

Lions Park in the Winter



photo by Gina Lopez

# Ranchlands Quest

*Working collaboratively to enhance production agriculture, open space, resource stewardship, wildlife, and habitat management.*

## BRUCELLOSIS

*A complicated issue - who is really at risk?*

This fall there has been a flurry of meetings and newspaper space dedicated to the brucellosis issue in Montana. Opinions and agendas have been hashed and reshaped. Three meetings were held in Ennis during October and November to address local and statewide concerns.

Yellowstone National Park is a repository of the remaining source of brucellosis in the United States. This disease has been a human health issue in the United States for many years. In 1947, the Center for Disease Control reported 6,400 human cases in the US. The brucella bacteria causes undulant fever in humans and bangs disease in cattle. Pasteurization of milk and vaccination of cattle has nearly eliminated the threat to human health. In 2006, the CDC estimated between 50 and 100 new cases in people in the United States.

Brucellosis is a serious human health problem world wide today because many third world countries have no programs to address the disease. The US Department of Agriculture began a national brucellosis eradication program in 1934, which set standards for testing, quarantine and depopulation that are still in place today. In 1956, according to APHIS, there were 124,000 affected cow herds in the US. As of June, 2000, there were only six remaining infected herds in the US. In Montana, there were 2000 herds of cattle infected by brucellosis in 1955. By 1985, the state was certified brucellosis free after the livestock industry had spent \$33 million in the effort. Texas is the only state at this time that has not achieved a brucellosis-free status.

This past summer there was an incident of cattle testing positive for brucellosis in Montana. This puts the whole livestock industry of the state on probation until May of 2009. If another case of one cow turning up positive for the disease occurs then the whole state loses its brucellosis free status. This has huge financial implications for the state. Wyoming and Idaho have both lost their brucellosis free status temporarily in recent years. The cause of the brucellosis in cattle in all three states has been infected elk.

*The livestock industry in Montana is gravely concerned about the economic impact of losing its brucellosis-free status.*

The bison in Yellowstone Park are not managed for brucellosis control so the disease persists in their population. The elk herds that congregate on winter feed grounds in eastern Idaho and western Wyoming have an incidence of brucellosis as high as 40% according to some estimates. These feed grounds perpetuate the incidence of the disease in elk which pass it on to the bison in Yellowstone Park where many of the elk spend the summer. Some of the elk, which summer in Yellowstone Park, winter in the Madison and Paradise valleys. Elk that do not frequent winter feed grounds have an incidence of brucellosis in the 3% range or less.

*continued on page 3*

# Subdivision Review Process

*Is this a vision for the future???*

In our society there is little attention given to the subdivision review process until it pertains to a subdivision next door to us. We live in a county and state where there is little regulation regarding the subdivision process. Madison County has always been progressive regarding addressing growth in comparison to the rest of the counties in the state. We were the first county to have a planning board and the first to hire a planner. We have all watched as growth has increased in the Madison Valley significantly over the past 10 years or so. The Madison Growth Solutions process, which has been going on for about three years, has focused much attention on growth in general and its impact in the valley. Community members have learned some enlightening concepts about how other communities have dealt with growth successfully and more often unsuccessfully.

We are fortunate to have a well thought out County Growth Policy. The county commissioners also have adopted the Madison Valley Growth Action Plan as part of the Growth Policy. The Action Plan's intent was to catalyze implementation to the Growth Policy through ordinances and regulatory action. The Growth Policy is not regulatory in and of itself. It is a statement of community values for the future in the context of expected growth. But it does not provide any means of regulating or enforcing those values and envisioned goals. The subdivision regulations are somewhat regulatory but only apply to properties going through the subdivision review process. There are six basic criteria which are the basis for approving or denying a subdivision proposal. Those six public interest criteria pursuant to 76-3-608(3), MCA, address the effect of the proposed subdivision on: agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, the natural environment, wildlife and wildlife habitat, and public health and safety. If you have attended a county planning



board meeting, you have heard the presentation of conflicting opinions regarding the validity of a developer's plan to meet all of the criteria of these six areas. Wildlife biologists don't necessarily agree on how growth affects wildlife and their habitat. Geologists don't always agree on public health and safety regarding geotechnical findings. Hydrologists don't always agree on ground and surface water implications and impacts from proposed developments. Not everyone agrees on what denotes important agricultural properties. So, you have a planning board comprised of eleven individuals who represent various parts of the county, who must listen to the arguments for and against a proposed subdivision within the parameters of the six public interest criteria. It is not unusual to have many community members who will provide testimony opposing a subdivision in their backyard but their comments do not necessarily relate to the six criteria upon which decisions must be based. Or they may provide testimony which conflicts with other citizen comments.

