



The Mountain-Prairie Review

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Ennis National Fish Hatchery Hosts Open House By Tom Pruitt, Fisheries

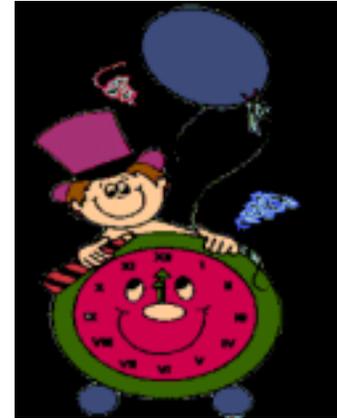
This fall, Ennis National Fish Hatchery hosted an Open House to celebrate the 130th Anniversary of the Fisheries program. Despite heavy rain, 125 intrepid soles braved the downpour for the trip to the remote hatchery where many activities were taking place. The Open House gave the public an opportunity to tour the new raceway buildings and learn about the hatchery programs.

The largest rainbow trout broodstock station in the National Fish Hatchery System, Ennis NFH showcased major construction completed over the last five years to prevent the spread of whirling disease into the hatchery and protect the genetic integrity of the broodstock. A highlight for visitors was watching rainbow trout eggs in the process of being sorted by egg pickers in preparation for shipping to hatcheries throughout the United States.

A “Pathways to Fishing” session was held for children under twelve. Professional fisherman and seasonal local resident “Bonefish Bob” put on a fly-fishing display and gave lessons for those interested. A cookout was held in the storage shop grilling burgers donated by a local rancher. A good time was had by all.



Ennis National Fish Hatchery welcomes the public at its fall Open House



**Happy New Year
Welcome to 2003!**



Table of Contents:

- Ennis National Fish Hatchery
- Open House1
- Lynx Reintroduction.....2
- Media Corner3
- Fast Facts.....3
- New Editor for news letter3
- Riding for the Brand4
- Partners on the Prairie.....5
- View from the RD’s Office.....6
- Congressional Affairs.....6
- Native American Affairs.....6

Colorado's Lynx Reintroduction Efforts to Continue

By Diane Katzenberger, External Affairs

Last November, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources received the go-ahead from the Wildlife Commission to release an additional 180 lynx in southwestern Colorado during the next five to six years. This approval was a critical step in the state-led initiative to help recover this species, which was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in March of 2000. Whether or not the state would receive approval from the Commission remained uncertain right up to the last minute.

The Commission is an eleven-member board appointed by the governor representing various special interest groups including livestock producers, agricultural and produce growers, sportsmen and outfitters, wildlife organizations, and county commissioners. Since several of the represented organizations had voiced opposition to the reintroduction

program, it's future remained doubtful. To pave the way for approval, the state requested the Service's help in alleviating those concerns which could potentially become roadblocks for the reintroduction program. Despite a short time frame, our folks in Ecological Services were up to the challenge.



Several staff members met with the state and groups of stakeholders to identify specific issues and explore possible remedies. At the eleventh hour, they hammered out a conversation agreement with the state which will provide protection for lynx as well as regulatory assurances for concerned citizens.

Upon Commission approval, trapping began in Canada and the first four of up to 50 lynx to be reintroduced this year have

been transported to a holding facility in southern Colorado. They will remain there to acclimate for the next few months to ensure they are in prime condition for release. Weather conditions in Canada are extreme right now, but state managers are hopeful that more lynx from British Columbia,

Manitoba and Quebec will be brought to Colorado this month.

Division of Wildlife managers plan to release the lynx in April at sites adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness Area and in the San Juan National Forest. Because of reintroduction has the potential for significant conservation benefits, the Service supports to the state's efforts to reestablish this species in Colorado's high country.



Media Corner

Know the Media and Their Deadlines

By Debbie Felker, Colorado River Info & Edu Coordinator

The timely release of information can be as important as the facts. News media need enough lead time to plan coverage of the story.

For planned events, news releases should be sent at least two weeks in advance. For late-breaking news, provide information as early in the day as possible and include a cell phone or home phone number to reach a designated spokesperson after hours. This is critical to ensure that your story is told accurately.

