

McNeel Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Ann Boucher, MSO

Hank McNeel is the backbone of the Montana/Dakotas noxious weed management program, and his influence reaches far beyond BLM boundaries. In recognition of his contributions to weed management, Hank was recently named a co-recipient of the Barbra Mullin Lifetime Achievement Award.

Presented by the Montana Weed Control Association during its annual convention in Billings January 13-15, the award recognizes long term active participation in weed management programs. It also acknowledges expertise in fostering cooperation among private and public entities and in developing and implementing innovative management concepts and techniques. In addition, the award takes note of the inspiration and guidance Hank has given to others who are involved in weed management programs.

"Over the years Hank has developed and nurtured a very effective interagency weed management program, and he has been a leader in cooperative weed management efforts. It's great to see him receive recognition for that," said Theresa Hanley, Branch Chief for Planning and Biological Resources.

Hank has been in government service since 1974. Prior to that, he was a county extension agent in Idaho. His lengthy list of duties and accomplishments in the BLM includes providing technical guidance and recommendations for integrated weed management programs in the MT/DKs BLM; serving as the Washington Office lead for biological weed control agents; developing numerous interagency agreements for weed control efforts; serving as BLM's representative on the International Biological Task Force; co-authoring numerous publications regarding coordinated management of noxious weeds and other weed management documents; and serving as the BLM representative on various weed management groups.

This award was especially meaningful for Hank because he was a co-recipient with Wayne Pearson, management consultant for weed control in Stillwater County of south central Montana. These two men pioneered weed management efforts in the region, and have mentored a whole new generation of professionals to follow in their footsteps.



*Hank McNeel, a Natural Resource Specialist, recently received the Barbra Mullin Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to noxious weed management.
Photo by Ann Boucher*

WHO WE ARE — WHAT WE DO

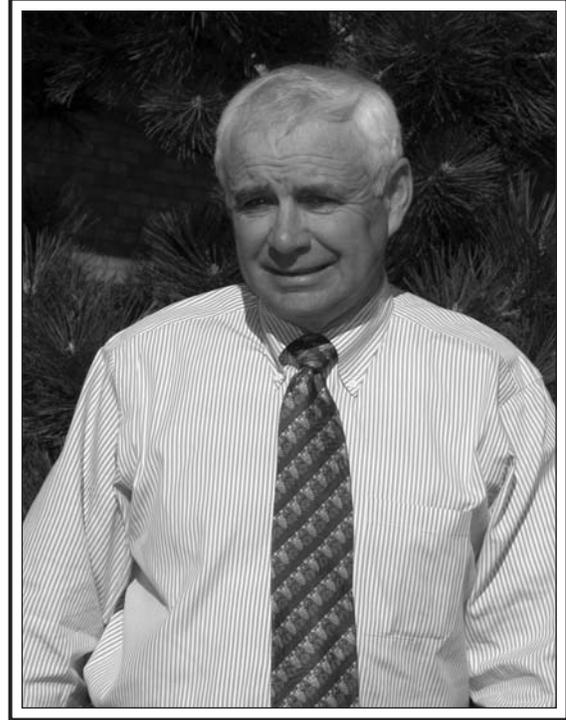
The “pathway” to the position I now occupy has been, to put it mildly, non-traditional. I started my Federal career and was introduced to the business of public land and resource management as a seasonal firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service in Nevada. That job was followed by seasonal work with the National Park Service. Following college, my National Park Service career spanned more than 30 years and took me and my family from coast to coast and border to border—eight states and eleven different assignments.

Along the way I had occasion to share office space with the U.S. Forest Service in Washington’s Olympic Peninsula, work closely with the Bureau of Land Management on cooperatives and partnerships in Utah, partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in New York, New Jersey and North Dakota, and, for two years under an Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignment, serve as deputy director of the Utah Department of Natural Resources.

I relate this not to give evidence of my inability to keep a job, but simply to point out that as I’ve followed the pathways of my career, I’ve had the good fortune to develop a number of friendships and close associations with others who were, in a variety of ways, managing a public trust. And what these experiences have taught me is that people who are drawn to the business of managing public land and public resources are much the same wherever you find them! That is to say, I don’t think any one agency has a corner on “white hats.”