In most parts of the United States when growth gets to a critical level it becomes apparent that some kind of regulations

must be implemented to level the playing field. Riparian zones, floodplain areas, wildlife and agricultural overlays are created to provide consistency in protecting critical parts of our communities and watersheds. By identifying specific areas of significant importance and concern and providing them with a consistent and defensible status, we eliminate the war of words and opinions to a great degree. This provides predictability and consistency to the growth process but also to the shared community values. Every member of the Madison Valley should read the Madison County Growth Policy, the Madison Valley Growth Action Plan and the Madison County Subdivision Regulations. This will give you the sense of what the vision and playing field of growth are for the valley. It will also give you a sense of what is lacking to provide equity and consistency to the process of growth. Growth should occur in accordance to local community standards and expectations with a vision of the future. This requires some serious thought and planning. The word planning denotes looking to the future and determining action to accomplish a perceived end result. A county planning department

*continued on page 3*



# Wildlife Activities



*photo by Gina Lopez*

This time of the year nearly all of the interest in wildlife in the Madison Valley has to do with hunting season. Local businesses are benefited significantly by the shopping habits of hunters. Several hunters have commented that they would rather shop at our local gun store than any place they know.

MVRG worked with Cedar Creek Ranch the last week of the general hunting season to coordinate cow elk hunters on the ranch. There were close to 100 hunters who were provided access to the ranch. They harvested over 70 cow elk. Cedar Creek Ranch also provided access to a landlocked state section this year.

The late season hunts continue after the two week general season extension. The past five years MVRG has provided coordination between landowners and hunters to improve ethics and access for cow elk harvest. This was done in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This year FWP decided to not provide that cooperation. In the past they gave the A-9 hunters contact information for MVRG so the hunters could have information about elk availability and landowner access.

This year FWP chose to not provide that information to the A-9 hunters. At a recent statewide Elk Summit sponsored by FWP there was much talk about collaboration and needing to work with local communities and groups to address wildlife issues. There was also much discussion about improving access. It seems strange that when local groups try to accomplish those goals that FWP is the one who pulls back.

There continues to be a steady presence of wolves in the valley. Even though there have been several wolves killed for their livestock depredation activities this year, the number of wolves in the valley stays close to the same level. Within weeks of eliminating the Wedge Pack on the Sun Ranch six more wolves were sighted. There have also been at least six wolves seen consistently in the Cedar Creek-Jack Creek areas. Local residents are encouraged to contact FWP and report wolf sightings. To report such sightings you can call 406-994-4042, or 406-994-6371.

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## ***Brucellosis...***

So, given all of these complexities plus the political turf strategies involved, there are not any clear quick solutions. The hunting interests and livestock industries in Wyoming and Idaho are not likely to give up the elk feed grounds easily. The lovers of free range bison are not going to acquiesce to wholesale vaccinations and depopulation strategies in Yellowstone Park. The livestock industry in Montana is gravely concerned about the economic impact of losing our brucellosis free status. There is an obvious need to address the brucellosis issue as a human health issue and eliminate it from Yellowstone Park. There is a need to provide a safety net for the livestock industries surrounding the Park which provide critical wildlife habitat for innumerable wildlife species during this time. The agriculture industry is still the largest portion of our Montana economy and provides a significant portion of the basis of our tourism industry which is number two. This is not an issue to be ignored but will require the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders who share a realistic vision of management for the future.

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## ***Subdivision Review Process...***

and planning board's work should be in the context of planning not fixing the results of past mistakes.