Knowing who to contact is also important. Get to know your local reporters by observing bylines on articles or learning which television reporters cover what kinds of stories. Some reporters are assigned “beats” to cover environmental/science, education, or general feature stories.

You can become an important resource to reporters before you ever pitch a story to them. One of the best ways is to call them. Always ask first if they are on deadline. If so, ask for a convenient time to call back. Introduce yourself, tell them you are available as a resource on certain topics and explain how they can reach you. Ask what kinds of stories they might be interested in. Verify their contact information (e-mail address, fax number). This conversation will set the stage for you to work together in the future.

A few days after you send your news release, place a follow-up call to make sure it was received and to ask if more information is needed. You can also find out if they plan to tell your story.

Always respect reporters’ deadlines. Respond to their phone calls promptly (within 30 minutes.) This will give you the chance to find out what they need and time to research and provide the requested information.

Next month: The Interview

Fast Facts

Historic Hatchery

Still Going Strong

The D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery has been producing fish in Spearfish, South Dakota since 1896. It is one of the oldest operating hatcheries in the country, and is listed on the National Historic Register. The staff of five offers the public many unique things to do at the hatchery, such as an underwater fish viewing facility, fish feeding, and a Fishery Museum. Because of its many attractions, the hatchery sees a whopping 145,000 visitors every year.

Kales Named New Editor of Mountain Prairie Review

With a departure of former editor and ARD-EA Dan Sobieck, Regional Legislative Affairs Specialist Matt Kales has been named as interim editor for the Mountain Prairie Review, effective with the February edition. Please forward all article ideas, photos and other submissions to Kales for possible inclusion in the newsletter. It is anticipated that a permanent assignment of editorial duties will be made at a later date.

RIDING FOR THE BRAND

By Bob Timberman, Refuges

[Editor's Note: Prior to his return to Region 6, Bob Timberman worked at Wichita Mountains NWR in Oklahoma. There he worked primarily in the biological section, while also serving as a wildland firefighter, a search and rescue team member, and part-time wrangler.]

I enjoy the early mornings while getting the horses fed, and watching the sun hit the far mountain. A dozen horses munching oats, brown-headed cowbirds flocking in to grab any waste. Silence is removed as I turn on the spigot and top off the water tank. It's bound to be another hot day.

My government horse Sonny, is tall and lean. His bald face and pink lips need sun screen in the summer to keep from getting burned. I give him extra oats in an attempt to put a few more pounds on him.

Sonny is the largest horse in the barn, but far from being the boss. Most of the other government horses in the stable have been there awhile, a hierarchy has long been established - he is the odd man out. He came off a ranch, and fits well on the refuge. Cattle are old hat, although these have horns with a little more reach than what he is used to.. He eyes bison with caution, I can tell he doesn't like the look, or smell of the them.

On one of Sonny's first refuge roundups, we are gathering cattle out of the heavy timber. It is fast paced work zig zagging through the trees and turning the livestock - he is a natural, I am scratched up high and low. As things slow down a new co-worker rides through the trees and up next to me. He is grinning from ear to ear.

"Ron," I laugh, "what are you so happy about?" He replies, "This is *&%^(#@! great isn't it....I'm riding for the brand Bob, just riding for the brand."

Later, we are bringing in the bison herd - or as much of it as we can. Horses were used for this event in the old days, too many hurt riders and animals created the change. Now 10-08 military trucks and a chopper are the tools of choice. The 10-08s are obtained free from the local military base. They are built stout, and we use them hard. Our regular FWS vehicles are babied, the military trucks are bullied. It is a necessary component of herding bison over 60,000 acres of rough, rock-laden country. The chopper is flown by a guy that does this type of work in three states, for almost for 30 years. He always says he doesn't fly the helicopter at all - he wears it. I believe him.

The chopper will haze a large herd of bison out of the woods and head them to open country. A few of us in 10-08s will be waiting, and the chase is on. The bison spread out, and the leaders will try for the forest - and freedom. Our job is to cut off any free thinkers in the group - and therefore keep the herd together. The chopper is all over the place; pushing, cutting, and turning...he bumps a slow moving animal with a skid.