I’ve found that folks who come to this line of work typically have several things in common: 1) they’re not in it for the money; 2) they have a high level of dedication and commitment to their work; 3) they believe that the work they do serves the common good, and 4) they consider their work more of a “calling” than just a job.

My year with the Montana/Dakotas BLM has validated these observations, but there seems to be something extra here. The extra includes a



resilient, “can do” attitude that is nothing short of astounding; a ready willingness to accept new ideas and new perspectives; a friendly and open demeanor, and a level of competence and ability that, to me, has been humbling.

One of my goals during the upcoming months and years is to make “who we are and what we do” better known to the citizens of Montana and the Dakotas—our constituents. This outfit is made-up of good people doing good and meaningful work. Quite honestly, I can’t think of a single thing that we do that doesn’t benefit the American public either directly or indirectly. Not many can make that claim. Thank you again for all the things that you do. I’m proud and honored to be part of the team!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin C. Ott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martin C. Ott
State Director

POWDER RIVER BASIN INTERAGENCY GROUP MEETS IN BILLINGS

Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City Field Office

Federal, state, tribal, and county government officials from Montana and Wyoming met in Billings February 18 to coordinate on coal bed natural gas issues that cross state and agency jurisdictional lines and to provide input on state or area specific issues such as regional monitoring needs in the Powder River Basin.

The purpose of the meeting was not to consider any specific natural gas development proposals or make decisions affecting development.

The coordination meeting was geared toward agency information sharing and reports from Air, Water, Wildlife and Aquatics task groups. Each of the task groups are comprised of representatives from the attending agencies that meet inde-

pendent from, but report to the main interagency group.

Attending agencies included; the Montana and Wyoming Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Montana and Wyoming Departments of Environmental Quality, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Wyoming Game and Fish, and the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Other organizations attending, but not official members of the group, included the North-



BLM Miles City Field Office Hydrologist Andy Bobst addresses the Powder River Basin Inter-agency Working Group at their recent meeting in Billings on February 18.

ern Plains Resource Council, Rocky Mountain Oilfield Testing Center, Devon Energy and the Western Research Institute.

MCFO Staffers Judge Science Fair

Mark E. Jacobsen, Miles City Field Office



Kent Undlin and Kathy Bockness observe the lively exchange as fellow judges expound on the merits of various student projects.
Photo by Mark E. Jacobsen

Miles City Field Office staff members contributed their expertise as judges for an annual science fair for rural schools, run by the Custer County Superintendent of Schools Office and hosted by Sacred Heart Parish School in Miles City, on February 6.

Planning and Environmental Coordinator Kathy Bockness, Realty Specialist Brian Lynnes, Archaeologist Doug Melton and Wildlife Biologist Kent Undlin were among the 21 judges who contributed their services for the event.

Eighty-six students filled the auditorium with their projects and presentations representing grades fifth through eighth. Awards were given in six categories with a grand champion selected from the top finalists. This year's Grand Champion was Chelsea Okerman from Sacred Heart School, who tested the tensile strength of cookies baked with either oil or fat.

Each year, Sacred Heart Principle Bart Freese solicits area agencies and volunteer groups for judges. Volunteers, like those from the BLM, lend their scientific and professional backgrounds to the fair and mentor the next generation of scientists from Eastern Montana.

Keep the Water Flowing

Text and photos by Joe Frazier, Lewistown Field Office

It seemed innocuous enough. A group of us were discussing a proposal to drill a well and run pipelines to tanks to water livestock. It was also suggested that during the six winter months when water was not being piped to stock tanks, the BLM should let the well run uncontrolled into a nearby reservoir to support a fishery.

It was the second part of this proposal that really caught my attention. Like most public resource development proposals this idea was a coin of several sides. The suggestion that we should allow a well to flow uncontrolled took me back to memories of my childhood, the many blessings of plentiful water and the harsh lessons learned by not being cautious with its use.

