



Centennial Valley Association — July 2023

CVA Program Updates

Invasive Species Management Program

The invasive weed management season is in full swing in the Centennial Valley for this year! The CVA and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) crew that has taken the helm of the program is Shannon Wilkey, Anna Haight, Clare Ols, and Hannah Robles. They have been working hard mapping and treating the invasive weeds that tend to be early invaders, such as black Henbane and whitetop, and as the season progresses will be focusing on more varieties of invasive weeds. Management efforts include Weed Weeks, of which one was completed in the last full week in June and the second is scheduled for the last full week of July— coming up fast. Two more Weed Weeks are scheduled for August and September, focusing more on later occurring invasive weeds that include spotted knapweed, hoary alyssum, and houndstongue. The data that has been collected and analyzed by the crew, as of the end of June, includes:

- * 60 points were Unlocated Year 1
- * 30 points were Unlocated Year 2
- * 26 points were Unlocated Year 3
- * 9 points were Eradicated
- * 38 new points located



Anna, Field Technician, treating weeds with a backpack sprayer.



Crew reseeding at Long Creek. Shannon Wilkey

This is the 4th year of CVA’s Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) grant. At the end of May, CVA and TNC staff reseeded bareground areas of Long Creek with native plant species, to improve forage, habitat, and to prevent the re-establishment of invasive weeds in the future. The crew will continually monitor Long Creek for the duration of the summer to identify other candidate spots to do another native plant reseed in the fall, courtesy of the WHIP grant. Since 2019, the CVA WHIP project has reseeded a total of 20-acres of wildlife habitat with native grasses and forbs in the Centennial Valley! Other than reseeding, the crew has also spent a lot of time on Long Creek conducting weed management,

including treatments with herbicide and hand-pulling of seed heads, and monitoring for additional bare spots from eradicated invasive weeds, to reseed with native grasses and forbs in the fall. The invasive weed species that have been targeted on Long Creek are whitetop, Canada thistle, musk thistle, and an isolated patch of hoary alyssum. Other priority WHIP treatment areas for the remainder of the season include Wolverine, Alaska Basin, and Metzel Creek. The CVA field crew has managed over 25-acres of invasive weed infestations in the WHIP areas so far in 2023!

Finally, CVA will be hosting three community sponsored Spray Days in August, in coordination with Beaverhead County. A homemade lunch, dessert, and beverages will be provided for all partners and volunteers in attendance. Please let us know if you are interested in joining us! The CVA Spray Days are:

- * Red Rock Pass at the top of the pass— **August 9th**
- * Lima Dam below the spillway— **August 10th**
- * Wolverine at the gate— **August 16th**

If you have any questions, concerns, or would like to volunteer during upcoming Weed Weeks and CVA Spray Days, please do not hesitate to reach out to Clare Ols at invasiveweeds@centennialvalleyassociation.org or Shannon Wilkey at shannon@centennialvalleyassociation.org.



Columbine, native plant species. Carol Bergstrom

CVA Program Updates (continued...)

Wildlife Speaker Series 2023

CVA was pleased to share our 5th Wildlife Speaker Series event in the Centennial Valley at the end of June. Jim Williams, former Montana FWP regional director and author, provided a delightfully educational and entertaining talk about mountain lions to 72 people, our biggest Speaker Series with CVA! A **HUGE** thank you to Jim for making the long drive to the Centennial Valley to share with us, and to the Taft-Nicholson Center for hosting the event.

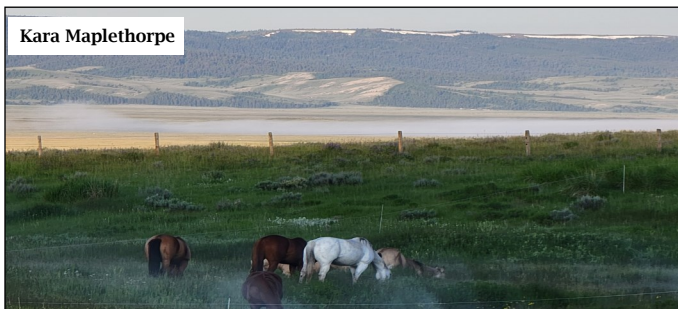
There are a few more Wildlife Speaker Series events taking place in the next month across southwest Montana:

- * **July 27**— Whitetail Deer and Chronic Wasting Disease, hosted by the Beaverhead Watershed Committee, at 5:30pm at the Dillon Depot Theater.
- * **August 9**— Raptors and Lead, hosted by the Ruby Habitat Foundation, at 5:30pm at the Ruby Habitat Foundation Visitor Center.
- * **August 16**— Mountain Goats, hosted by the Madison Conservation District, at 5:30pm at the Madison Theater in Ennis.

