

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc. , Lewistown, MT

Wildlife area is for animals and people

Story and photos
by Judy Bryne

Looking for a place to hunt? Want a picnic in the wild? How about fishing the Judith? Bird watching, horseback riding or hiking?

Just 11 miles northeast of Denton lies an outdoorsman's paradise – the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

Managed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the area is forever reserved for public recreation, and it's free – no permission required.

Such was not always the case. When FWP's Wildlife Biologist Tom Stivers arrived in Lewistown about 20 years ago, outdoorsmen had a tough time finding public lands close to town for hunting and other recreational opportunities. "It was an obvious need in this area," he says. "Havre, Malta, Great Falls, for example, all had public lands close by, but not Lewistown."

How the land was acquired and what FWP is doing with it is a story worth telling. It begins with a curmudgeonly, but far-sighted, old fellow from Great Falls, who spent much of his life in Denton – Leroy Byron Beckman.

A life-long deer hunter, Beckman amassed a small fortune through his frugal lifestyle, savvy investments and farming. At the end, he decided to give



The Beckman Wildlife Management Area encompasses three distinct geographic habitats: rolling foothills with grasses, timbered hills with sandstone and clay out croppings and riparian river bottom.

it to the people of Montana. His last will and testament established a trust fund for the purchase of lands for wildlife conservation and for public hunting grounds.

He stipulated that lands purchased through his trust would be gifted to Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. When Lou and Sally Steiner's place on the Judith River came up for sale, it seemed a perfect match to fulfill Beckman's dream and Central Montana's need. A proposal was made, and the land was acquired.

Today, FWP personnel manage and maintain the 6,500 plus acres of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area less than an hour from downtown Lewistown.

Region 4's Wildlife Area Manager

Mark Schlepp oversees the Beckman WMA, as well as eight others in the region. Born in Conrad, raised in Windham, schooled in Stanford and now living in Choteau, Schlepp is thrilled to be working in Central Montana. He visits the Beckman WMA approximately once each month carrying a virtual tool shed in his truck as he surveys approximately 10 square miles of the Judith River Breaks.

He takes readings from the power meters, checks the grazing patterns of

the cattle, distributes signs for hunters, inspects the vegetation for progress on weed control and assigns tasks that need accomplishing to his WMA staff.

"We're the caretakers of this property," he says. "Beckman's trust was set aside for land acquisitions only. FWP pays for repairs, fencing, road maintenance, weed control and irrigation."

In addition to caretaking, management of the WMA involves looking toward the future. In accordance with Beckman's wishes, a primary goal for the area is to improve the condition of its vegetation for the benefit of the wildlife, particularly white-tailed deer, mule deer and upland birds.

A new habitat grazing system plan has been implemented this year, which incorporates the Beckman WMA and

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Energy Conservation

With the energy rates of most sources increasing in cost, I encourage all of our members to use electric energy wisely. Conservation is one of the best ways to help with monthly power bills. There are several areas where conservation can be effective such as indoor and outdoor lighting. Efficiency of security lights for outdoor lighting can be improved if you have the older "blue colored" mercury vapor lights. The newer "amber colored" high-pressure sodium lights use about \$8 worth of power per month compared to \$11.50 for the mercury vapor light. If you own a security light, you can operate it with a switch, using electricity only at times when you need light.

Board member Vlastelic certified



Mike Vlastelic

Board member Mike Vlastelic successfully completed the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association Credentialed Cooperative Director Program. NRECA offers training on the competencies directors need to provide value to the membership and to the communities they serve. The CCD certificate is earned by attending five required courses and successfully completing a learning assessment for each. Fergus Electric was also commended for its ongoing commitment to education and training.



Indoor lighting is more efficient if you use a fluorescent light. Compact fluorescent bulbs have become significantly cheaper to purchase and they use about 75 percent less electricity than the old-fashioned incandescent light bulbs. I advise gradually replacing your light bulbs with the (CFL) compact fluorescent bulbs.

When purchasing new appliances for your house, I recommend the "Energy Star" appliances. Be sure to look at the electrical usage and estimated annual billing. You can learn more about energy conservation, CFL bulbs and Energy Star products online. Check out the vast information provided on the Energy Star website, www.energystar.gov.

If you are wondering how much electricity an appliance uses, we have kWh monitors that we lend to members. You are welcome to take a monitor home to see how much your refrigerator, computer or any electrical device uses.

