

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

Big Sky Regional Field Trials draw bird hunters and their dogs from Alaska to Florida

Story and photos
by Judy Byrne

The sky is blue. The air is crisp. “Hup, hup,” comes the command. Two men in hunter’s orange tread through the grasses as their dogs quarter the field.

Nolan Huffman’s Brittany Spaniel suddenly stands on point. “Whoa,” says the second hunter, cautioning his setter to hold back. Huffman flushes a quail, raises his gun, and fires. The bird drops, and Huffman’s Brittany runs to retrieve it. He gathers his bird, congratulates the dog, and sends him back into the brush to find another.

Huffman isn’t just hunting quail, however. He is competing against 70 other bird hunters and their dogs. Although bagging a bird or two makes up a big part of the contest, the ratings his dog receives from the judges is what matters most. Huffman, a member of the National Shoot to Retrieve Association (NSTRA), is entered in the Big Sky Regional Field Trials held near Lewistown in early September.

A full-time professional dog trainer since 2001, Huffman spends half his year – usually June through November – in Central Montana. When the weather turns too cold to work the dogs, he returns to his family roots in North Carolina.

“I first came out here to Three Forks for a dog trial in ‘99,” he says. “When I became friends with Jon Edwards, he brought me to Lewistown to hunt.” Eventually, Huffman bought 40 acres on Limekiln Road, which introduced him to the Horacek family. He married their daughter, Danelle, in 2010.



Nolan Huffman praises his Brittany Spaniel Rusty for retrieving a quail and then will send him back into the bush to find another.

Together with Edwards and Gary Ramsey, another hunter, Huffman was instrumental in bringing the Big Sky Regional Trials to Lewistown. The Huffmans’ parcel of land provides an ideal setting for NSTRA field trials. Within a few miles of town, it offers hunters the option of lodging and dining in town or camping on-site. This year’s trials brought 70 handlers and over 100 dog entries, as well as friends, spouses, and NSTRA officers. A portion of the field resembled an RV park with several dozen campsites.

“I love it out here. Montana attracts people from all over the country,” says John Holder of Wisconsin, who has

been participating in these events for seven years. As NSTRA’s second vice-president, Holder serves as chairperson of this trial. Holder says the most important part of his job is recruiting the best people he can to coordinate the activities.

One of those is his wife, Stacy. Managing entries from across the nation keeps her busy throughout the event. This year’s gathering brought entries from 16 states, some from as far away as Florida and Alaska. As trial coordinator, she receives the entries, schedules the hunting braces, and posts the judges’ scores.

“Each brace is 30 minutes and includes two hunters, two dogs, and five quail,” she explains. “Dogs are rated in several categories, including obedience, ground coverage, and retrievals. When the brace is over, we post the rankings here.”

Handlers usually prefer morning braces, when the air is cooler and more humid. Dry, hot weather hinders a dog’s ability to sniff out the prey. However, afternoon braces can provide opportunities to bag more birds, which also increases the score.

As well as being a competitor, Doug Cartwright of Great Falls serves as chair of the Big Sky Region. He plans the regional schedules, prepares the site, and procures the quail. He first joined the other 3500 members of NSTRA while stationed in Minot. “Field trials extend your hunting season and make your dogs better hunters. They aren’t at home just sitting on the couch,” he explains. “Also, a NSTRA championship makes the dog more valuable, particularly for their litters or stud fees.”

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Southern Montana

The re-organization of the bankrupt Southern Montana Electric (Fergus Electric's power supplier) continues progressing through the planned Chapter 11 process.

I am very pleased that attorney Lee Freeman has been appointed as the Trustee for Southern. Freeman is highly qualified and professional. I think that he will do a good job of guiding and leading Southern through the re-organization plan, which I hope will be finalized in about 12 months.

As we work together to develop this plan, Fergus Electric's goal is to stabilize rates and to keep future rate increases to a minimum.

New Board Trustee

Last month, I informed co-op members that Steve Balster, the trustee from District 1, was resigning as of Dec. 31, 2011. In Dec. the Fergus board interviewed three excellent candidates to replace him.

After the interview process, the board selected Paul Descheemaeker to be the new trustee for District 1. The board and I were very pleased to have three qualified candidates apply for the position and we all agreed that it was a difficult decision.

