

Centennial Valley Association — January 2023

CVA Program Updates

Water & Drought Awareness Program

Although the Centennial Valley may be covered in snow, the Water & Drought Awareness Program still has work to do while we wait for spring! During these colder months, Sara, Interim Field Coordinator, has continued writing monthly Water Reports for the community to provide information on snowpack and precipitation. She has also been researching new rain gauge placement and streamflow sites for future data collection, as well as the possibility of soil moisture monitoring. Sara is also planning an exciting fundraiser for the Water & Drought Awareness Program. Keep your eyes open for announcements in the coming months to learn more! Thank you to Montana DNRC for supporting this work with a Watershed Management Grant!

Scott Jackson



As of January 20th, 2023 the percent of median snow-water equivalent at each SNOTEL site in the valley are as follows: Beagle Springs– 137%; Clover Meadows– 116%; Divide– 121%; Lakeview Ridge– 144%; Short Creek– 168%; Tepee Creek– 137%; White Elephant– 139%. According to the NRCS, the Jefferson River Basin is at 102% of median for snow water equivalent, with the Red Rock River sub-basin at 111% of median! The National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center released its temperature and precipitation outlook for the end of January/start of February, predicting 70-80% chance of below normal temperatures with a 40-50% chance of above normal precipitation.

If you would like to receive the Water Report, reach out to Sara at drought@centennialvalleyassociation.org and she will get you added to the listserv. Stay warm!

2023 Wildlife Speaker Series

Stay tuned for updates regarding The Wildlife Speaker Series of Southwest Montana. With a vision of educating and inspiring people to know more about local wildlife and the ecosystems we share with them, this now 9-year-old perennial event provides curated presenters on a wide variety of topics. This year, the following entities are planning to host events: Big Hole Watershed Committee, Beaverhead Watershed Committee, Ruby Valley Conservation District and Watershed Council, Madison County Conservation District, Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, Madison and Jefferson County’s Extension Agency, Centennial Valley Association, Jack Creek Preserve, and Ruby Habitat Foundation. Topics, some of which are still being determined, will include macroinvertebrates, osprey, coyotes, mountain lions, impact of lead and migration patterns of raptors, and more! For more information, contact any of the above groups, or Dave@rubyhabitat.org.

Wildlife & Range Rider Program Update

Greetings from the Centennial Valley! There is more snow on the Valley floor than we’ve seen in years, and we are enjoying the wintery wonderland.

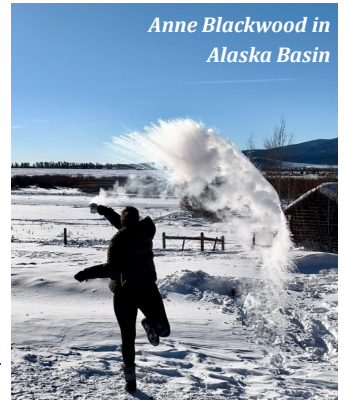
We will have at least one Range Riding position open for the 2023 season. The job announcement will be listed on our website at the beginning of February. Please pass the word along to anyone you think might be well suited for the position.

Last season, we had smooth-running season overall. Erika, Taylor, and David rode through cattle for six (6) different producers, consistent with the past several years. We are currently analyzing our data for the final report. From our observations, however, there seemed to be less grizzly bear and wolf activity compared to the last couple years. It’s hard to say what the underlying reason for this observation is, but we wonder if it’s not related to forage conditions or improved drought conditions. It could also be simply due to reduced observations, particularly from game cameras. Our cameras have been used regularly since 2017, and this year a good number of them started malfunctioning. Luckily, we acquired some new cameras at the end of the season and look forward to an improved camera program this year!

As always, we would like to thank our participating ranches, CVA members, community members, funders including the Cross Charitable Foundation and Livestock Loss Board, and all of those who continue to donate money, equipment, and time to our Range Riding Program. This program wouldn’t be where it is today without your support. Thank you!!

-Erika Nunlist, Wildlife Program Coordinator,
wildlife@centennialvalleyassociation.org

Anne Blackwood in
Alaska Basin



CVA Program Updates (continued...)

Get a Centennial Valley Hat for the Winter Months!