I attached a kWh monitor to my home computer and found that it uses 135 kWh in one month if always left on. The home computer adds \$12 to \$15 to my monthly power bill. I discovered that it is cost-effective to turn the computer on only when in use.

With winter approaching, block heaters for cars, trucks and tractors come to mind. If you can put the block heater on a timer and only heat the engine for a couple hours in the morn-

ing rather than leaving the vehicle plugged in all night, you will save money.

I continue to see ads for radiant heaters that grab your attention with persuasive lead-ins like "Costs only 8 cents per hour to run." Radiant heaters are attractive and provide a pleasant heat but please beware – 8 cents per hour equals \$58 per month.

Electricity is a very good source of energy for all of us and I support using it wisely.

Highwood Generating Station

We continue to work toward this future natural gas power source. Our power supplier, Southern Montana Electric, is striving to have a diversified power supply. Western Area Power is a hydropower resource, PPL-Montana is primarily a coal-power resource, the Highwood Generation is planned to be a natural gas resource, and wind power will be considered a renewable resource.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality is in the process of finalizing the air permit. Financing for phase one, the first of three phases, a 40 MW simple-cycle natural gas peaking plant is progressing. I will keep you informed in my monthly Manager's Message.

Signal Peak Coal Mine

The new underground coal mine at Roundup is gradually increasing its electric consumption. Currently, the mine plans to install the long-wall miner and have it ready to operate by December. That will put the mine at their large-production capability. In less than 18 months, this sizeable project will be completed. NorthWestern Energy expanded its Broadview

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Evans re-elected MECA president

Fergus Electric's board president, Bob Evans, was re-elected president of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) at the October annual meeting. Headquartered in Great Falls, MECA is the state association for 24 Montana rural electric cooperatives. Rick Molvig of NorVal Electric in Glasgow is vice-president and Leonard Sivumaki of Sun River Electric in Fairfield is secretary-treasurer.

MECA helps Montana cooperatives find solutions to challenges facing the rural utility industry. Besides bringing affordable, dependable service to more than 400,000 Montanans, MECA speaks with a strong voice on behalf of its members in the halls of Congress and in the Montana Legislature.



Bob Evans

RURAL MONTANA

Service awards presented at MECA annual meeting

Joe Pirrie, Fergus trustee, was recognized for 40 years of cooperative service at this year's Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association's annual meeting in Great Falls.

General Manager Scott Sweeney was recognized for 30 years working with electric cooperatives, and Bill Spoja, corporate attorney, was honored for 35 years of service.

Along with rural electric associates from across Montana, these individuals were honored for outstanding service to Montana's rural electric community and to the national rural electric program. Collectively, they have 105 years of experience and expertise to share with the membership.



Joe Pirrie



Scott Sweeney



Bill Spoja

Wildlife

Continued from page 3

the neighboring Roe Ranch. This habitat plan implements a coordinated rest-rotation grazing system and is intended to enhance wildlife habitat on both properties, expand hunting access to a wider area and reduce conflicts between hunters and cattle. "We are implementing a habitat management plan that we expect will improve both parcels of land, in total about 9,000 acres," adds Schlepp.

Game is already plentiful in the Judith River Breaks. In fact, this WMA and its surroundings include some of the more productive deer habitat in the state, according to Tom Stivers.

Nonetheless, FWP hopes to increase the area's deer population by 20 percent. In addition to rotating pastures for cattle grazing, FWP maintains three irrigated alfalfa hay fields and plants silver sage and other plant species to encourage deer to remain in the area.

Beautiful and bountiful, the Beckman WMA encompasses three distinct geographic habitats: rolling foothills with grasses, timbered hills with sandstone and clay outcroppings and riparian river bottom. These separate terrains produce a diversity of plant species that can attract deer throughout the year, as well as a wide variety of other animals. Mountain lions, bobcats, coyote, antelope, foxes, badgers and skunks share the area. Twenty-five acres of wheat fields also attract upland game birds, particularly pheasant, Merriam's turkey and sharp-tailed grouse. Non-game birds and amphibians, as well as rattlers and other reptiles, complete the population.

The Beckman WMA is classified as primitive, with no water or improved campsites available. A couple of out-



Wildlife area manager Mark Schlepp oversees the Beckman WMA. Visiting the site once a month, he takes meter readings, checks grazing patterns of cattle, distributes signs for hunters, inspects the vegetation for progress on weed control, and assigns tasks to his WMA staff.

houses perch in parking areas, but those are the only hint of civilization. The area is fenced, but user-friendly. Most gates have walk-throughs for hikers or riders, and a gravel road leads down to the Judith River. Camping is allowed in some areas, but ATV's are not.