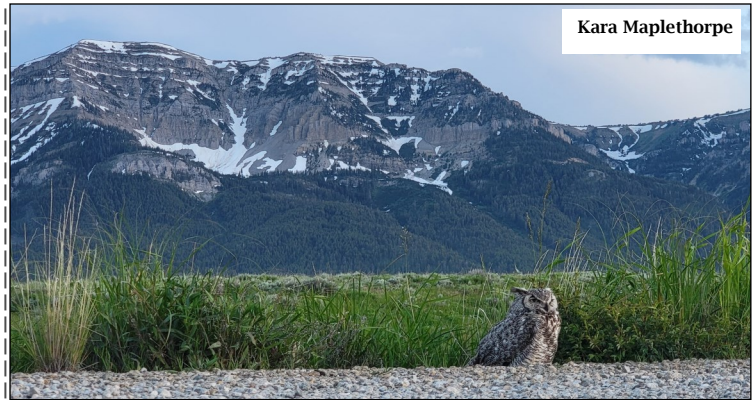
Wildlife and Range Rider Program

Range riding season has been in full swing since the end of May! The Team includes Erika, Wildlife Program Coordinator, Taylor, second season Range Rider, and Cody, who is here for his first season on the Team. Range Riders have been out riding through seven herds over the past few weeks and tracking wildlife via game cameras and sign/visual observation. The Team pays close attention to water availability, grass, poisonous plants, and fence issues. Overall, cattle herds have been healthy this season, with no reports of predator conflict. Unfortunately, the native plant larkspur, which is toxic to cattle, has been healthy this year, leading to cattle losses. Range Riders will continue to monitor for larkspur and other poisonous plants, like death camas, and help keep cattle away from those plants in their pastures.

The Wildlife Program has many game cameras spread out across the Centennial Valley to monitor large carnivores and other wildlife. From range riding efforts, game cameras, and community reports, the Team has recorded observations of 18 grizzly bear, five black bear, and seven wolf this season. Please reach out to Erika at wildlife@centennialvalleyassociation.org if you have questions or would like to report any wildlife sightings!



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info@centennialvalleyassociation.org



Water and Drought Awareness Program

The Centennial Valley is still green in many places, thanks to a significant winter snowpack and consistent rains in May and June! Though any drought in our around the Centennial Valley may be kept at bay, temperatures have been very warm across Montana, with little to no precipitation. As we move deeper into the summer, remember to be aware of changing conditions and be fire smart!

Field Technicians Shannon and Anna have been managing six automated rain gauges placed throughout the valley floor. In addition, TNC and the Refuge have CoCoRaHS rain gauges, the BLM has a RAWs station in the Sandhills, and CVA Members, Scott and Shane, share data from their automated rain gauge in Lakeview. Data is being monitored monthly and is compiled into an end of the month report. If you would like to receive the Water Report directly to your inbox, please reach out to us!

As of July 20th, Lakeview (south-central) has received 1.0" of precipitation and the Sandhills (northeast) has received 0.30" of precipitation. The Jefferson River Basin is 109% of median for precipitation for the water year, and the Red Rock subbasin is 106% of median for precipitation for the water year.

If you have questions, suggestions, or would like to receive Water Reports, contact us at drought@centennialvalleyassociation.org.

Thank You from the CVA!

CVA is so grateful for the members, donors, grantors, and partners that support our amazing Team each year! Contributions, whether monetary or in-kind, ensures staff are supported to sustain effective programs that are meaningful to the Centennial Valley.

CVA is actively looking for grants and other monetary and in-kind support for our Invasive Species Management, Range Rider, and Water and Drought Awareness Programs. Please reach out to Kara, Executive Coordinator, at (715)681-0795 or commuityorg@centennialvalleyassociation.org if you have suggestions or would like to help CVA in any way.

Thank you for your support in 2023!