The Centennial Valley has long been a home away from home for Hannah and Mark, and Hannah has been fortunate to partner with the Centennial Valley Association in a number of ways over the years to support its mission to preserve traditional ranching as a way of life in the Centennial Valley, while maintaining open space, wildlife habitat, water quality, and migration corridors, as they exist today, for future generations. After years of working together, CVA and Hannah put their heads together to design hats that showcase the beautiful colors and textures of the landscape that would also give back to the important work of CVA. The Centennial Valley Association and its members are critical stewards of community, tradition, and place, so we came up with two hat designs that feature colors like sage and wheat and snow, which are inspired by the rugged snow-capped mountains and sagebrush landscape that capture the hearts of everyone who ventures there and where we are truly fortunate to live, work, and play.

For every CVA hat sold, a portion of the proceeds goes directly to the Centennial Valley Association to support their work. Your purchase will not only keep you warm, it will also help CVA continue to foster initiatives that benefit us all. Yarn for these hats comes from 100% wool manufactured by a family-run mill in Southern Maine that's been spinning worsted yarns for over 120 years. Each hat is hand knit by Hannah in Sheridan, Montana. The leather CVA patches on each hat were handmade by Erika Nunlist in the Centennial Valley. Each hat costs \$50.00, plus shipping. If you are interested in a CVA hat, please reach out to Kara Maplethorpe, Executive Coordinator, directly at (715)681-0795 or communityorg@centennialvalleyassociation.org.

Get to know more about Hannah, Mark, and Erika's businesses:

Flowers & Fringe, Erika Nunlist– Flowers & Fringe was established in 2021 by Erika Nunlist after she discovered a passion for leatherworking. During the winter months in the Centennial Valley, Erika creates unique items inspired by the wildlife, people, and landscapes of the West. You can check out her work on Instagram and Facebook, @flowers.and.fringe, or on her website: www.flowersandfringe.com.

Bears Den Essentials, Hannah Jaicks & Mark Ollenburger– Bears Den Essentials was started in 2020 when Hannah and Mark realized that their passion for knitting and love of the West could turn into something they could share with others. During countless long drives across the state, and late night conversations by the campfire, they created a handmade knitting company. Manufactured by hand at their home in the Ruby Valley by Hannah, all of their knits are inspired by the places, animals, and people they share their home with here in Montana. www.bearsdenessentials.com



Thank you for supporting the CVA and these local businesses in 2023!

Announcements

- * Help the CVA and its community-based programs by renewing or starting a membership in 2023! Member dues enhance projects that support the Centennial Valley's working lands, wildlife, fisheries, recreational opportunities, and community. To become a member, check out the [Get Involved](#) page on our website, or contact Kara, Executive Coordinator, at (715)681-0795. We appreciate your support and consideration!
- * **THANK YOU** to those who supported CVA during the Giving Tuesday fundraiser! Members and supporters raised over \$9,500! Donations will support our programs and staff, who dedicate so much of their time and effort to the Centennial Valley. We are so grateful and look forward to sharing 2023 with you!
- * CVA and The Nature Conservancy are in search of a Field Technician for the 2023 field season! This is a split position between both organizations. The full job description can be found on the [Careers](#) page of CVA's website.



Scott Jackson

Partner Updates

The Nature Conservancy



Winter is in full swing in the Centennial Valley, with 2-3 feet of snow across the valley floor! We had a productive field season last year, with the continuation of the CVA-TNC noxious weed program, ≈ 7 miles of wildlife friendly fence completed (in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] and CVA), and 900+ acres of cheatgrass mapped. We planned to treat the 900+ acres of cheatgrass last fall, but lack of rain early in the fall prevented cheatgrass from getting to optimal height for treatment (1-2 leaf stage). Once the precipitation did come, it came in the form of snow and didn't stop coming. Winter is the time for field season planning, and we are gearing up for a busy 2023. This upcoming field season we are planning to continue our partnership with CVA on the noxious weed program, complete more wildlife friendly fence work, map and treat cheatgrass across the valley, and assist Montana State University and the USFWS with a research project evaluating songbird and vegetation structure response to different grazing techniques. TNC and CVA are currently in the process of hiring seasonal technicians for 2023, so if you know of any interested parties, please direct them to Kara Maplethorpe or myself.

