

# Ranchlands Quest

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



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Newsletter of the  
Madison Valley Ranchlands Group  
Volume 8 - Issue 1 - Winter

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## COLLABORATIVE ELK MANAGEMENT

Local landowners, sportsmen and agency personnel have been working collaboratively to find an elk management strategy for the Madison Valley since 2001. The number of elk wintering in the Madison Valley on private lands has grown dramatically over the past 10 years.

In December 2007, FWP proposed creating a Madison Management area which included most of Hunting Districts 360 and 362. Only 200 cow elk tags would be issued for that area on a draw basis. This proposal met huge opposition by all of the landowners impacted and by the vast majority of local hunters. So FWP increased the proposed cow tags to 400. At the February FWP commission meeting this proposed plan was opposed by sportsmen, outfitters, landowners and conservation groups. The commissioners nonetheless passed the proposal with the provision that if a collaborative local process could come to an agreement on something supported locally by December 2008, they would consider it.

Landowners in the valley met consistently throughout 2008 to discuss possible management strategies to address the impact of such large numbers of elk wintering on their land during the winter months. FWP hired a facilitator and a series of 5 well attended meetings were held. These were long and difficult meetings, usually lasting up to 8 hours. It was agreed by all attending that tolerance for elk

numbers was much lower than the current population. It was agreed that 1500 elk need to be harvested each year for at least three years to get to an agreed upon level of 2500 wintering on the east side of the Madison. Strategies for achieving this were discussed and a proposal was prepared that expressed these strategies in detail. Following is the proposal submitted to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission on December 11, 2008 in Helena.

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**MADISON VALLEY ELK ISSUES WORKING GROUP**

**Recommendations Respectfully Submitted to the  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission  
December 11, 2008**

Introduction

The Madison Valley Elk Issues Working Group met 5 times – June through November of 2008 – to address and problem solve around issues related to elk management and elk numbers in the area. Convened by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, approximately 35 people attended each meeting representing landowners and landowner managers; sportsmen and women; a conservation organization; the US Forest Service (USFS); and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) including one Commissioner. The Group agreed to work in a collaborative, interest-based process within self-defined ground rules and process agreements.

Recommendations and Agreements

The following consensus recommendations to the Commission were developed in response to the issue statement and within the Collaborative Framework (see Attachment A) crafted and agreed upon by the Working Group.

1. Recognizing that we are currently over objective for the Madison elk herds in Hunting Districts 360 and 362, strive for a significantly reduced total elk population objective distributed across the Valley through the following strategies:

- Target a harvest of 1500 cow/calf elk per year for each of the next two years with General Season landowner-sportsmen efforts and Early and Late Management Season hunts.
- Beginning in 2009, start Seasons August 15 and continue to February 15 with:
  - Antlerless harvest focus utilizing elk “B” tag (A9/B12)
  - September, October, November – Emphasis on distributing animals off the Flats
  - December through February – Emphasis on distributing animals across winter range
- Design the 2009/2010 Season(s) to include:
  - An Early Management Season
  - A General Season (with possible season extension based on harvest numbers)
  - A Late Management Season
- Conduct the remainder of the 2008/2009 season(s) as follows:
  - An extended General Season for this area (supported by the Working Group and Region 3 FWP personnel on the Working Group) if the Commission enacts a General Season extension.
  - A Late Management season based on harvest numbers and demonstrated commitment by landowners to increase harvest through access during the General season.

2. Landowners within the Madison Special Management Area commit to participate during the 2008/2009 Season(s) – actively engaging in practices that will attempt to distribute and harvest elk in accordance with the intent of these agreements.

- Using an approach that includes the entire area rather than individual properties, private landowners will facilitate an amount of public access intended to achieve the 1500 harvest objective for the 2008/2009 General season with the goals of:
  - Implementation of a 2008/2009 Management season;
  - Adoption of agreements for 2009/2010 and successive seasons;
  - Ability to evaluate if documented hunter numbers on private land during the General Season moves the situation toward harvest/distribution goals.
- Landowners commit to a self-managing approach to encourage accomplishment of the intent of these agreements.