I was born and raised in southwestern Kansas where my parents owned a small ranch on the Cimarron River. As kids my sister and I used to swing on a rope tied to a large cottonwood tree and drop into one of the deep holes of the river (about 6-foot deep). When we were not doing "cannonballs" we were whiling away the summer fishing for catfish and perch in those same deep holes. During the winter it was duck hunting on the beaver ponds that persisted on a one-quarter mile tributary from a perennial spring. The spring ran about 60 gallons per minute and kept the beaver ponds open when the rest of the river was frozen. In the fall it was quail and pheasant hunting in the riparian zone that extended away from the beaver ponds.

The spring was coming from the giant Ogallah aquifer that un-

derlies most of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and the eastern parts of Colorado and New Mexico. It was commonly thought to be an inexhaustible supply of water that would be used to irrigate the "wheat basket" of the nation.

If I took you to that spring and beaver ponds today, you would not see water. You would not even be able to identify where the spring was or where the beaver ponds once supported the riparian area. All that remains is a few old, dying cottonwoods and a grass/sagebrush community. What happened to that inexhaustible supply of water from the Ogallah? As everyone in that region learned, even great aquifers are not inexhaustible.

Aquifers work by a very basic mechanism. Water (recharge) is fed through the soil from snow melt and rain fall in the upper reaches of the watershed to the

aquifer which flows down gradient to some point or points where that same amount of recharge is discharged in the form of springs or seeps. Sometimes the springs are obvious, like the one where I used to hunt ducks. Sometimes they appear under water along the banks of streams and rivers. The Ogallah, before the Great Plains area was settled, was in dynamic equilibrium; discharge equaled recharge. If more water is discharged than is recharged, as in the case of numerous wells flowing uncontrolled, the water table in the aquifer drops. This is what happened to our ranch in Kansas. Large scale irrigation withdraws exceeded recharge and caused the water table to drop, in some cases up to 150 feet. The Cimarron has not flowed through our ranch for more than 25 years now. What do you suppose the loss of a perennial stream did to the value of the



Without a shut-off valve this well continuously overflowed, creating bog-like conditions and rapid weed growth.

property, not to mention the impacts on the riparian areas and associated wildlife?

So, when it was suggested that we leave a well flowing uncontrolled six months a year, I became a little cautious about the idea. One well flowing uncontrolled probably would not have a noticeable impact on springs and seeps supplied by that same aquifer. However, numerous wells flowing uncontrolled would. If irrigators can drop the water table of one of the largest aquifer systems in the United States by 150 feet, what would happen to a much smaller aquifer system (like those common in the Missouri Breaks)?

The proposed well we were discussing would tap the Eagle Sandstone after penetrating through the Judith River Sandstone. These two aquifers underlie central and eastern Montana and western North Dakota. They generally flow at the surface meaning they do not need to be pumped. A lot of central and eastern Montana is without elec-

tricity, so a flowing well to a rancher is a true gift. If the water table were to drop enough that the well no longer flowed at the surface, it could mean economic disaster to the livestock producers of that area. So I researched how many other wells were flowing uncontrolled from the Eagle and Judith River aquifers in the Lewistown area. Petroleum County alone had over 350 such wells.