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Partner Updates

University of Utah's Taft-Nicholson Center

Parade participants.
Carol Bergstrom



Activities on the University of Utah's Taft-Nicholson Campus are in full swing. June marked the return of the honors course, Ecology and Legacy. Science Wednesday continues to be a community favorite. We had the privilege of hosting the Wildlife Speaker Series on June 28th with a wonderful presentation by Jim Williams, author of *Path of the Puma*. The presentation drew an audience of 72 community members. July started with a community celebration of the 7th annual Lakeview 4th of July parade. A huge shout out to the parade committee, Ivy and Amelia Warren and Carol Bergstrom. We are in the middle of hosting our faculty fellow program, which brings researchers from the University of Utah to the center to work on their research. So far, we have had presentations on the digital library and math education. We will finish the month up with music in the mountains when the students of the U of U Brass Ensemble grace us with a concert on the 21st of July.

-Mark Bergstrom, Taft-Nicholson Center Director



Carol Bergstrom

The Nature Conservancy in Montana

After three weeks of trainings to kick off the season, the Sandhill's Preserve is buzzing with land stewardship and research projects. TNC staff have started wildlife-friendly fence work, and are currently working on a half mile stretch of sheep-wire fence along the North Valley Road. We are working with three separate landowners to improve fences for wildlife and hope to modify or remove/replace five miles of fence this summer.



TNCVA crew treating henbane on North Valley Road. Shannon Wilkey

TNC and CVA staff have been hard at work combating noxious weeds across the entire valley, with 2-4 people working on weed related projects nearly every day. TNC is also leading cheatgrass mitigation efforts throughout and adjacent to the Centennial Valley. We are contracting cheatgrass mapping services to get an idea of how much cheatgrass there is in the High Divide. We have had two separate contractors survey large areas, and have found little cheatgrass outside of main gravel roads. We plan to spray 800-1,000-acres of known cheatgrass patches in the Centennial Valley this fall, and will likely be increasing these efforts in the coming years as new cheatgrass patches are discovered.

Lastly, we are starting to survey drainages for potential mesic restoration sites, looking to improve and/or maintain degraded sagebrush/grassland streams. We will begin to build low-tech rocks structures after we determine priority areas for restoration.

-James Waxe, Land Steward & Science Manager

Beaverhead County Weed District

The cool, wet spring has seemed to give the weeds an extra boost this year! We are not quite halfway through our season and weed populations have been higher than normal in some areas. This has caused us to not get to some areas as quickly as we would like. Other areas have looked great. We are hoping that we are getting seed bank germination.

So far, we have held 22 spray days across the county with another 12 to go, including a few in the Upper Red Rock. There are still grant funds available for herbicide and commercial application costs for landowners in the Upper Red Rock CWMA. Be sure to get your receipts or invoices to our office as soon as you can to receive up to 50% in cost-share dollars!

If you have questions or concerns about noxious weeds, please don't hesitate to call the office at (406)683-3790.

-Amber Burch, Weed Coordinator



Avalanche debris in Alaska Basin.
Cy McCullough

To preserve traditional ranching as a way of life in the Centennial Valley, and to maintain quality open space, wildlife habitat, water quality, and wildlife migration corridors as they exist today for future generations.

Partner Updates (continued...)

Centennial Valley Birds and Grazing Project

Montana State University has launched a new project this year in collaboration with US Fish & Wildlife Service, TNC, Bureau of Land Management, US Geological Survey, and private landowners. With this project, we are hoping to better understand the effects that grazing cattle have on songbirds and the vegetation that they rely on for nesting habitat. To answer these questions, we are conducting avian point count surveys in the Centennial Valley this summer. A point count survey is a census of all birds detected by sight and sound in a predetermined location during a specific duration of time; we use six minutes. We are focusing our efforts on grassland, sagebrush, and wet meadow habitats to determine if different cattle management strategies support stronger wildlife communities in each of these habitat types. After our data are collected, we will be able to determine species composition and abundance across these habitats. In addition, we are also conducting vegetation surveys at each bird survey point. These vegetation surveys will help us determine patterns of utilization by cattle in each pasture, as well as grass, forb, and shrub diversity. Together, the vegetation and bird surveys will allow us to make recommendations to landowners and land managers interested in increasing pasture utilization while maintaining high levels of biodiversity.



Andrew Stauffer uses a rangefinder to estimate bird distance.