## *Elk Management - Working Group Recommendations, continued from page 2*

3. In order to facilitate ongoing management efforts and aid in accomplishing annual harvest objectives and agreements:
  - Local landowners agree to contract/pay for a Hunt Coordinator and “office” during the 2008-2009 Seasons to:
    - Manage hunter access over the remaining Seasons and across the Valley. All hunters desiring access to private land in the Valley would go through the Hunt Coordinator and he/she would distribute hunters according to where access is permitted at particular times and where elk are present with the initial intent of at least 30 hunters per day across all Seasons. Two-day hunts would be accommodated and Block Management cooperator numbers will be honored.
    - Communicate with landowners for daily information about access and animal distribution and with FWP about improving the process.
  - Local landowners will publish notice of contacts and would ask that FWP publish in all pertinent materials as well.
  - Local landowners will print and provide maps that:
    - Identify hunter areas, contact points, and the contact person(s);
    - Display the FWP logo;
    - Explain the “rules of engagement” on individual properties;
    - State ethical hunting rules;
    - Explain the Brucellosis kit process for individual properties.
  - Fully implement across all Seasons in 2009/2010. Local landowners and FWP will evaluate the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 experiences with a Hunt Coordinator and determine the best approach for future years.
4. With the intent of achieving liberal harvest numbers, consider the following regarding tags and regulations:
  - Since the season setting/regulation decision-making process for 2008/2009 has already occurred with the Commission, a Management Season roster (previously referred to as Game Damage season) should be used for draw during 2008/2009 Management Season.
  - Antlerless tags should be available over the counter for the 2009/2010 General Season:
    - Brow Tined Bull/antlerless plus over-the-counter A9/B12 valid in both Hunting District 360 and 362
5. To facilitate safe and ethical hunting, an online Hunter Course should be required for users of all tags in 360/362 with the possibility of being drawn for a private land bull hunt as reward for taking the course. Find the resources to locate an additional game warden in the area.
6. Continue the Madison Valley Elk Issues Working Group with meetings after the Early Management Season, after the General Season, and after the Late Management Season to:
  - Evaluate general progress after the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 seasons;
  - Determine the success of hunter access and distribution based on the whole area rather than individual landowners;
  - Evaluate the success of the Hunter Coordinator approach and determine the best option for the future.
  - Recommend adaptive strategies where useful.
  - According to recent conversations, the current expressed landowner tolerance is 2500 elk in the Madison valley. Recognizing this tolerance level, the Working Group commits to a collaborative process to establish a new elk population objective that considers tolerance, distribution, science and aspects of range conservation and management. By November 2010, the Working Group will arrive at a new population objective to recommend to the FWP Commission.
7. Use all game damage tools with kill permits used as a last resort.
8. Work to increase the tag/permit price to cover additional management costs including the cost of a Hunt Coordinator and additional damage funds.

*...continued on page 4*

## ***Collaborative Elk Management Results - Thus Far***



At the December 11, 2008 FWP Commission meeting the commissioners passed a resolution that eliminated the proposed Madison Management area for the year 2009, continued an either sex season for elk in hunting districts 360 and 362 and provided for unlimited over the counter A-9/B-12 tags for cow elk in those two hunting districts. There was no reference to the details of the aforementioned proposal which the Madison Valley Elk Issues Working Group spent all year preparing.

### **2008 Elk Harvest**

This past hunting season was exceptionally warm and dry. The elk harvest in the valley was low by all accounts. Due to the long and wet spring, there was an abundance of feed in the mountains up high and that is where the elk spent the hunting season. An extended season was implemented for three weeks with hardly any change in weather or elk movement. The landowners of the valley paid for a Hunt Coordinator, Tom and Kelly Leo, to facilitate access and hunter numbers on the ranches. The extended season was 21 days. During that period of time, 2229 hunter access days were provided on the ranches in hunting districts 360 and 362 through the hunt coordinators. Ten percent of those hunter access days were by local residents, the balance were hunters from throughout the state. There were 434 cows and 67 bulls reported harvested during that time. There were more than that actually killed but they weren't all reported. During the extension many other hunters spent time on public and private land with very little success either.