Ron and I drive parallel to the herd

while keeping them from crossing "our" road. At times you have a 1,500 to 1,800 pound bull running within arms reach out the truck's open window. It would sometimes then stop on a dime and try to duck behind you as you lock up the truck's brakes and slide to a dusty stop....all the while Ron is close behind keeping the gap closed, and therefore maintaining a larger rolling bison roadblock. The radio buzzes with our.. er.. communication.

One time in particular, a few bison cows and calves slipped between us, and Ron headed off-road to turn 'em back while I held the leaders as they charged ahead. I look in the cracked side mirror just in time to see Ron launch off a Geo-sized boulder, the orange oil pan and scarred undercarriage of the truck fills my view. He lands the truck, turns the renegades - and we push 'em through the gate. As we get together prior to the next run I could see Ron once again grinning from ear to ear. "Let me guess," I said, "Yep" replied Ron, "riding for the brand Bob, I'm just riding for the brand."



Partners on the Prairie

By Dan Sobieck, External Affairs

Once native prairie is subjected to the plow it is forever gone. Period. While it's true this turf – formed by innumerable fires and storms over eons--can be “re-stored”, it can never be replaced, and once broken will never again support as much diverse flora and fauna as the real thing.

Bringing back the prairie, or some semblance, is a formidable task.

“The Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District started shifting from five-species native grassland seedings to high diversity seedings in 1996,” said Project Leader Gene Mack, recognizing that restorations using just five species paled in comparison to native prairie, which might include 300 species of grasses, forbs and sedges.

Partnering with non-profit Prairie Plains Institute, the Rainwater Basin WMD began planting high diversity seedings on 25 acre plots in '96, '98, and '99. At the same time, small tracts of unplowed prairie found on Waterfowl Productions Areas were identified, inventoried, and managed to produce a number of local ecotype seed sources. These unbroken bits of prairie, like hidden jewels, contained a combined 120 prairie plant species and formed the cornerstones of a new diverse seeding program--with Deputy Project Leader Tom Koerner coordinating the seed harvest from the sites and subsequent reseeding efforts.

Working with the Prairie Plains Institute and the Nature Conservancy, the Rainwater Basin WMD staff also shared and exchanged their seed harvests to ensure all parties obtained maximum seed diversity.

“In 2001, the momentum for the effort grew with the funding of a RONS project,” explained Mack. “As our program evolved, we found that our capacity could be exponentially increased with the addition of new equipment. And now Nebraska Game and Parks and Pheasants Forever joined us as partners.”

Along with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, all partners chipped in to purchase a used grain combine. Modified to the task of harvesting these wild natives, and behind the sure hand of the Service's restoration technician Brad Krohn, the combine gleaned over 20,000 pounds of seed in 2001 and nearly that amount in 2002. The bulk of the seed was native warm and cool season grasses mixed with a healthy amount of dominant forbs and sedges and smaller amounts of the less dominant species. Then the “horse traders” went to work again, trading seed with partners to ensure maximum diversity.

Today, the seed produced by the Rainwater Basin's program is spread throughout the range in which it is harvested; 4,600 pounds to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; 2,000 pounds

to Pheasants Forever; 1,000 pounds each to both Boyer Chute and Kirwin NWRs; and plenty to be used on 780 acres of the Station's own property.

“We gained years on our production schedule thanks to our partnerships,” said Koerner, adding that cost savings were another tremendous benefit. “There's no way we could afford to plant 120 species if we had to purchase the seed commercially. And the local ecotype seed we use isn't even available commercially.”

The value of these diverse plantings has been especially evident during the recent drought--while grass production (and subsequent wildlife habitat) has been poor in many tracts, deeper rooted forbs such as lead plant and compass plant have survived nicely--affording the landscape and critters relief until the rains visit again.



New Year Ushers in Bright New Era for Fisheries

By Ralph Morgenweck, RD

The start of a new year provides a good vantage point from which to consider the “shape of things to come” during the next twelve months. While this year promises to be a challenging one for the Service and the resources we strive to conserve, I am excited about the Fisheries Program’s Vision for the Future, a new strategic plan intended to enhance and refine Fisheries activities. Plans to step the Vision down to the regions, and to regional fishery resources, will be drafted in the coming months.

