



# The Mountain-Prairie Review

<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/ea>

Fall 2003

## Blackfoot Challenge Sets Example for Conservation Partnerships

By Deserai Anderson-Utley, EA

The Blackfoot Valley in west-central Montana is home to wildlife that has all but disappeared from much of the U.S. The valley floor hosts sandhill cranes, black terns and other birds, while grizzly, wolves and elk roam the valley and nearby hills. The Blackfoot River and its tributaries provide critical spawning and rearing habitat for rare native fish like the bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Yet recently this precious valley seemed to be headed the way of many Western lands. Residents thought that development of the valley's resources was an inevitable reality.

That's when the Blackfoot Challenge was established to help conserve and protect the valley's valuable natural resources and wildlife. The Challenge is charged with coordinating efforts among landowners, federal and state agencies, local government and corporations steward the Blackfoot Valley.

"As landowners and managers we have to show by example. This is our legacy," says Challenge Chairman and local landowner, Jim Stone. "This is the best thing we can do for our ranch and it's the best thing we can do for the valley."

This cooperation between public and private interests to support environmentally responsible practices has produced numerous gains in protecting the Valley's resources. To date, 85,000 acres of private lands have been preserved through perpetual conservation easements, 2,100 acres of wetlands have been restored, 2,300 acres of native grassland has been restored, over 300 miles of fish passage barriers have been removed, and many other projects have helped to pave the way towards preserving this valuable land.

The Challenge was awarded a National Watershed Stewardship Award from Service Director Steve Williams in June for their leadership in conservation. "The Blackfoot Challenge is doing the kind of landowner-led conservation we need to be promoting nationwide," said Williams. "Leaders in government and non-profit organizations must work in partnership with private landowners to ensure that healthy habitats and wildlife populations are here for future generations," he added.

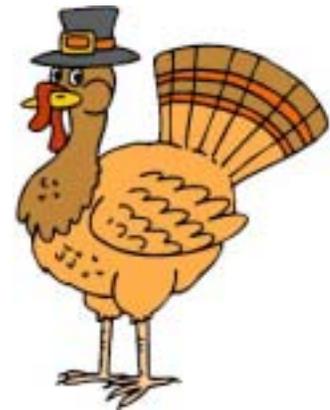
The Blackfoot Challenge participates in education in local schools, policy planning for habitat, forestry, water quality, and recreation and works to educate residents about safely living with grizzly bears, wolves, and other wildlife. The Challenge was chartered in 1993, but local landowners have been instrumental in stewardship since the late-1970s. For more information on the Blackfoot Challenge, contact [blkfootchallenge@aol.com](mailto:blkfootchallenge@aol.com).



Photo caption: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams presents the Watershed Stewardship Award to Blackfoot Challenge Chairman Jim Stone in June, 2003.



**Happy Fall!**



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## Media Corner

### News Media: Off-the-Record

By Debbie Felker, Colorado River Info and Education Coordinator

While participating in a news media interview, there may be information that you think could help the reporter better understand your message. That information, however, might not be something you want publicly attributed to you as representative of the Service. In this instance, you might be tempted to share the information “off-the-record.”

Think again before you do this. **NOTHING IS OFF-THE-RECORD.** If you don't want to see it in print or hear it on the air, do **NOT** say it to the reporter.

You may develop a good rapport with a reporter to the point that you want to share information as you would with a trusted friend. Resist that temptation. Remember, a reporter is neither your friend nor your enemy. Treat him with professional respect and personal courtesy, but remember the reporter's job is to get information. The reporter is always working, and the interview is never “over” as long as he's still in your presence.

Something you share “off-the-record” with a reporter may be held in strict confidence by the reporter, but his editor or news director may not know about “your agreement” with the reporter and attribute the information to you anyway. Err on the side of caution and think before you speak.

Next edition: The Ten Commandments (Part 1)

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## North Dakota Refuges Recognized

By Kenneth Torkelson, Refuges

Four National Wildlife Refuges in North Dakota have recently received national or regional recognition.

Upper Souris NWR was named one of Audubon Magazine's “10 crown jewels” of the refuge system. An article in the June issue of the Audubon Society publication picked the “most easily-accessible, visitor-friendly” refuges of the 540-unit system.

The August issue of Birder's World Magazine listed Chase Lake NWR as one of the 10 lesser-known places to see a wildlife spectacle in North America. The article singled out the refuge for hosting the largest breeding colony of white pelicans. Author Matt Schlag-Mendenhall said he wanted to highlight “lesser-known- but still jaw-dropping- spectacles deserving of birders' attention.”