-James Waxe, Land Steward & Science Manager, james.waxe@tnc.org

University of Utah — Taft-Nicholson Center

The Center is busy planning for next season. If you would like to hold an event, class, or retreat at the Center, applications are still open. The Artist-In-Residence program is accepting applications and the deadline is January 31st. Applications for all of our programs are available on our webpage.

The Center's partnership with SAGE (a worldwide network of sensor arrays) is continuing. If you haven't checked out the sensor arrays and the beautiful real-time pictures, you can do so at:

<https://portal.sagecontinuum.org/node/000048B02D3AE2F2>
<https://portal.sagecontinuum.org/node/000048B02D3AE2F4>

-Mark Bergstrom, Director of the Taft-Nicholson Center

Beaverhead County Weed District

Even though the ground is white, noxious weeds are lying in wait and getting ready for the weather to warm up. It was even reported recently that spotted knapweed was green in Butte! Now is a great time to be thinking about plans for noxious weed management in 2023. The Weed District, in cooperation with the MWCA Southwestern Area, will be putting on an applicator training on Thursday, February 23rd in Dillon. Please contact the Weed District to register for the training. Remember, you need to get recertification credits by December 2024. Don't know how many credits you have or need? Contact the Extension or Weed Office and we can check for you. A list of spray days will be available soon. Days will include Lima, Lima Dam, Big Sheep Creek, Little Sheep Creek, Snowline, Monida, Wolverine, and Red Rock Pass.

-Amber Burch, County Weed Coordinator, (406)683-3790

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

All is mostly quiet on the Refuge front. As always, winter brings most outdoor field activities to a halt. However, it is the time for planning spring through fall field season activities and this year is no different. Some of the projects the Refuge is looking towards this field season are:

- * assisting volunteers with bluebird nest box surveys
- * aspen seed collection, aspen tree seedling planting, and building a protective enclosure
- * sign upgrades and replacement
- * maintenance of an interpretive native pollinator/wildflower plot for the visitor center
- * facilities maintenance – staining, painting, mowing, etc.
- * riparian creek restoration
- * mountain camera trap inventory
- * invasive plant removal
- * Odell trail maintenance

Arctic grayling work on Upper Red Rock Lake is ongoing, with data logging devices having been deployed under the ice to assess water oxygen levels. Ice depth averages around 12" currently, which is less than the previous three years. A thick layer of snow is currently insulating the ice from cold temperatures and causing it to grow slower. Peak thickness usually occurs sometime in March with average thickness then around 35".

A recent observation of several snow depths at the River Marsh Campground was measured in the area of 24". We are hopeful for a very green spring, colorful wildflowers, and a minimal fire season later this year. Fingers crossed.

Temperatures, while mild as of recent, fell to -40F and -30F on December 22nd and 23rd, respectively. While absent from the valley for a few years, temperatures this low are of paramount importance to the Centennial Valley's mountain ecosystem and play an important role in limiting mountain pine beetle and spruce beetle outbreaks.

-Cortez Rohr, Deputy Refuge Manager



Cortez Rohr

Partner Updates (continued...)

Beaverhead Watershed Committee

Scott Jackson



The Beaverhead Watershed Committee continues to work with the Beaverhead County Collaborative on resolving local potential wilderness designations. We've come to a preliminary agreement on the BLM Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study Area, and will now move on to the BLM Bell-Limekiln WSA. We encourage anyone with interest in the area and topic to reach out. Our grant application to reinforce a failing mine tailing berm on Grasshopper Creek has ranked at the top of DNRC's list. These grants go to a legislative subcommittee to be approved with the Governor's budget. Never a done deal until the Legislative Lady sings and the session closes out, but in the past, ranking high on this list means getting funded. We've also had an application approved to develop a nutrient reduction wetland on Lower Stone Creek. This will be a long process, but it's nice to see it moving.

-Zach Owen, Watershed Coordinator, zach@beaverheadwatershed.org

Ruby Valley Conservation District

The Ruby Valley Conservation District's Rancher Roundtable series of speaker events has officially begun for 2023! There are three more events planned to take place over the next month, so come enjoy a complimentary dinner while watching one of our guest speakers, who will be speaking on pertinent farming and ranching issues and topics. The next event will be held at the Ennis Public Library at 5PM on Tuesday, January 31st, where Dr. Sam Wyffels will be discussing technology on the ranch. On February 21st at 5PM, Dr. Jane Mangold will lead a discussion on invasive grasses at the Alder Fire Hall. Finally, on February 28th at 5PM, we'll be back at the Ennis Public Library, where Josh Wagoner and Andrew Lam will be talking about weed control in hay. For more information on these events, email info@rvcd.org or call Christina at 406-842-5741 x 105.

