help.

In the past, funds have been used both for private timber sales as well as helping with Forest Service proposals. Ziesak said the extra funding has helped to expedite the process of getting the Forest Service sales going sooner.

“The idea being to get those into the market sooner,” he said.

Recently the funds have gone primarily to forestry on private lands and Ziesak said that thus far 24 projects around the state have been done through the past $4 million that has been spent.

“We’ve managed to cover a vast majority of the forests,” he said, “give us a project you can’t do without financial help.”

The initiative is slated to continue for some bienniums to come and Ziesak said that many very well written proposals were received within the first two years.

On the, he said that the program is designed to provide extra funding to get treatment done in areas where the risk of wildfire could be reduced. At the same time, those projects are also geared towards getting material to mills and at times, such as projects in the eastern part of the state, help defray the cost of transportation which would otherwise make projects financially unfeasible.

“The industry is hurting and that’s why this started,” he said.

Rich Lane, log buyer with Wil- lis Enterprises which operates the pulp mill in Bonner lauded the program noting that not only is it mitigating wildfire fuels, but helping to keep the timber industry alive.

“We’re seeing state money get good work done on the ground,” he said, “I think this is a unique program that is just starting to get attention.”

As the groups toured a few of the different sites that were treated, Weltzien explained a little bit further about what work had been done. He said that in the past the land had been harvested pretty hard by companies such as Anaconda, Champion and Plum Creek. That resulted in heavy re-generation, but also in the thickness of ladder fuels.

“A big part of this project was to bring our forest back into balance,” he said.

Some of that was achieved by leaving a diversity of different tree species in place during the operation. Thinning was done, but Weltzien said that some thick stands were also left on the landscape. Brush was left on the ground to replace nutrients in the soils and the trees displaying the best genetics were left in place so as to proliferate those good qualities into future trees that would grow in the area.

“We’re trying to leave the best of the best,” he said.

He also noted that by increasing the space between trees, the possibility of crown fires is reduced should a wildfire strike, the trees are able to grow more healthy and if a bug infestation should occur, the forest would be in a better condition to resist the effects.

“Really it’s pretty straightforward,” he said about what was done in the six different areas treated.

In addition to the project which has been completed, the BCCA is also the recipient of another Forest in Focus grant which is providing $175,587 to treat 243 acres. The project is in progress and is proposed to bring 5,452 tons of logs to sawmills and 4,438 tons to the pulp mill.

In information provided by the Blackfoot Challenge they lauded the Forest in Focus Initiative as well as Governor Steve Bullock’s support of the program to create healthy landscapes and support the timber industry.

“Another program relies on a local market for the forest products removed during treatments. Access to these local markets reduces the net cost of treatments, allowing us to increase the number of private landowners participating in the program and the number of acres treated.

The Governor’s Forest in Focus Initiative is helping to retain access to these markets,” stated the information, “for us, successful management of forests and rangelands in the Blackfoot Watershed means resilient and sustainable use of forest and rangeland resources, increased pace and scale of management, working forests, healthy range- lands and soils and local benefits like fire safe communities, graz- ing leases, forest stand diversity and forest jobs.”
The forests are in their focus

by Michael Stafford

It was easy to tell that those who spoke about and toured the recently thinned and harvested areas of the Montana State Prison were proud of the work that was done there. Timber was harvested that otherwise would not have been in the event of a wildfire, fuels were reduced. However, none of that would have been possible without the grant funds from the Forests in Focus Initiative.

“We’re getting some really nice work done all around the state,” said Roger Ziesak, Forest Practices Specialist with the DNRC.

On August 25, a number of different people including DNRC staff, Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) staff, local government officials and reporters toured the recently thinned areas. During the tour, the Forests in Focus Initiative was explained.

“So far it’s been a good program,” said Ziesak.

He told the group that the initiative was created through the state to provide grant money towards harvesting timber and thinning dense areas of forests. In particular, the money goes to projects that might not otherwise be done due to their remote location away from a sawmill or other facility or projects that would not be financially feasible given the amount of timber in those locations. He also said that the initiative is to help out the timber industry in the state and to get logs on trucks headed to mills.

“This grant program was developed as one of the ways to address that,” said Ziesak.

The grant program was set up for five bienniums and is in its fourth year. So far, it has been able to help with about 34 projects around the state.

One of those, the LaMarche Timber Harvest was at the prison ranch. Sean Steinbach, DNRC Forester and Project Foreman explained a little about the thinning projects that have occurred in the forested areas of the prison property. He said that the prison has done a good job in the past of thinning timber and that the grant program allowed that effort to be carried forward.

In 2005 and 2010, Steinbach said federal grant money became available for some harvest projects at the ranch. However, the recent grant of $200,000 for the timber sale of 470 acres for saw logs and pulp was state money.

The grant was awarded in February 2015 and work started in the summer of 2015, recently finishing up.

Rich Lane with Willis Enterprises that operates the pulp mill in Bonner said that he believes the state money is well spent on projects like this one.

“Our state money we want to invest very wisely and I think that’s being done here,” he said.

On the way up to one of the sites thinned, Ziesak explained that like the other projects that have received grant money, this one was slightly unusual in that the grantee, Sun Mountain Logging, provided more funds to the project than the grant did.

“They were able to do a much larger area that way,” he said.

The LaMarche timber harvest consisted of different sites including one that was on a sharp slope and needed to be line logged using cables and hauling the timber back up. Both Ziesak and Steve Flynn with Sun Mountain Logging said that was a more expensive part of the operation and would not have been possible without the grant funds.

At the other sites, Steinbach explained that the forest was thinned with about 30 feet in between trees and those left being a variety of sizes and ages.

“I really like having a mosaic of age classes,” he said.

It was also noted that with the different ages and sizes, the potential for an insect infestation through the area is lessened.

Flynn agreed and said that with the forest thinned in the area, it helps reduce the possibility of a forest fire starting and serves as a break should one start on adjacent Forest Service land. While a forest fire would not stop at the area, if it were a crown fire which cannot be controlled, it would be forced down to a ground fire which crews could battle.

“Timber stand improvement and fire reduction were two of the major points,” he said.

As for the timber removed, Flynn said that 550 loads of saw logs were taken to Sun Mountain Lumber and 50 to 60 loads of pulp were taken to the mill at Bonner.

“A little over two million board feet,” he said.

Flynn elaborated that the prison has been proactive about managing their forests and in the past have had their crews thin and timber different areas as well. He also spoke highly of the crew from Sun Mountain Lumber of the job they did at the different sites.

“Our operators are really experienced,” he said.

Yet another benefit to the thinning is that much more sunlight can shine through the canopies, allowing in more grass to grow. Ziesak said that will be good for the cows on the ranch.

“This is going to give them a lot more grass in this area,” he said.

There were also some additional parts of the timber sale that the grant funds helped allow to be done. Some of the timber roads used to haul were later obliterated, returning the area to regrow.

Another part of the project included rebuilding part of LaMarche Creek which had blowed out. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks had wanted restoration to the creek as it is habitat for a pure strain of cutthroat trout and with the extra money available through the grant program, not only were part of the creek able to be restored, but two to three miles of it will be fenced to keep it protected from cattle on the ranch. Work was also done in other areas to prevent sedimentation into drainages.

As for the ranch and MCE, Steinbach said that they were compensated for the sale of the timber. The money will be used for training programs through MCE.

“It was a good project from a collaboration standpoint,” he said.