I want to welcome Paul Descheemaeker to the board and I look forward to getting to know him while we work together.

Rural Electric Cooperatives and PSC

by William A. Spoja, Jr.,
Guest Columnist

Although I serve as legal counsel for Fergus Electric Cooperative, I write this as a long-time member/consumer of the cooperative.

I have watched the recent discussion of our rural electric cooperatives in Montana with a great deal of interest because I learned my "readin', 'ritin' and 'rith-metic" under lights powered by Fergus Electric. During the 70 and more years that I have watched, there are a few facts which have become apparent to me:

1. Public Service Commission (PSC) supervision of NorthWestern Energy (NWE) did not prevent the Chapter 11 bankruptcy of NWE in 2003. Some would even say that it contributed to the problems of NWE.
2. The cost of regulation by the PSC is quite expensive for the company being regulated. The ones who pay this cost are the ultimate users of the power sold – cooperative member/consumers. (Co-ops are already monitored by Rural Utilities Service.)
3. PSC supervision of the rural cooperative power companies would tend to take authority away from the member-owners of the cooperative and place it into the hands of the



William A. Spoja, Jr.

PSC and its bureaucrats. We member owners may have missed the mark during the Southern Montana G & T period prior to bankruptcy, but so did the PSC and NWE before the NWE bankruptcy. We members care about what happens to our cooperative. If we are pushed aside, who will really care? Should we expect some bureaucrat in Helena to take more interest than we?

I hope that we avoid the pit falls that PSC regulation of the member-owned cooperatives would create. Selling power in a down market causes enough trouble. We don't need more trouble from bureaucrats at the PSC. Their current leader, Kavulla, has not proved himself beyond being able to stir the 'trouble pot' at this time. Let's watch to see what value he accomplishes before we decide to give him control of our hard-won electrical power cooperatives. We, our parents and grandparents have worked too hard to build them.

Nominating committee seeks candidates

Fergus Electric's annual meeting set for June 7

In accordance with Section 4.3 of Fergus Electric's bylaws, the committees for selecting board candidates have been appointed and will meet Feb. 21 at 6 p.m. at the Bar 19 in Lewistown.

In addition to candidates selected by the committee, any 15 or more members acting together from District 3, 5, or 7 may make other nominations by petition not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting. Such nominations are to be posted where the committee list is posted. No other method of nominating candidates for trustees is permitted.

Directors serve a term of three years and are elected by ballot at the annual meeting of the membership.

At least two candidates

from District 3 (Winifred and Roy areas), 5 (Roundup and Musselshell areas) or 7 (Geyser and Stanford areas) will be nominated.

Candidates must have their principal residence in the district from which they are selected.

Committee members are: District 3 – Dirk Hassler, 350-1451, Ron Heggem, 462-5364 and John Wickens, 462-5618; District 5 – Max Carpenter, 323-1921, Gil Majerus, 323-2575 and Sam Ohanesian, 323-2281; District 7 – Bill Araujo, 423-5620, Virginia Dye, 566-2689 and Bruce Neumann, 735-4488.

If you are interested in running for a position on the board, please contact one of the committee members.

Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close for Presidents' Day Feb. 20, 2012.