The weather started to change at the end of the extended season and there were a few more elk coming down. The extended season was not continued and there has been a Management Season implemented starting January 17th. Hunters that signed up on a Game Damage Roster in June and July 2008 are the only hunters allowed to hunt during this Management Season.

### **Perspective on Wolves**

The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group has worked consistently with supporters of wolves to find ways to minimize the loss of livestock from wolf depredation. We have attended wolf conferences and given talks to help others understand the perspective of the livestock producers in this issue. We have sponsored tours to educate ourselves and others regarding the dynamics of wolves and livestock in the Madison Valley. Five years ago we worked with wildlife groups to initiate a Range Rider program. We provided the riders and one of the wildlife groups provided the funding. This effort has been replicated in several areas where there is a high likelihood of wolf/livestock conflict.

One of the big lessons we have learned is how differently livestock producers and wolf advocates look at things. When the wildlife groups put money into something like Range Riders it is done as a fundraising strategy for their supporters. They come and take pictures, make videos and advertise to their supporters what great work is being done. But the context is to raise more money for their organizations. Last summer we visited with two different organizations about funding for the Range Rider program. Both organizations were willing to provide some funding but only if we guaranteed that the Range Riders would never kill a wolf. In the four years that the program has existed the Range Riders have never killed a wolf. But the wolf management plan states that if a livestock owner or his agent comes upon an incidence of a wolf actually attacking or killing livestock, the owner or agent is authorized to kill the wolf. That is the best management practice, address the wolf actually doing the depredation. Otherwise, Wildlife Services comes in and kills a wolf, not necessarily the wolf that was involved in the livestock depredation. So, it puts the Range Riders in the position of not working for the ranchers but actually working for the advocates of wolves. We have resisted this mindset of the wolf advocates. We have the Range Rider program to protect livestock. The presence of the riders is felt to have reduced livestock losses. Therefore, those who supported the reintroduction of wolves are unwilling to recognize the true cost of their actions on the livestock industry.

## The following is an article that clearly speaks to one of the big challenges to the Madison Valley as well as many other ranching areas of the west.

*When Lucia Stewart, an admitted urbanite, spent two days with ranchers in the Gallatin Valley, she realized they had more in common than she thought: ground.*

# My Day with a Rancher: Standing on the Same Turf

By Lucia Stewart, 7-16-08

Last week I spent two days with 20 ranchers and 2 journalists. Everyone except the journalists wore boots and pants. Everyone except the journalists was up early. At times I felt totally out of place, yet right at home.

I know I come from a different breed, a more urban outlook. That is why I was nervous to attend the Undaunted Stewardship tour with the Montana Stockgrowers Association, knowing I would be on a tour bus, eating three meals a day with folks that I didn't think I would have much in common with, nor really know what to discuss. As a journalist, of course I'm going to undertake the challenge, and I sure didn't expect to be so enthralled, tutored and standing on the same ground as my weathered neighbor.

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*I'm actually nervous for our ranching community and the lands that they manage, graze, care for and care about.*

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I got introduced to a way of life that is not too far off from my own. I appreciate and care for this land of Montana and the Rocky Mountains. I want it to be healthy and have the best management practices to keep it viable and teeming with diverse flora and fauna. And the ranchers share that perspective, but they are the ones with dirt under their nails from managing the land that I appreciate.

The ranchers of Montana have a depth of knowledge of this place that is indispensable, as they have walked every inch, with decades and generations of wisdom of how to manage their property so water

flows, noxious weeds diminish and our land is productive while providing the vast, and seemingly wild, open space.

I admit I haven't been the best about hearing their side, as many "environmentalists" may not either. A few of the ranchers did claim that they are terrible about talking to and communicating with the other side, but they are trying to change that as our lands are becoming increasingly polarized with different interest groups.

We face a standstill with little to no progress on the future of our ranching community and what that means to some of the amenities that us urbanites appreciate and find essential to this land: open space, healthy wildlife habitat and local foods and agriculture.

I'm actually nervous for our ranching community and the lands that they manage, graze, care for and care about. We are facing a time when urban cities value open space and great vistas where wildlife roam free, but we do not understand what takes place on the other side of the fence.