"Vehicles tend to drive deer and other animals away," says Schlepp. "We plan to manage this area for both people and animals. We want people to be able to use this area and have a good opinion of their experience when they leave."

Identify account number

Win a \$30 credit

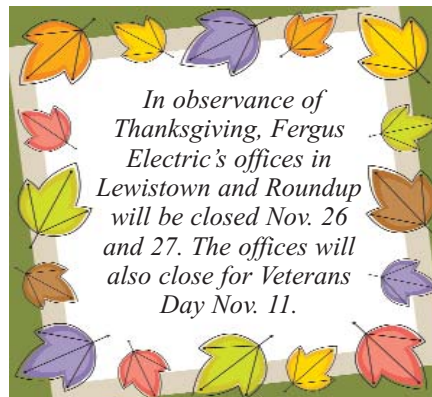
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 370090 • Account 318066

Account 235600

You will receive a \$30 credit on next month's statement.

Curtis Fowler of Lewistown was last month's winner.



So much to be thankful for . . . Manager's Message

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Editors note: At Thanksgiving, we are thankful for many things for many reasons. To Fergus Electric, Thanksgiving is an occasion to express appreciation for the opportunity to serve our membership and to wish everyone a pleasant holiday. Letters expressing appreciation are reprinted here.

To a great crew:

You guys sure do nice work.
Thanks,
Todd Foran

To: Management and Employees

We would like to thank you for the great service we have received from Fergus Electric Co-op over the past 25 years that we have been in business.

Our Sincere thanks,
Velma and Gene, Daum's Store,
Grass Range

Fergus Electric:

The Roy ambulance and fire departments would like to thank you for your "in-kind" donation to help with our expansion project.

Tom Byrne, Shonna Smith, Jolene Smith, Dave Kalina, Artie Niemi, Kirk

Donsbach, Blake Simons, Rosalie English, Pam deRosier, Ted Thompson, Carl Sielstad.

Special people make special schools:

Thank you so much for providing the "Get Charged – Electricity and You" kits.

Judy Stephenson, Librarian,
Lavina Schools

Dear Fergus Electric,

Thank you for teaching us about farm safety. We had a great day and learned a lot!

Paige Highley and the
Stanford 1st Grade

Dear Fergus Electric,

Thank you very much for providing this scholarship. This money will greatly help me pursue my educational goals.
Sincerely, Teri Husfloen, Roundup

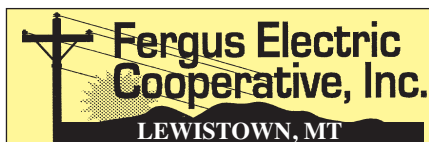
Scott and Guy,

Thank you for your insightful presentation at our alternative energy conference.

Bill Jones, President, Harlowton
Chamber of Commerce

Substation. Heberly and Associates engineered the design and supervised the construction of the 30 miles of 100 kV transmission line, and Outback Construction constructed the 30 miles of transmission line and all the distribution lines at the coal mine. This new commercial electric load will be a benefit to all the members of the cooperative. It was a great project with everyone working closely together to make it happen.

Signal Peak Coal Mine and John DeMichie, CEO/President, have been very good to work with throughout this impressive project. We are pleased to provide electric service to the new coal mine and to have 175 new mining jobs in Musselshell County.



Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:

Dale Rikala406-538-5192
Guy Johnson.....406-535-5132
Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)406-323-3426
Monte Obert406-538-9705

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Fergus Features is a national, state and regional award winning newsletter.

Hunting safety tips

Grass Range 8th grader Bryce Rigler says hunting can be a fun and safe activity. Each hunter should make responsible decisions to keep it that way. Bryce learned the following safety tips in last year's hunter education class taught by Dan Roats.

- Wear bright orange clothing. Not only is it safe, but it's required by law.
- Point the muzzle of your gun in a safe direction.
- Treat every gun as if it were loaded.
- Be sure of your target and beyond.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire.
- Avoid hunting alone. Let family or friends know where you are hunting and when you expect to return.
- Check the weather forecast and dress properly.

• Respect property.
Also, remember that insulators on power poles are not meant to be targets. Damaged power lines and broken insulators create dangerous situations. Outages can be caused, livestock endangered, and in the worst case – death.



Bryce is pictured at last year's hunter education field day, where he took a muley with a 25½ rack.

Youth tour essays due November 30. Details in October Fergus Features.