In July, Kellys Slough NWR was designated a regional site of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, one of 57. The Refuge hosts from 26,000 to 43,000 shorebirds each year.

The new publication, “Birding of North Dakota” called J. Clark Salyer NWR “the single best birding spot in North Dakota,” and “...one of the best birding spots in the entire country.” The 63 sites mentioned in the booklet include 17 other refuges and waterfowl production areas.

## In Memory

By Debbie Felker, Colorado River Info and Education Coordinator

Mike Baker, hatchery manager for the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program's Grand Valley Endangered Fish Facility near Grand Junction, Colorado, died July 3, after a brave battle with cancer. Mike joined the hatchery staff in 1992. His expertise in fish pond culture improved the Recovery Program's efforts to raise endangered razorback sucker.

Mike developed an elaborate mating scheme to maintain the highest genetic diversity for the razorback sucker to be stocked into the Colorado and Gunnison rivers. He monitored the growth and stocking of razorback sucker from 98 acres of ponds throughout the Grand Valley. The Recovery Program attributes much of the success of razorback sucker propagation in the Upper Colorado River Basin to Mike's efforts.

Mike's career with the Fish and Wildlife Service spanned 39 years. In addition to his contributions to the Recovery Program, he worked in Spearfish, South Dakota, Valley City, North Dakota and Great Falls, Montana.

Mike was a good friend and a man who could always be counted on. He is greatly missed.



## High Plains Partnership Receives High Marks from DOI

By Deserai Anderson-Utley, EA

The High Plains Partnership (HPP) is making strides in improving habitat for declining populations of at-risk species on private ranches in the prairie and grassland region of the U.S. Traditionally, this 11-state region has been grazed by cattle, replacing historical grazing by wild bison. Because more than 90 percent of the High Plains is privately owned, it is vital that partnerships develop to use ranching to improve and conserve habitat for these at-risk species.

For the work that the HPP has undertaken and the example it sets for other partnerships, it recently received the “4-Cs” award from the Department of the Interior. This award is in recognition of the Partnership’s focus on the Secretary of the Interior’s 4-C’s philosophy of consultation, communication and cooperation in the service of conservation.

Eleven states, Fish and Wildlife Service Regions 2 and 6, the USDA and numerous conservation organizations participate in the HPP, which is a program to provide financial and technical assistance to landowners to protect imperiled wildlife on agricultural lands through non-regulatory mechanisms. The Partnership has provided improved habitat for species such as the lesser prairie chicken, black-tailed prairie dog, burrowing owl and Arkansas darter in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas through mitigating the impacts of grazing by adding fences, controlling woody vegetation and adding water structures.

The popularity of the HPP has skyrocketed, with over 150 ranchers on a waiting list to become a part of the program in Kansas and Oklahoma alone. These ranchers have taken the initiative to form a non-profit organization to educate other ranchers about the best practices for grazing their livestock and improving their land for habitat for at-risk species.

“With a relatively small amount of Fish and Wildlife Service funding and personnel, we have been able to join with our partners to leverage, focus and deliver much greater resources towards conserving at-risk species habitats in the High Plains,” says Patricia Mehlhop, Regional Grassland Coordinator, “but we need to do even more over a larger area to make a lasting difference.”

The states involved in the initiative include Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. The Partnership has also gained support from the Endangered Species Committee of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, New Mexico Cattlegrowers’ Association, Wildlife Management Institute, The Nature Conservancy and the National Wildlife Federation.

## RMA Staff Serving Overseas

By Tom Jackson, RMA



This photo was taken by Chris Young, FWS Safety Officer at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (aka Master Sergeant Young, U.S. Army) who is currently stationed in Kabul and will be there for the next 9 months.

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## HOW’D THEY DO THAT?

By Kenneth Torkelson, Refuge

It’s not very often Service employees get a good laugh from incoming mail, but that’s what happened recently at the North Dakota Field Office/Wetland Habitat Office. The envelope was addressed to “U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bismarck, ND 58501?”

The three agencies are not co-located.

“A woman from Minot, ND was asking for a copy of the new “Birding North Dakota” booklet that the Service helped fund,” explained writer-editor Ken Torkelson, who quickly filled the request. The woman mailed the envelope Aug. 12, and the booklet was sent to her on the 14th. Said Torkelson, “I wanted her impression of the Fish and Wildlife Service to be as good as mine is of the Postal Service for getting the request to the correct location—especially so rapidly.”



## **Preserving the Mountain-Prairie's History; Meet Rhoda Lewis, Regional Archaeologist**

By Deserai Anderson-Utley, EA

Off hand, you would not think that archaeology and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have much in common. On the contrary, as Rhoda Lewis, Regional Archaeologist and Historic Preservation Officer points out, "The nice thing about the Service is that our guys in the field are used to managing resources for conservation. By preserving wildlife and habitat, we also preserve cultural resources that might be in that area."