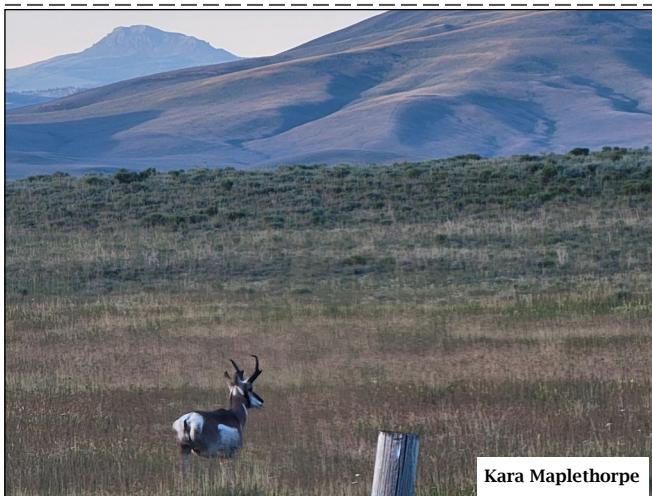


Emma Grusing searching for birds.

We began surveying a large area of the Centennial Valley during the first week of June and have recently finished these surveys. We have detected an impressive number of bird species, including sparrows, flycatchers, wrens, warblers, waterfowl, hawks, and many others. We have learned a lot about the utilization of this area by different bird species - some we were unsure were even here. An example of this accomplishment: discovering a new possible breeding population of Sprague's Pipits that was otherwise undocumented in the valley, or even anywhere else in Beaverhead County. Sprague's Pipits are a grassland songbird that has declined almost 80% since the 1960s, largely due to conversion of their habitat to croplands. Interestingly, studies show that Sprague's Pipits benefit from well-managed cattle grazing, which perfectly aligns with the goals of our research and monitoring project in the Centennial Valley. These birds are a difficult species to detect, even when the males are showing off in their unique flight display in which they produce a unique flight song; otherwise, they are ground nesters who are primarily found in medium-height grasses interspersed with wildflowers. We have also been fortunate enough to observe courtship flight displays from other species like Wilson's Snipe, as well as detecting many nests of more common species in the valley: Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, and Brewer's Sparrow. In total, we have surveyed 867 individual locations spanning federal, state, and privately-owned land. We look forward to analyzing our results and being able to disseminate our findings to landowners and other scientists with similar research goals. Our crew is grateful to have been able to spend the past couple of months living and working in such a culturally and ecologically unique and special landscape, and we especially appreciate the landowners and managers allowing us to use their land for this study.



Emilie Maggs scanning for birds.



Kara Maplethorpe

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Dean Waltee, Montana FWP Wildlife Biologist, will pursue a complete-coverage aerial survey for antelope across the Centennial Valley during late July and August. He will survey the watershed using a yellow fixed-wing SuperCub by flying north-south transects from east to west. The survey effort will also include classification of moose within and in proximity to the Red Rocks Refuge early one morning. Any elk and mule deer that are opportunistically observed while flying will also be classified. Dean will share a summary of the survey effort soon after completing the survey.

Partner Updates (continued...)

Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership



Emma Fullerton, TNC, building a Beaver Dam Analog.

Come help the Beaverhead Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation build beaver dam analogues on Fish Creek! This project will require a 1-2 mile hike into the project site where we will use on-site materials to build woody structures in the stream channel to help reconnect the channel to its floodplain, expand beaver habitat, and ultimately improve important fawning habitat for big game. These structures will mimic beaver dams and failed beaver dams to restore processes that will allow for further regeneration of willows and wetland vegetation. Register for the event [here](#).

When: August 19th, Time TBD. We will be camping August 18th and 19th, volunteers are welcome to join for one or both nights or just for the day.

Where: Fish Creek, above the confluence with Metzel Creek, off of the North Valley Road in the Centennial Valley.

Who: All are welcome! Partners include Mule Deer Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Youth Employment Program, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Bass Pro Cabela's Outdoor Fund, Montana FWP, and Montana DNRC.

Contact: Heidi Anderson at (406) 596-2001 or heidi@heart-of-rockies.org.

Ruby Valley Conservation District & Watershed Council

In the midst of the summer sun, our annual stream monitoring program is in full swing- and you can help! If you have ever been curious about how total rates of discharge are calculated in rivers and streams, or if you just want the opportunity to see beautiful parts of the Ruby Valley that you might not get to see otherwise, contact Tim at bswc@rvcd.org to be added to our mailing list and hear about our upcoming monitoring plans. Whether you can volunteer once or for multiple days, we would be happy to have you. Just make sure you bring a good pair of waders or other high rubber boots!