Growth will most likely continue in the valley. There are some blips in our national economy that could affect the rate of growth or not. The future has always been difficult to predict. We have been consistently surprised at how things are playing out in spite of our best predictions. Planning is a dynamic process, or should be. The more good information we can gather regarding how growth is impacting other parts of the west, will only benefit us in making well informed decisions for a somewhat unpredictable future. Our participation as citizens is critical and essential.

## *The Weed Committee looks back at 2007.....*

The Weed Committee has enjoyed another successful year working to prevent and control noxious weeds in the Madison Valley. In 2007 they hosted a workshop on weeds, a “Weed Summit”, that was very informative. The Madison River Project continued in 2007, and this year the commercial applicator spraying weeds along the river corridor advanced, nearly reaching the town of Ennis. Private landowners throughout the valley were able to collect cost-share dollars to help pay for weed treatment on their property. In fact, due to the overwhelming demand, the MVRG Weed Committee funded over \$10,000 in cost-share payments to private landowners.

This was the fourth year the Committee was pleased to partner on the Pilot Grazing Project, using sheep to treat noxious weeds along the Madison River. The sheep have done a great job at controlling weeds, increasing forb and grass production and dramatically reducing the spotted knapweed in the project area. This project will be highlighted in the spring newsletter so look for more details then.

This year’s noxious weed fundraiser, dinner and auction, was held at Wall Creek Game Range on August 4, 2007. The ninth annual “Weeds Party” was a great success as well as a lot of fun. Funds raised that night are used to support weed committee activities throughout the year. Once again, thank you to all of our sponsors, donors, volunteers, guests and to Fred King and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for allowing the committee to host the event at Wall Creek. Giclee’s of this year’s original Larry Zabel painting, “Wall Creek Salt Run”, are still available. This year’s painting highlights the rich history of the area, featuring former Wall Creek permittee Pete Durham and the current range rider for the Wall Creek Stock Association, Gary Shelton.



*Weed Summit - March 2007*



*Weed Fundraiser - August 2007*

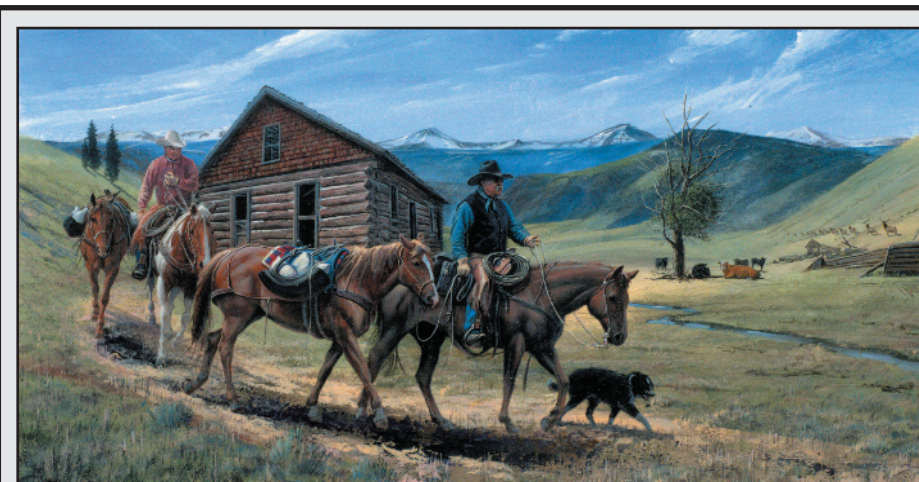


*Weed Fundraiser- August 2007*



### **Weed Calendars Still Available!**

MVRG Weed Committee calendars featuring scenery from the Madison Valley and noxious weed education are still available. Calendars can be purchased by visiting local businesses or by calling 682-3731. We will gladly ship calendars anywhere in the US.



### **“Wall Creek Salt Run”**

by Larry Zabel

*“A painting created for the  
2007 MVRG  
Weed Fundraiser”*

*Gicleés are available  
through the MVRG office  
at 682-3259.*

## *And looks forward to 2008....*

The Weed Committee has been extremely successful in obtaining grant funding for 2008 and beyond. Below is a brief description of some of the new and continuing projects we will be working on.