Over the course of two days, I heard a list of threats to the viability of the ranching community that was astounding. It was more than I had imagined: brucellosis, wolves, wind energy, mining, judicature of water, sage grouse and the endangered species protection restrictions, subdivision fragmentation of the land, water quality and finding good helping hands. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in particular is in a challenging scenario. The 21 million acres in the GYE is losing the connected grazing resources, as

the land becomes subdivided, public lands management plans change that alter grazing practices that no longer make operations viable, and species protection is putting restrictions on land management that also limited ranchers activities. All of these factors are constricting the profitability of the land and forces losses beyond a breakeven.

It was a wake-up call when one ranchers stated that due to the increase cost of brucellosis testing, as well as the change in management requirements in Park County, we may see ranches drop deep into the red, forcing sale and subdivision because the land value is so high, and in turn, the inevitable loss of open space in the Paradise Valley.

Our landscape is on the verge of becoming more fragmented than it already is, particularly if we lose the ranching community.

I encourage anyone who lives in the West to spend a day walking and chatting with a rancher on his land. You will walk away more enriched, more knowledgeable about land management and understand how crucial this threatened way of life is on our Western landscape.



# WEED COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Weed Committee had a great 2008 and is looking forward to an exciting 2009. We were pleased to sponsor and participate in several new projects, as well as a few ongoing efforts. Of course the 10th annual fundraiser was a huge success, with fun being had by all at the Sun Ranch! Again, thanks to all of the donors, volunteers and guests who help make the event possible.

In 2008 the Weed Committee facilitated the first year of the Norwegian Creek EQIP project, funded by NRCS. Landowners within the project area did an OUTSTANDING job addressing weeds, and in 2008 alone treated over 5000 acres of weeds. What an accomplishment! Special thanks to the landowners for their dedication and to NRCS for being such a great partner! This was also the first year that the committee worked with NRCS and landowners in the county to "Train" their cows to become weed-eaters. The producers and cows did great, and we are looking forward to learning more about this innovative grazing project.

Miles of the Madison River and several MT FWP fishing access sites were treated as part of the MT DOA's Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant, combined with funding from the Missouri-Madison River Fund and PPL MT. We are pleased with the progress we've made, but there is still more to do. The Weed Committee will continue to seek funding to address noxious weeds along the river corridor.

Several landowners in the Bear Creek area participated in our 2008 National Forest Foundation project, targeting yellow toadflax and other weeds. As part of this grant we were also pleased to work with the USFS at Bear Creek Days to promote noxious weed education. And while we're talking about education, let's not forget the SUPER job that Mellissa

Newman and her students did this past summer as part of the Madison County Bio-control project. They worked hard all summer surveying, collecting and releasing bio-control agents, or weed-eating bugs, throughout the county. If you're interested in receiving bugs in 2009 it is never too early to get on the list. Contact the Weed Committee office for more information!

We are still waiting to find out about funding on a few more projects, and will keep you posted. The Weed Committee is always looking for new ways to help residents of the valley address noxious weed issues. If you have suggestions for future projects or project areas please let us know. The Weed Committee can be reached at 682-3731 or by emailing [mgriffiths@3rivers.net](mailto:mgriffiths@3rivers.net).

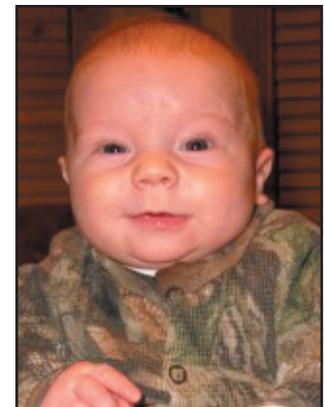
## ***GOT WEEDS?***

***If you have suggestions for future weed control projects or special emphasis areas please let us know!***



## **2009 Weed Calendars Are 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 United States.



Welcome to the newest member of  
our Weed Fighting Army!

**Mason James Griffiths**  
was born October 6, 2008

Mason has already joined Mom, aka MVRG's  
Weed Coordinator, Melissa Griffiths at  
several meetings including the MT Weed  
Control Association's Annual Convention.