Curious to hear more about the Ruby Valley Conservation District's upcoming events and other relevant news centered on Southwest Montana? Sign up for our monthly newsletter! Not only will you get updates on all of the RVCD's upcoming plans, but you will also get updates on local drought and rainfall levels, relevant headlines on local conservation, and our monthly contribution to The Madisonian's Natural Resource News! Sign up by [clicking here](#), keep an eye on our [website](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) for similar updates and fun photos.

The Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance- a conservation-based conglomerate of local landowners devoted to protecting the Ruby Valley- recently hosted a tour of river restoration projects that have recently been completed!

The RVCD played a part in the completion of many of these projects, and so we explained what went into a couple of the projects while visiting the sites. Some other conservation workers and landowners talked about their own projects as well. All in all, it was a very fun and productive day filled with opportunities to learn and teach about the importance of maintaining our watershed and soils in order to protect the Ruby Valley!



Audra Bell, RVCD Director, giving a talk at the Range Tour.



Zach Owen

Beaverhead Watershed Committee

The Kidd boat check station is running, and is being managed by Beaverhead Conservation District. This year, we'll experiment with staying open late-night on weekends. More mussel-infested boats have been found so far this year than all of last year. The Watershed Committee is waiting on a grant agreement form this month, then we'll see if we can start our mine tailing stabilization project on Grasshopper Creek this year, depending on construction contractor availability. We have funding to design a nutrient reduction wetland on lower Stone Creek this year. We still have grant funds left to replace weirs on the Red Rock through Lima and Dell areas. We have a draft agreement in place for the recommended release of the Hidden Pasture WSA, and are starting to work on the Bell-Limekiln WSA with the Beaverhead County Collaborative. -Zach Owen, Watershed Coordinator

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Partner Updates (continued...)

Bureau of Land Management

Nesting sandhill crane. Kelly Bockting



Update on the Monida Creek Ducks Unlimited Dam Reconstruction. All water stop logs were removed from the control structures in the fall of 2021 anticipating construction in 2022 and

the ponds were dry and conditions were conducive to completing the work. However, the contract did not get awarded until the fall of 2022, therefore construction work was to begin in May of 2023. Thankfully, with the snowpack in winter of 22-23, the reservoir is full, and water cannot pass through and/or water has backed into the ponds. Currently construction is slated to begin in mid August 2023, water levels permitting. Limited road work was completed this spring on the two track that leads to the ponds. On a brighter note, since there is water in the ponds, a pair of Trumpeter Swans nested successfully and have three cygnets. There was also a sandhill crane nesting at one of the ponds and habitat for plenty of other waterfowl, shorebirds, and mosquitos.

-Kelly Bockting,
Wildlife Biologist

Trumpeter Swans with cygnets. Kelly Bockting



Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

The Refuge is upgrading its radio repeater system, located in the old fire tower near headquarters, to provide better coverage across the valley in areas where its primary repeater atop Deer Mountain sometimes cannot reach due to blockage from mountains. Together, both repeaters will provide complete radio communication coverage of the valley, thus dramatically improving safety for those working in the field.

The Refuge sprayed a 5-acre test plot, removing invasive smooth brome grass in one of its units, in preparation for restoration activities. In the fall, upwards of 10 species of native grasses and 30+ species of native flowering forbs are expected to be no-till drilled in the test plot. If successful, larger restoration efforts can be expected. This test plot will provide opportunities for an outdoor environmental education and restoration ecology

classroom experience, while simultaneously serving to restore a compromised habitat to its former fully functioning ecosystemic state.

-Cortez Rohr,
Deputy Refuge Manager

Cortez Rohr



Shannon Wilkey

The Trampling of a Seasonal Technician

I've trampled through seas of sage, grasses, and forbs, whose names I'm still learning, in order to target invasive weeds of whose names I am also still learning. I know now what a "skeleton" is in regards to houndstongue, and I know that its flowers are purple and smell of an unpleasant combination of rotten fruit and buttered popcorn. I know that "whitetop" is a witless name considering that there are many plants in the valley whose tops bloom white, but I admit it's a fun seek-and-find when you get into the swing of it. I have been asked by a visiting friend if the henbane on the side of the road was put there by us on purpose, and the unexpected righteous indignation I felt in response to said question may be a good tell of my new-found investment in the fight against invasive weeds in the valley, and I think there may be no turning back now.