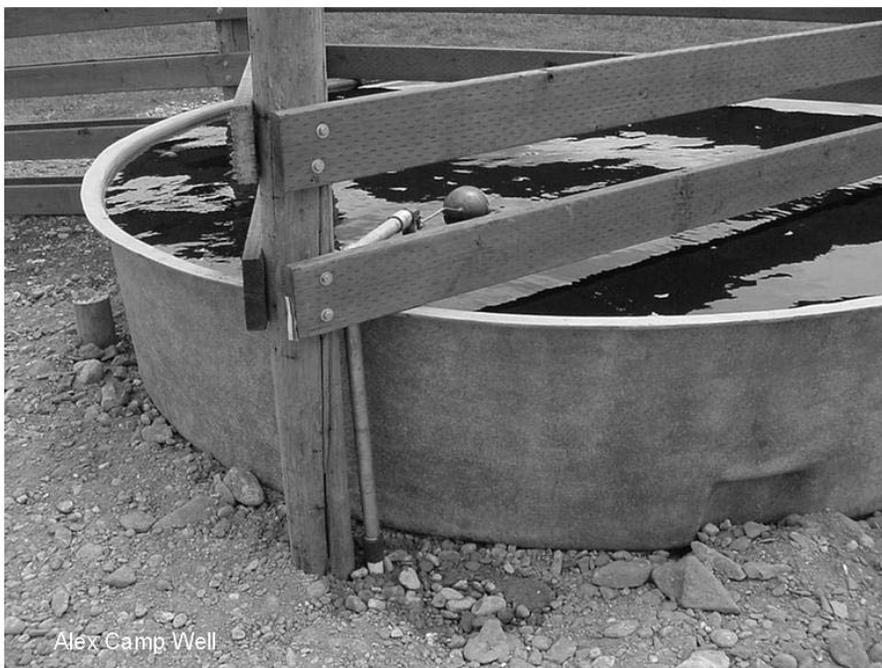
I visited with Ted Hawn, district supervisor of the Lewistown Natural Resource Conservation Service office in Lewistown. He had the same concerns about what may be happening to the local aquifers. Ted and I organized a meeting of Petroleum County land owners, asked several water experts to speak, and invited a grant writer. The result was that the state allocated money to assist land owners who volunteered to install shut-off valves on their uncontrolled wells. We were able to obtain a grant that paid up to 75 percent of the cost of installation. To date, approxi-

mately 250 wells in Petroleum County have been controlled.

The idea spread to adjoining Fergus County. Another grant was funded by the state and approximately 100 wells have been controlled. The idea also caught on at BLM's Montana State Office. Tim Bozorth, then the state hydrologist, secured funds for BLM-LFO to fix their uncontrolled wells. The Lewistown Field Office has repaired all of its known uncontrolled wells (33) except one. That well is awaiting a contract and will be fixed in the near future.

Is upgrading these wells making a difference? Mike Brayton, a graduate student at Montana Tech in Butte, used this question as a thesis project. He monitored 20 wells to observe what happened to pressure and yield after that well, or adjacent wells, were controlled. All showed increases in both pressure and yields. Several of those wells are still being monitored today and all continue to show increases in pressures and yields. Several ranchers have reported that their wells that have not flowed at the surface for years are now flowing.

More wells still need repair, but this effort has produced enough positive results to show the unwilling or uninformed that aquifers can be somewhat restored. Jon Reiten, a hydrogeologist with Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology in Billings, is an avid supporter of this project and has provided technical support as well as convincing numerous land owners the value of fixing their wells. He believes several of these repaired wells will qualify as "poster children" for any upcoming discussions regarding the value of this effort.



Alex Camp Well

The same well with a float-type shut off valve creates a much cleaner site and contributes to saving the aquifers that are so important in numerous ways.

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



Numerous small lakes and potholes in the remote Axolotl Lakes area provide high-elevation habitat for rainbow and cutthroat trout. (BLM Photo)

Axolotl Lakes

Location

About 70 miles northeast of Dillon, Montana

Description

The Axolotl (“Ak-suh-lot-ul”) Lakes Wilderness Study Area and 40 adjacent acres make up this unique and relatively remote recreation area. Axolotl Lakes lies on the northern edge of the Greenhorn Mountains at an elevation of roughly 6,900 feet. The entire Madison Range and valley are visible from the heights of the property. The land is characterized by lush meadows interspersed with rolling foothills, rocky ledges and outcrops. The area is known for its scenic beauty, fishing opportunities, and diversity of wildlife. Several small, unnamed lakes and potholes throughout the area are inhabited by rainbow and cutthroat trout.

Directions

From Dillon, travel north 28 miles on State Highway 41 to Twin Bridges. Then travel 50 miles east on State Highway 287. Turn south on Gravelly Range Road and drive about 7 miles. Turn west on Axolotl Lakes Road and go about 5 miles to the recreation area entrance.

Visitor Activities

Hiking, fishing, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and hunting.

Special Features

Riparian and wetland areas are interspersed throughout the area. In addition, fluvial Arctic grayling are reared in the Upper Twin Lake, accessible via the recreation area, providing brood stock for the reintroduction and recovery of the

grayling in Montana. A great diversity of wildlife inhabits the area including elk, antelope, mule deer, moose, bald and golden eagles, nesting osprey, and many other species.