Our regional archaeology team, which consists of Lewis, Dr. Galen Burgett and Brant Loflin, both in Spearfish, South Dakota, is an integral part of the Service. Much of their time is spent ensuring that federal laws such as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 are met and that they monitor and mitigate the impacts of Service actions on cultural resources. Lewis prides herself on customer service to the field and helping field stations meet these regulations.

The fun part of the job is when they get to be in the field discovering archaeological sites or researching the history of significant projects in the Service's past. Lewis is particularly proud of a couple of projects. At Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in North Dakota, where a dam was determined to be unsafe and the lake drained, significant archaeological sites were discovered. These remains of human occupation dated nearly 11,000 years and help trace the use and manufacture of tools by the early inhabitants of the area. According to Lewis, sites like Lake Ilo help researchers understand how people lived centuries ago.

Most recent historic preservation projects are equally important to Lewis. The archaeology team is nearing completion on a study of the legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Project Administration in relation to Mountain-Prairie Region National Wildlife Refuges. These public works programs resulted in many of the first refuge buildings in the 1930s and early 1940s. From Red Rock Lakes and Des Lacs refuges to Valentine refuge, the history of these people and this era will now be preserved.

"I feel what I do is important. I like to do a good job and help the field understand the importance of historic preservation," says Rhoda Lewis.

Her goal is apparently being met across the Mountain-Prairie Region. Research projects are underway at the National Elk Refuge in Wyoming in conjunction with a doctoral student from the University of Nebraska, and at Fish Spring NWR in Utah. Refuge Manager Jay Banta at Fish Springs NWR has taken this message to heart, working closely with the University of Utah archaeology field school to coordinate a research program each summer to study the history of the Lincoln Highway, Pony Express, and prehistoric sites. Lewis says the result of projects like these is that artifacts and human history are preserved for future generations and researchers to appreciate and learn from.

Times have changed for archaeologists. The typical dig that movies and TV have glamorized has been replaced by ground penetrating radar systems that allow researchers to create images of the site, while leaving the earth mostly untouched. Lewis describes the importance of limited digging by pointing out that technology will keep changing, and in years to come, researchers may be able to learn much more from a site than we presently can, as long as it is intact.

The regional archaeology team is charged with surveying and recording cultural resources that are disturbed due to construction, land exchanges, and anything else that may affect these sites. The nice thing about being an archaeologist for the Service is that, "our mission is the same, conservation is the main goal for everyone here," according to Lewis.

After a 16-year federal career, including 13 years with the Service, Lewis is retiring in 19 months. Likely, she will spend much of her retirement searching for other historic sites and helping preserve the historic legacy that has been left over thousands of years.

## LE Gets On the Ground to Protect Wildlife

By Karen Miranda Gleason, EA



Special Agent Tim Eicher and “Rock” conduct backcountry patrol in grizzly and wolf country along the Norfolk drainage of the Shoshone River, Shoshone National Forest near Yellowstone National Park. Region 6 Law Enforcement works in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies to investigate and deter harm to grizzly bears, wolves, and other wildlife protected by federal law. Horseback patrols are a great opportunity to interact with hunters, outfitters and guides, and others in the area to teach them ways to avoid problems. Proper I.D. of bears and mitigation of human-grizzly encounters is a high priority.

“I don’t know if getting mauled by a bear makes you a better person or if only good people get mauled by bears. But I don’t think I’ve interviewed a person yet who hasn’t wished to let me know that they don’t blame the bear,” said Dominic Domenici, Resident Agent in Charge based in Casper, Wyoming. “I met one guy in the hospital shortly after his attack. He was injured pretty badly--had his ear bit off--and he said ‘You’re not going to shoot that bear, are you? I don’t want her killed. She was just doing what I was doing. She was hunting.’”

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## Karen Miranda Gleason Starts New Position

By Heather Gonzalez, ITM

After four and a half years serving with the Region’s External Affairs staff, Karen Miranda Gleason is taking on the challenge of becoming the Service’s first national fire outreach coordinator. She will be working for Refuge’s Fire Management Branch, headquartered at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. Her role will include developing and implementing a program to promote the Service’s use of fire as a wildlife habitat management tool. After some extended vacation during the month of July and a move across two states, Karen began her new job in August.

## Leadville NFH Starts \$1.8 Million Construction

By Karen Miranda Gleason, EA



Contractors broke ground during National Fishing and Boating Week to begin 9 months of construction on a state-of-the-art water treatment system at Leadville National Fish Hatchery. The new system, using both ultraviolet technology and mechanical filters, will eliminate the organisms which lead to whirling disease in trout raised at the facility.