Regional Field Trials

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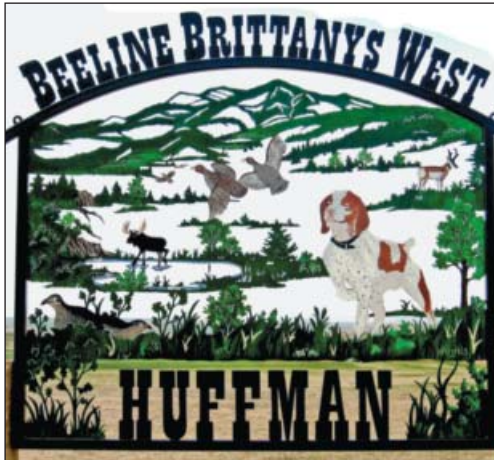
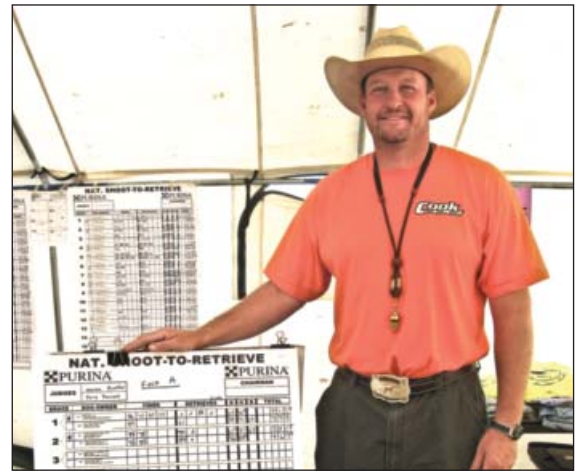
Originally from New Hampshire but now living in McAllister, MT, Gary Bauer has been involved with NSTRA for many years. One of the few hunters who run Gordon Setters, Bauer has a two-time champion, Piper, and a television celebrity among his pack. "Mollie was featured on ESPN," he says. "Gordons are great bird dogs. They have beauty, brains and bird sense. They know instinctively where birds might seek cover." Additionally, Bauer likes the calm, mellow temperament of these black-on-tan dogs.

Now retired, Bauer hunts nearly year-round. He likes the competition. Trophies, belt buckles, and bragging rights bring some reward, but he most enjoys the camaraderie among NSTRA members. "This is the greatest bunch of people I've ever been around," he says.

Although not a hunter herself, his wife, Martha, accompanies Bauer in their RV. She enjoys traveling to new places and often serves as a field marshal during trials. Her responsibilities include keeping things on schedule and communicating by radio with judges in the field.

Eliminated early in the trials, Jim Wiitala of Ennis relaxes while waiting for the upcoming pig roast. A 12-year participant, Wiitala runs German Shorthairs and belongs to NSTRA for the fun of it. "You get to meet people from all over, and it's a great spring activity," he says. "Field trials get the dogs in shape for hunting season."

Huffman considers this year's field trial a huge success and looks forward to hosting it in Lewistown for the next three years. "People had a lot of fun,"



Top L to R: It's all about dogs. This one proudly carries the prize to his handler. Huffman stands next to the chart where rankings are posted. Bottom L to R: This sign welcomes participants. According to his owner, black-on-tan Gordons have beauty, brain and bird sense.

he says. "Several even extended their stay in the area. Friday night's pig roast catered by the King Colony was a huge hit. They cooked the quail we bagged inside the pig, and everyone loved it."

Huffman invites everyone to come

out next fall to watch or join in the competition. "There are also several trials in the spring, everywhere from Savage to Polson. We'd love to have people give this a try whether or not they join NSTRA."

Embrace your blinks

Okay, so asking members to actually "embrace their blinks" may be a stretch (resetting clocks is a hassle after all), but it is important to at least understand why your lights sometimes dim or blink, especially during inclement weather.

The power lines that serve your home have a variety of protective devices designed to keep your power on during storms. There are several reasons your lights might blink during a storm, but the most common cause is tree movement.

Despite our best efforts to keep trees near our lines trimmed on a regular basis, strong winds can cause those trees to make contact with wires. When that happens, your lights may dim, or you might lose power for a few seconds as the system operates to see if the problem clears. Without the proactive equipment, members could experience a prolonged outage instead.

If you have an ongoing reason for concern however, don't hesitate to contact Fergus Electric. (538-3465).

Surge protection recommended

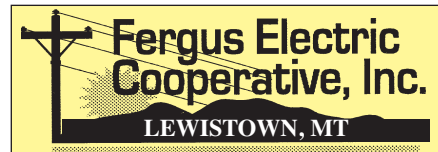
Surge protection devices can help shield your home and equipment during power spikes and outages.

Members are advised to talk with their electrician regarding installation of devices specific to their electronic equipment, such as computer and televisions, and they may also look into Whole House Surge Protectors. Electricians can install these at the meter base, where electric service enters the structure.

Unclaimed Capital Credit checks

Please call the office, 538-3465, if you know the whereabouts of any of those listed below.

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| Guy Johnson | 406-535-5132 |
| Scott Sweeney | 406-538-7218 |
| Don Criswell (Roundup) | 406-323-3426 |
| Monte Obert | 406-425-1288 |

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