### **Madison-Missouri River Fund Project – NEW**

This is a multi-faceted one year grant that focuses on the river and is funded by the River Fund and PPL. It provides for weed treatment at 10 fishing access sites, cost-share for private landowners who own shore-line property on Ennis Lake, and commercial application of the river corridor from the lake to Black's Ford. It also supports a variety of educational opportunities including: a weed-pull and public education day at a fishing access site; a vehicle and boat wash-station and outreach day; and the design and printing of an educational brochure focused on how weeds are changing the Madison River;

### **NRCS EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) Project – NEW**

The EQIP project pairs the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and private landowners in the Harrison area, working together to control weeds on a landscape level. The grant provides funding for 6 years, with the MVRG and the Madison Valley Conservation District working to administer the grant.

### **National Forest Foundation Project – NEW**

This project is aimed at gaining control over the rapidly expanding population of yellow toadflax in the Bear Creek area. Funds awarded by the National Forest Foundation shall be used for cost-share for private landowners, weed treatment on state and federal lands, as well as enhancing "Bear Creek Days". This educational event is hosted by the Forest Service and benefits local students. Money from this grant will be used to purchase exciting new curriculum focusing on noxious weed education and to supplement activities at the event.

### **Conservation Innovation Grant, "Training Cattle to Eat Noxious Weeds" – NEW**

Training cattle to eat noxious weeds may not be as difficult as it sounds! Supported by funding from NRCS, we will work with several ranchers in Madison County to implement this practice, teaching their cows that some noxious weeds can be excellent forage. Look for a discussion of results later this year.

### **Pilot Sheep Grazing Project - Continuing**

The MVRG Weed Committee will continue to help facilitate this extremely successful project which puts sheep to work eating noxious weeds along the Madison River. To date, results have been outstanding and we are looking forward to another season.

### **Madison River Project - Continuing**

The Weed Committee once again partnered with the County Weed Board to apply for 2008 funding to continue treating weeds along the upper Madison River and providing cost-share for private landowners. This grant is funded by the Montana Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Trust Fund and will be voted on in March 2008.

### **Madison County Bio-Control Project – Continuing**

The bio-control project had a busy 2007 season and is looking forward to an even busier 2008. Several of the grants listed above provide funds for bio-control, and the Weed Committee and County also submitted a proposal to the Noxious Weed Trust Fund to help sponsor this project. Look for more details in the next newsletter, or call the MVRG Weed Committee to sign up to receive weed-eating insects next season!

### **2008 Noxious Weed Fundraiser – 10th Anniversary!**

The 2008 fundraiser will be the 10th annual dinner and auction. The event will be a time to celebrate all that has been accomplished over the past 10 years. The Sun Ranch, home of the first Weeds Party, will host the event on August 23, 2008. Please mark your calendars and help us celebrate this incredible milestone!

For more information about any of these new or ongoing projects please feel free to contact the MVRG Weed Coordinator at (406) 682-3731.

## *Water Regulations In the Madison Valley*

There was a Madison Valley Water Summit held in July to look at the water resources and concerns. As a follow up to that, there was a community forum held in September to consider Water and Growth. Both of these events were well attended and extremely informative. At the September forum, after presentations by John Lafave, a hydrogeologist with Montana Tech, and Duncan Patten, an ecologist with Montana State University, there were break out sessions for citizens to discuss what steps should be taken to address current issues. The foremost recommendation was to take action on loop holes in the Madison River setbacks which are currently in the subdivision regulations. That setback or streamside protection is 500 feet on the main stem of the Madison and 100 feet from tributaries.

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*Who is in charge of making sure our rivers and streams do not suffer from growth impacts?*

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On October 23rd a formal request was presented to the County Commissioners to create an ordinance which would restrict all new construction to the current setbacks. This request was limited to the Madison Valley and the east side of the Tobacco Roots. The Commissioners unanimously adopted the request and assigned the planning department the task of drafting a streamside protection ordinance. It is expected that a draft ordinance will be completed within the next couple of months. There will be ample opportunity for public review of this ordinance.

Currently, there are numerous other counties going through the same process to address streamside protection. As the rate of growth continues in most of Western Montana there are critical problems arising with streamside encroachment. Folks will build in some of the most precarious places because of their lack of understanding of the dynamics of hydrology and stream ecology. The rivers and streams of Montana are for the most part pristine and of great value to our economy and society. Without some type of regulations, the streams will continue to become impaired for various reasons.