The project was the main topic of discussion during a recent meeting and walking tour hosted by new hatchery manager Ed Stege and staff Carlos Martinez. Congressional staff, partners, and members of the local community viewed the construction site, and the event also received front page coverage by the local media. Regional Office staff from Fisheries, Engineering, and External Affairs also attended and answered questions about the project.

As the only Federal fish hatchery that currently tests positive for the disease, Leadville has put its fish production on hold due to the problem. By state regulation, it must eradicate whirling disease in order to resume its native fish production and stocking programs, including a new broodstock program for Colorado’s state fish, the greenback cutthroat trout.

Leadville NFH Visitor’s Center remains open, as do its picnic grounds in the adjacent wilderness. From the town of Leadville, go approximately 3 miles south, then turn right (west) on Hwy 300. Go about 3 more miles to the hatchery.

## **Law Enforcement Agent Helps Save Stranded Boy Scouts**

By Karen Miranda Gleason, EA

Service law enforcement agents aren't usually involved in search and rescue, but a resident agent in Utah answered the call recently to perform "other duties as assigned" when circumstances required her help.

Stationed in Cedar City, Resident Agent Bonnie Bell was meeting with staff at the Capitol Reef National Park about a joint wildlife investigation when the group got word that a boy scout troop had been stranded on a nearby trail. The group was hiking in Spring Canyon, a route requiring crossing of the Fremont River. However, substantial snowfall followed by record high temperatures created a dangerous situation due to flooding, with the river continuing to rise and more precipitation expected.

"It was moving way too fast and was way too deep," said Bell. The river was also about 40 degrees, with a waterfall just downstream from the crossing. The only other way out of the canyon was 10 miles back, a hike too daunting at that point for the four scouts, age 12 and 13, and three adult leaders.

Bell worked with park staff, including the park superintendent, to move the group one-by-one across the river. The rescuers first rigged up a light line using a Tyrolean system of ropes and carabiners in the trees, to move across the hiker's packs and deliver rescue gear.

They then worked as a team to establish a stronger line to move the hikers across. A separate safety line, staffed with a person on each side, was rigged up downstream to catch anyone who may have lost hold of the rope while crossing.

After donning lifejackets and whitewater helmets, each scout slid down a six-foot bank on his back into the chilly water, took the end of a belay line, and forded the Fremont with hands in the air. Swiftwater rescue belay techniques helped each person get across and up a three-foot bank on the opposite side.

"I was like a stop log," Bell explained. "My part of the operation was to grab them as they came across diagonally and pivot them onto the bank." She was in the water up to her waist, while another rescuer to whom she directed each hiker was out of the water on the bank. The cold scouts were then led to a warming van nearby.

"I've been in situations where I had to help people," she added. "Part of what we do as law enforcement officers is help the public. It's just part of the job."

# Accidental Eagle Poisonings from Euthanasia Drug are Preventable

By Deserai Anderson-Utley, EA

Across the country, eagles and other wildlife are dying due to accidental poisoning by a routinely used euthanasia drug. Over 130 bald and golden eagles have become documented casualties of pentobarbital poisoning from eating the carcasses of animals that have been euthanized. Residue from the sodium pentobarbital remains in the meat of animals long after they have been euthanized.

“These poisonings can be easily avoided by properly disposing of the contaminated carcasses,” according to Service Special Agent Neill Hartman. “It’s fairly simple to make sure wildlife cannot get to the tainted meat. We hope to get this information out to people across the country who may come into contact with euthanized animal carcasses,” Hartman added.

These deaths commonly occur when euthanized carcasses are left exposed to birds and other scavengers instead of being incinerated or properly buried, procedures that are required by many state and local laws. Some birds die immediately after eating poisoned meat, while others are able to fly for several miles. These birds usually die in subsequent vehicle collisions, electrocutions, hypothermia, predator attacks, drowning or falling from perches while sedated by the drug.

Proper disposal of euthanized animals and better communication between veterinarians, clients, and solid waste staff can help prevent this problem. Effective disposal methods include incineration, which is the preferable method, proper burial, or landfilling. Burial of the animal must comply with state and local requirements.

Species affected by accidental pentobarbital poisoning include both bald and golden eagles, as well as other scavenging birds such as magpies and ravens. The extent of other wildlife fatalities due to this type of poisoning have not been thoroughly documented to date, but may include any avian scavengers such as California condors, vultures, several hawk species, wood storks, crows, gull and other birds. Scavenging mammals potentially affected by pentobarbital ingestion include foxes, bears, marten, fishers, coyotes, lynx, bobcats, cougars, otters and others. Additionally, domestic dogs have been intoxicated or killed by eating poisonous carcasses. Zoos have also documented the deaths of tigers, cougars, and lions from accidentally being fed tainted meat.