Permits, Fees, Limitations

None.

Accessibility

None.

Camping and Lodging

Only dispersed, primitive camping is permitted. The nearest lodging is in Virginia City, 10 miles east on State Highway 287, and in Ennis, 30 miles east on State Highway 287.

Food and Supplies

Food, supplies, and commercial services are available in Virginia City and Ennis.

First Aid

The nearest hospital is in Ennis.

Additional Information

Vehicle travel in this area is limited to designated routes. Roads in the area are not maintained; a high-clearance vehicle is required. Foot travel may be necessary.

Contact Information

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They proceeded on . . .



Spring 1804

May 14

Expedition sets off from Camp Dubois "under a jentle brease," Clark writes. (Lewis is in St. Louis and joins the group a few days later.)

Nearly four dozen men are involved (the precise number is unknown), and members hail from every corner of the young nation. Reuben and Joseph Field are brothers. George Drouillard, Pierre Cruzatte, François Labiche are sons of French-Canadian fathers and Indian mothers. Besides captains, other diarists are John Ordway, a young soldier from New Hampshire; Patrick Gass, a carpenter of Irish stock from Pennsylvania; Joseph Whitehouse, a tailor from Virginia; and Charles Floyd of Kentucky, a "young man of much merit," Lewis writes.

They travel in a big keelboat (55 feet long and 8 feet wide, capable of carrying 10 tons of supplies) and two smaller boats called pirogues. Proceeding up the Missouri River involves sailing, rowing, using setting poles, and sometimes wading along the bank to pull the boats with cordelling ropes. Fourteen miles is a good day's progress.

May 25

Expedition passes La Charette, a cluster of seven dwellings less than 60 miles up the Missouri, but, as Floyd notes in his journal, "the last settlement of whites on this river."



Cheri Diaz

Cheri Diaz is a student trainee at the Montana State Office in the Branch of Human Resources Management.

Cheri came to the BLM as a high school student through the Student Temporary Employment Program. She later converted to the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), which is designed to combine classroom learning with practical on-the-job experience. Now a junior at Montana State University – Billings, she is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a focus on Human Resources and Information Technology. By the time

she graduates from college, she will have already accumulated some significant work experience and the BLM will have benefited from her able assistance.

Besides maintaining full class schedules and a high academic standing, Cheri continues to provide support to the Branch of HRM with enthusiasm and professionalism.

"Cheri is a hard working, dedicated employee who has a great attitude and a wonderful sense of humor," said Diane Friez, HRM Branch Chief. "She adds a fresh perspective to the Branch and I am looking forward to watching her progress in her Federal career as she takes on new and challenging work assignments."

Cheri's days of filing personnel-related paperwork are nearly over as she moves on to bigger and more



challenging duties. She will soon begin processing personnel actions and taking on some of the responsibilities related to retirement issues. These are critical tasks which require a strong background and knowledge of government procedures and regulations.

Cheri is definitely an asset to the Branch of Human Resources Management and the Montana/Dakotas organization. (Diane Friez, MSO)

Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association meets on the first Tuesday of odd-numbered months at Fuddrucker's in Billings Heights. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please call Shirley Heffner at 259-1202, Cynthia Embretson at 252-1367, or send your address to Cynthia at ceatsage@wtp.net.

The Public Lands Foundation offers new retirees a free one-year membership. Please contact Bill Noble, PLF Montana Representative, at 406-656-0267 to join.

Please also help us keep our Quarterly Steward mailing list current by contacting Ann Boucher of the External Affairs staff at 406-896-5011 or aboucher@mt.blm.gov with address changes.

Retired from MT/Dakotas BLM since January 1, 2004:

Marianne C. Schappek – 14 years
Lead Admin. Support Assistant, Montana State Office

Verna J. Claybo – 15 years
Range Technician (fire) (Intelligence Manager),
Montana State Office

Larry A. Christiansen – 31 years
Land Surveyor, Montana State Office

Vern A. Jackson – 31 years
Land Surveyor, Montana State Office

Paul Peek – 31 years
Natural Resource Specialist, Butte Field Office

Bruce W. Reed – 34 years
Malta Field Manager

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