Who is in charge of making sure our rivers and streams do not suffer from growth impacts that can potentially impair the water quality and quantity? Most people think maybe Montana DEQ, EPA or even Army Corps of Engineers are dutifully watching out for those waterways. Not so by a long shot. Their approval or permitting responsibilities leave much to be desired. They are extremely limited in their authority and the scope of their responsibilities. The reality is that if communities or watersheds want to see their waterways protected from negative impacts of growth, they must do it themselves. And they have all of the tools to do so. It is called the democratic process. It is the process of community members letting their commissioners know what should be done. The commissioners are our decision makers and have expressed a willingness to get citizen participation to initiate the decision making process. That is why there are public hearings and community forums. The more that willing citizens participate in the process, the more likely we are to get well supported action from our commissioners. This is the fundamental purpose of the Madison Growth Solutions process.



*photo by Jeff Laszlo*



## Community Forum on Streamside Protection *January 30, 2008 - 6:30 p.m.*

There will be a community forum on January 30th at the Ennis High School foyer at 6:30 pm. It is a continuation of the Madison Growth Solutions process of community participation in addressing the impact of growth in the valley. Janet Ellis will give a short presentation on what is happening around the state regarding river and stream setbacks. The Madison River has had a 500 foot setback since 1993. This forum will provide citizens the opportunity to look at existing conditions and challenges to the Madison River and other streams in the valley. It will also provide the opportunity for input on a draft Streamside Protection ordinance being prepared by the Planning Office.

### *-Annual Membership Meeting CHANGED -*

*In the original bylaws of MVRG, our annual membership meeting has been held the second Thursday of January each year. Coincidentally that seems to always be the coldest and nastiest day of winter each year. In October of this year, 2007, the board of directors passed a resolution changing that date to mid June of each year. We are planning a barbecue and have a request in for good weather. We know it will be warmer than all past annual meetings. June also provides the opportunity for many MVRG members to attend who are smart enough to not be here in January. We will keep you apprised of a more definite time and format. In the meantime, on January 10th, stay close to your stove and enjoy a pleasant evening at home.*

### *Will you join us in our efforts?*

The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group works to protect the ranching way of life and the biologically healthy open spaces on which ranching depends.

Yes! I want to help the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group.  
Please accept my tax deductible contribution of :

\$25 - \$100     \$125 - \$250     \$275 - \$500     \$1,000  
 \$5,000     \$10,000     \$25,000     other

*\*annual membership dues are \$25*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

*PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:  
MADISON VALLEY RANCLANDS GROUP  
P.O. BOX 330 - ENNIS, MT 59729*

*The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization  
and deeply appreciates your financial support!*



***A MESSAGE FROM MVRG PRESIDENT,  
JOHN CRUMLEY***

**BRUCELLOSIS**, It is what we hear more and more about in our area. During the last several months the ranchers in the Greater Yellowstone area have been asked to do double duty where bangs is concerned. Bangs is a disease that causes animals to abort and is contagious to other animals and humans that come into contact with blood, birthing materials or aborted fetuses. Montana has had a brucellosis-free status for many years and all ranchers vaccinate young females before 12 months of age. Now ranchers in the Madison are being asked to vaccinate adult cows and to test all adult cows for the disease.



The wildlife in the Madison is the source of infection - elk and buffalo which can mingle with cattle from between January 1 and June 30 are putting herds of cattle at risk. If one animal tests positive for bangs then the whole herd will be sent to slaughter. This may change the tolerance of the ranchers for having wildlife on their property. We as residents of the Madison Valley need to put as much pressure as we can on the park service and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to have wildlife herds bangs free. Think about this and see if we can come to some consensus about how to proceed.

I hope everyone has a happy holiday and remembers the reason for the season, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Thanks, John

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Crumley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light-colored rectangular background.



*The MVRG Staff,  
Board Members, and  
committees would like  
to thank you for your  
continued support this year.*

*We hope that you and  
your family have a  
beautiful holiday season!*

*We look forward to  
working with you  
in 2008!*



MADISON  
VALLEY  
RANCLANDS  
GROUP