Cases of pentobarbital poisoning have been recorded in 14 states since the mid-1980s. States affected by this problem include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Montana, Nevada, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. Poisonings in British Columbia, Canada, have also raised international concern over this issue. At least 133 bald and golden eagles have been killed in recent years.

For more information on secondary pentobarbital poisoning, visit <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/poison.pdf>.



**Bald and Golden Eagles**

## RD's Column

By: Ralph Morgenweck, RD

As I have written previously in this column, I believe that it is important for all of us here in the Mountain-Prairie Region to periodically remind ourselves of the fact that we are collectively working to conserve fish and wildlife resources.

Regardless of your position, your efforts contribute to this larger goal. If ever you feel like this goal is in danger of being obscured by the details of your daily task, I encourage you to get outside, get your hands on the resource, and reconnect with the real reason we do what we do.

Autumn is a fine time of year for such a reminder. Birds are on the wing, fish are spawning, and the natural world is generally busy making preparations for the coming winter. The Service is also typically busy this time of year as well: completing surveys, spawning fish, herding bison, and conducting other field work aimed at effectively conserving species and their habitats.

Numerous volunteer opportunities are available for staff to participate in and assist with these activities. Take advantage of such opportunities and remember the vital role we all play in leaving a living legacy for future generations. Doing so can make your job even more meaningful and help you "see the forest for the trees."

For more information on future volunteer opportunities, contact Dee Emmons, Regional Volunteer Coordinator, at 303/236-4392; or,

Saratoga NFH (brown and lake trout spawning): 307/326-5662

Colorado ES FO (Pawnee Montane Skipper surveys): 303/275-2370

Charles M. Russell NWR (Black-footed ferret survey): 406/538-8706

## Congressional Affairs

By : Matt Kales, EA

While Washington, D.C. is a good distance from the Mountain-Prairie Region, there are an increasing number of resources available on the World Wide Web about the U.S. Congress and current Congressional activity. Below are some selected, annotated URLs:

U.S. House of Representatives: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)  
U.S. Senate: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)  
*Find a Congressman or Senator; learn more about a Congressional district or state in the Mountain-Prairie Region; access additional resources about Congress and the federal government.*

House Committee on Resources: [www.house.gov/resources](http://www.house.gov/resources)  
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works: [www.senate.gov/~epw](http://www.senate.gov/~epw)  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: [www.senate.gov/~energy](http://www.senate.gov/~energy)  
*Keep current with these key authorizing committees; view hearing schedules; read testimony by FWS/DOI witnesses.*

House Committee on Appropriations: [www.appropriations.house.gov](http://www.appropriations.house.gov)  
Senate Committee on Appropriations: [www.senate.gov/~appropriations](http://www.senate.gov/~appropriations)  
*Track the status of FWS' appropriations bills and other relevant funding legislation.*

"Thomas" (Library of Congress): [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov)  
*Comprehensive legislative information, including bill language, sponsors, status, etc.*

For more information, contact Matt Kales, regional Legislative Affairs Specialist.

## Native American Affairs

### Tribal Wildlife Conservation

By: David Redhorse, EA

Twenty American Indian tribes in Region 6 submitted 22 Tribal Wildlife Grants (TWG) and 12 Tribal Landowners Incentive Program (TLIP) proposals that request about \$6 million federal funds. Nationally, the Service received 218 proposals for tribal wildlife conservation and preservation efforts. The Region 6 review team began the task of scoring TWG proposals late September. The team will complete their review by reading and scoring TLIP proposals during the second week of October. The national review team will be selecting proposals for funding recommendations during the first week of November.

Also the Regional Native American Liaison can finally claim that he has visited all reservations in this Region. In September the Liaison accompanied Dave Irving (Vernal Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office) on his tour of tribal efforts to place fish passages on streams on the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation. The reservation is located on the Utah - Nevada border. The Goshute are restoring habitat for the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout, with help from Trout Unlimited and the Service.

The Mountain-Prairie Review is a monthly publication produced by the USFWS Region 6 External Affairs Office. Publisher: Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director; Editor: Matt Kales, EA; Staff Writers: Diane Katzenberger, David Redhorse, Sharon Rose; Design and Layout: Heather Gonzalez, IRM/ Jean Clemens, EA. All contributions from Region 6 employees are welcomed and will be considered for publication.