Through another sort of trampling, I found myself knee-deep in mud and waist-deep in muck-water to repair an electric fence. The leeches were not fond of this mission, and made their opinion known with attempts to use myself and another as a meal. There have been a few moments in my time as a seasonal worker that make me question why I do what I do, and that was one of those moments. But work has to get done and fences need to be fixed, so leeches it was for that day.

The work is not the most glorified, but I want honest and good and that's what is being done here. There's not much glory in fighting leeches to get a fence up, but there's integrity in the fence that is built. There's not much glory in the sting of nettle that scrapes past you as you reach to pull a houndstongue, but there's worthwhile utility in the action of the pulling. The effects of our labor don't show themselves with flags and trumpets, but in the subtle ways that pronghorn calves cross through fence-line, or the glory that comes when blooms of Lupin replace henbane on the side of the road. These effects that appear subtle are substantial and long-lasting, worth the sweat and scratches and soreness of muscles that haven't been used since the previous season. So onward with the trampling!

-Hannah Robles,
TNC Seasonal Technician, 2023

Hannah clipping
houndstongue.



Announcements & Other Updates

Centennial Valley Historical Society— Mark your calendars because on Saturday, August 5th, the Centennial Valley Historical Society is hosting their annual BBQ and fundraiser! The event is to be held at the Taft-Nicholson Center from 10am—3pm, with lunch served from 11:30am—12:30pm. Jack Kirkley, professor at the University of Montana Western, will give a presentation on birds at 1pm. In addition to the activities, there will be a silent auction, pie auction, and Historical Society items for sale, including t-shirts, books, cookbooks, and bird calendars. Remember to bring cash or check for purchases. Hope to see you there!

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation— The state released its draft of the Montana Drought Plan on June 19th. There is a 45-day public comment period, closing on Friday, August 4th, 2023. The draft plan represents a stakeholder driven overhaul of the previous Drought Response Plan. All water users and members of the public who may be impacted by or are interested in drought are encouraged to review the draft plan and send DNRC their thoughts. To review the draft Montana Drought Plan and to submit comments, visit the drought plan website: MTDroughtInfo.org

Centennial Valley Association Annual Meeting— The Centennial Valley Association is officially 20-years old as of June 27th! We would like to hold an official Annual Meeting to catch up with the community and celebrate this Fall. Association members— please reach out to Kara (communityorg@centennialvalleyassociation.org or 715-681-0795) if you have a meeting preference of September or October. We will do our best to find a time that works for most everyone. Watch your email inboxes or mailboxes for an official invite later in August!



Centennial Valley

Excerpt from "Centennial Valley: A Journey Through Time 1930-2014" Volume II by the Centennial Valley Historical Society page 143

Centennial Valley was named in 1876 by Mrs. William (Rachel) Orr, wife of one of the partners in the P&O Ranch on Blacktail Deer Creek...It [Valley] was in Madison County with Virginia City being the county seat. There was a road through the Valley, which came down what is known as Price Canyon, a shortcut to Virginia City, across the head of the Blacktail, through the notch and across the head of Sweetwater and down the Ruby Valley to Virginia City. This road became impassible in the wintertime and Valley residents used the route by Monida and Dillon to get to the county seat. This proved impractical...and in 1911, Centennial Valley was annexed to Beaverhead County with Dillon being the county seat.



CVA Board Members

Yvonne Martinell, Chairwoman	Scott Huntsman
Peggy Dulany & Andrew Anderson (Proxy)	Ed Wolfe
Kevin Crowe & Tassi Duffner (Proxy)	Mel Montgomery
Jerry Scheid (Advisory)	Mark Bergstrom (Advisory)
Jim Berkey (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
- * Madison Valley Ranchlands Group
 - * Heart of the Rockies Initiative
 - * USFWS Partners Program
- * Montana Watershed Coordination Council
 - * Cross Charitable Foundation
 - * Greater Yellowstone Coalition
 - * Defenders of Wildlife
 - * Livestock Loss Board
- * 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!

To preserve traditional ranching as a way of life in the Centennial Valley, and to maintain quality open space, wildlife habitat, water quality, and wildlife migration corridors as they exist today for future generations.