## *A note from MVRG President, John Crumley*

Greetings and Happy New Year from Crumley Ranches. Things never slow down here on North Meadow Creek. I stay busy feeding cows, getting ready for calving, fixing machinery that rebels at this cold weather and dealing with some very hard working characters in my pastures. These characters are some beavers who have decided to flood the meadows where the cattle spend the winter. What a challenge! If any of you are interested in adopting these hard workers you are welcome to them.

I would like to applaud the Elk Management folks for hanging in there through all of the meetings this past year to work out the proposal addressing elk numbers and movement on the east side of the Madison Valley. Extended seasons and

management hunts sometimes feel like plugging a hole in the dike when the water is already running over the top. All local hunters need to get their names on the Game Damage Roster between June 15th and July 15th for Hunting Districts 360 and 362 so we have enough hunters to make a difference next fall and winter.

The Range Rider program has been approved again for this year. Jim and Marilyn Powers do an outstanding job of minimizing conflict between wolves and livestock. We are still working on the funding for this effort.

The Weed Committee continues great programs in addressing noxious weeds in the valley. Even though noticeable progress is being made in many areas, there

are new weeds cropping up in areas where weeds have not been in the past.

A high five to Mary Ellen Wolfe for her skill and stamina with the Growth Solutions process to help educate community members about growth and its consequences in our valley.

Well, the cattle need fed and the beavers are back at it.

-John L. Crumley



### *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*

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*(406) 682 - 3259      MVRANCH@3RIVERS.NET*

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

# GROWTH

The United States of America has existed as a nation for over 220 years. One of the constant aspects of our existence has been continual growth in our economy and society. Despite civil and world wars which caused the death of hundreds of thousands of our soldiers, our population continues to increase. We have endured consistent periodic recessions and depressions but our economy has continued to grow and prosper. We face another time of challenge and hardship that will have unforeseen impact on us individually and as a nation. Growth will continue despite the downturns and upheavals. Hopefully, we will press forward in our personal lives and in our workplace responsibilities to make the future even better. None of us can foresee all that lies ahead. But we can take steps to insure that we don't make the same mistakes of the past.

There is a growing concern about climate change and the atmospheric load of carbons. We see a dwindling of natural resources and critical habitat. We know that there will be a continuing increase in population. What can we do as residents of this spectacular valley to minimize the loss of what we value the most? The things which occur around America and around the world are not occurring

in a vacuum. Whatever is lost or degraded anywhere on earth is connected and is a loss to us locally. The other side of that coin is also true. What we conserve and restore here is a benefit to the rest of the world. We have the obligation as members of the human family to build, improve and enhance our communities and society.

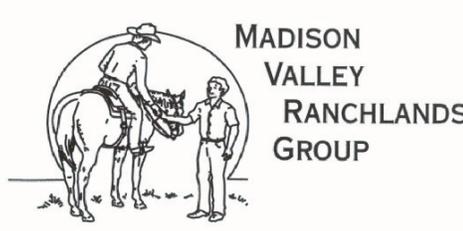
In an effort to gain a better understanding of our social, economic and ecological well being, we need to examine the critical aspects of our valley and community which may be at some risk of impairment. There have been recent meetings by Horizons in our community to ascertain what social poverty might be addressed. That has been a valuable endeavor by many local citizens. There have been several meetings of a group called Mad4Food which is interested in expanding the local production and marketing of meat and produce. The most effective solutions to problems and challenges to any community are determined by local people.

Most projections for our future indicate grave challenges and adjustments need to occur. The more clearly we understand the scope of the challenges, the more effectively we can move forward

with appropriate solutions. That is assuming there is broad participation by community members in obtaining good information and applying that to local circumstances.

We will probably not see the kind of growth in the Madison Valley for a while that occurred from 2002 through 2006. But growth and population increase are continuing at a steady rate elsewhere around the nation. The demand for clean water, clean air and safe food production will continue to increase proportionally. The areas that help provide those necessities of life will need more attention to reduce impairment and degradation. We are part of those areas. We must look to the future realizing we can't afford to squander the habitat and ecological capital that is here. We must actively consider how we will exercise our stewardship over resources that are critical far beyond the mountains surrounding this valley.





**MADISON  
VALLEY  
RANCLANDS  
GROUP**