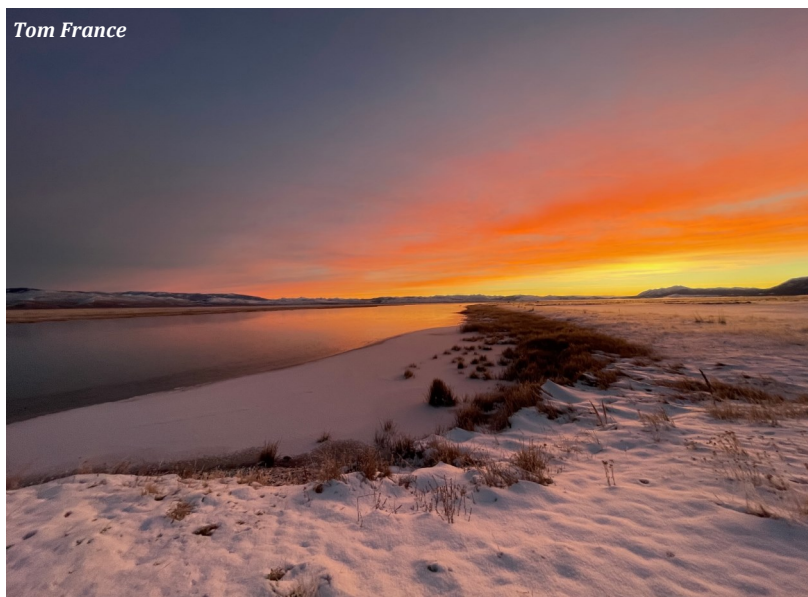
In other news, I'd like to introduce myself as the new Big Sky Watershed Corps member at the RVCD. My name is Tim Weighart, and I'll be working within the district until this November. After a tough summer spent working on trails in the Sawtooth Wilderness, I'm looking forward to diving into the other end of conservation work by helping out with the planning, monitoring and implementation of the RVCD's local projects. Some of the biggest responsibilities that I'll have in the district will include assisting with our plans for the biggest education and outreach events of the year, such as Kids River Resource Day and our Wildlife Speaker Series. In addition to monitoring many of our ongoing projects in the rivers and tributaries of the Lower Ruby and Tobacco Root Mountains, I will also be planning my own small-scale restoration project to help a specific segment

of river become healthier or more stable. I look forward to learning more about the greater area of southwestern Montana, and about the important conservation work that you are all doing out here.

-Tim Weighart, Big Sky Watershed Corps



Tom France



CVA Board Members

Yvonne Martinell, Chairwoman
Peggy Dulany & Andrew Anderson (Proxy)
Kevin Crowe & Tassi Duffner (Proxy)
Jerry Scheid (Advisory)
Jim Berkey (Advisory)

Scott Huntsman
Ed Wolfe
Mel Montgomery
Mark Bergstrom (Advisory)
Bill West (Advisory)

CVA Committees

Weeds: Scott Huntsman
Wildlife: Yvonne Martinell, Bill West
Hunting: Jerry Scheid, Scott Huntsman

Friends of the CVA

CVA strives to build and utilize working relationships with numerous agencies and organizations, such as:

- * Federal, State, and County Agencies
 - * The Nature Conservancy
 - * Taft-Nicholson Center
 - * Future West
- * Heart of the Rockies Initiative
 - * USFWS Partners Program
- * Montana Watershed Coordination Council
 - * Cross Charitable Foundation
 - * Greater Yellowstone Coalition
 - * Defenders of Wildlife
 - * Livestock Loss Board
- * Western Sustainability Exchange
- * Missouri Headwaters Partnership
- * Friends of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and the Centennial Valley
 - * Fish, Wildlife and Parks WHIP Program
 - * Montana Native Plant Society
 - * Western Landowners Alliance
 - * And Many Others!