Integral to the Vision, which will be introduced at the National Fisheries Leadership Conference in January, is partnerships. Recognizing that partnerships have historically been, and will continue to be, critical to Fisheries, the Service collaborated with the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and other partners to develop the Vision and to find meaningful ways to renew our commitment to fisheries conservation partnerships. States, tribes, Congress, local governments, the business community, anglers, farmers: these entities represent partners, or potential partners, with whom the Service can and must work to conserve our nation’s aquatic resources.

In this spirit of partnership, I encourage you to partner in the Region with our Fisheries Program to support the Vision. Whether you volunteer at a hatchery during spawning season, work cross-programmatically with the Fisheries program, or just take a kid fishing, every action counts.

Let’s start this new year off right and help usher in a bright new era for Fisheries, and for our nation’s aquatic resources.

Committee Changes Mark Start of 108th Congress

By Matt Kales, EA

Major changes in Committees with oversight of the Service, our authorities, and our budget marked the start of the new Congress this month. In the House, Rep. Charles Taylor (NC-11th), assumed the Chair of the Interior Subcommittee on Appropriations, the committee that oversees the Service’s annual budget. Rep. C.W. Young (FI-10th) will remain Chair of the Appropriations Committee. In a surprising move, House leadership appointed Rep. Richard Pombo (CA-11th) over other, more senior members of the Committee (including Rep. Joel Hefley of Colorado’s 6th District) to Chair the House Resources Committee, which is the Service’s authorizing committee, and also has jurisdiction over the Endangered Species Act and other statutes of interest to the Service. Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (MD-1st), Chair of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans during the 107th Congress, will retain his retiring Resource Committee Chair James Hansen’s seat, has been assigned to the Resources Committee, while Rep. Tom Osborne (NE-3rd) has left the Committee, as has Bob Shaeffer (CO-4th), who retired at the end of this most recent term.

The shift in control of the Senate resulting from last November’s elections has elevated Sen. Ted Stevens (AK) to Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Sen. Conrad Burns (MT) will Chair the Interior Subcommittee. Sen. James Inhofe (OK) will take over the Environment and Public Works Committee, the purview of which is similar to the House Resources Committee, though EPW also has jurisdiction over the major environmental laws, such as the Clean Water Act. Sen. Wayne Allard (CO) and Sen. Craig Thomas (WY) has been assigned to EPW. At the time of this writing, the EPW subcommittees have not yet organized.

Native American Issues

By David Redhorse, EA

Tribal Grants

Draft guidelines for Tribal Landowner Incentive Program and Tribal Wildlife Grants were published December 27, 2002, in the Federal Register. Tribes and interested individuals have until January 27, 2003, to submit comments. We provided copies of draft guidelines to all Tribes in this region and offered opportunities to meet or discuss these drafts. Since we have been talking about these grants for over a year, Tribes appear to be ready with comments and proposals.

Tribal Organizations

Next week the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC) is meeting in Denver. This group has as their mission: “to restore bison to Indian Nations in a manner that is compatible with their spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices”. The ITBC includes 25 tribes in Region 6, representing half of the 50 member organization. The Service and ITBC used an agreement, along with provisions in the Service manual, to distribute surplus bison among American Indian tribes. Even though the agreement’s term ended, Neal Smith NWR, Region 3, and Wichita Mountains NWR, Region 2, were able to provide bison to tribes during the past year. The Service is engaged in an effort to renew its agreement with the ITBC.

The Mni Sose Inter-Tribal Coalition is working with the Region to share Native American perspectives on wildlife species that Lewis and Clark recorded first for science. Mni Sose is collecting traditional Native American stories and narratives of how the wildlife species were valued. These perspectives will be included in a new wildlife leaflet distributed at various sites along the Trail of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The Mountain-Prairie Review is a monthly publication produced by the USFWS Region 6 External Affairs Office. Publisher: Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director; Editor: Dan Sobieck, ARD-EA; Staff Writers: Karen Miranda Gleason, Matt Kales, 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.