Montana Beaver Working Group

Connecting and providing resources to people interested in the role of beavers in watershed and riparian health

Stories and News

BLM Seeking Input on Low-Tech, Process-Based Riverscape Restoration Strategy for Montana/Dakotas

Restoration work underway on BLM lands in north-central Montana, July 2020. Photo by Amy Chadwick.

In July the Montana/Dakotas State Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management released a draft Proposed Action section of a programmatic environmental assessment for utilizing simple, cost-effective restoration methods to improve the conditions of riverscapes on BLM-managed lands in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The strategy aims at helping the BLM achieve goals and objectives that depend on healthy riparian-wetland and aquatic habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species, recreation, wildland fire mitigation, floodwater retention, and drought resilience.

Actions are divided into four categories, and described and assessed in detail for each:

- Addition of structural elements (i.e., artificial beaver dams and wood accumulations) to "kickstart" hydraulic, hydrologic, and geomorphic processes that historically maintained the health of these systems
- Vegetation management actions that would allow riverscapes to grow and consume the woody material necessary for the restored processes to become self-sustaining
- Headcut control techniques to prevent erosional features from migrating into and degrading otherwise healthy riparian-wetland habitat
- Beaver mitigation actions to mitigate potential flooding or undesirable tree removal associated with beaver dam building activity

To review and comment on this draft section, go to https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2000265/570. Note that the participation deadline for this document has passed, but the site is set to continue receiving comments. BLM State Hydrologist Alden Shallcross notes that there will be a public comment period on the complete draft EA at a later date, but input now from professionals with experience in restoration and an interest in healthy riverscapes would be much appreciated.

Emily Fairfax Talks Beavers in Artemis Podcast

Photo courtesy Emily Fairfax.

In July, two of the leaders of NWF's Artemis Sportswomen for Conservation conducted a lively interview with ecohydrologist, science story teller, and beaver enthusiast Emily Fairfax, producing a podcast that's now available here for all to enjoy.

Dr. Fairfax is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Science and Resource Management at California State University Channel Islands. Last year she produced this widely shared stop-action video of the relationship between beaver dams and fire.

EVENTS

LOW-TECH PROCESS-BASED RIVERSCAPE RESTORATION VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

August 11-14, 2020

Free four-day workshop hosted by Utah State University Restoration Consortium, focused on low-tech, process-based riverscape restoration offers flexible participation opportunities.

Limited capacity: Register **here**

This virtual workshop will introduce conservationists to low-tech process-based approaches for restoring streams and their associated riparian areas (riverscapes) to benefit fish, wildlife, and working lands. Participants will learn principles guiding low-tech process-based restoration and become familiar with simple, hand-built tools, including Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) and Post-Assisted Log Structures (PALS), intended to mimic and promote specific ecosystem processes. Participants will gain basic skills in the planning, design, and implementation phases of project development. To make participating remotely and/or from home more manageable, hosts have spread the curriculum out over four days with lots of time for breaks and self-paced exercises.

RESOURCES

RANCHERS, BEAVERS, AND STREAM RESTORATION ON WESTERN RANGELANDS

USDA Forest Service PNW Science Findings paper (available here), featuring the findings of Forest Service research social scientist Susan Charnley and colleagues at the Pacific Northwest Research Station, based on case studies and interviews in California, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon.

Key findings:

- Ranchers who participated in the studies perceived that the benefits of beaver-related restoration outweighed the drawbacks. The greatest benefits observed were increased water and forage availability for livestock.
- Ranchers were motivated to use beaver-related restoration by a desire to restore incised streams, riparian areas, and wet meadows; to raise groundwater levels and improve surface water flows; and to improve habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species.
- Ranchers used a variety of grazing management strategies that were compatible with beaver-related restoration. Some were adopted for the purpose of beaver-related restoration, and some were adopted to support other ecological restoration goals.
- The most relevant policies for beaver-related restoration are state regulations regarding beaver trapping and hunting; and federal and state regulations related to constructing in-stream structures and managing sensitive species.
- People who installed artificial beaver dams considered the regulatory process to be the biggest barrier to project implementation. Successful implementation involved collaboration among ranchers, scientists, practitioners, and regulatory agencies.

LOW-TECH WET MEADOW RESTORATION: READING THE LANDSCAPE

Recorded webinar from July 22, 2020, hosted by NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife and the Intermountain Join Venture. Link to recording here. Presentation PDFs available here.

Wet or mesic meadows are rare but disproportionately important habitats within western rangelands. Gully erosion and channel incision are widespread problems reducing natural resiliency and water storage capacity, which is impacting wildlife and working lands. Simple, low-tech restoration methods using sticks and stones provide effective tools for protecting and restoring meadow systems. While there is no shortage of degraded areas that need help across the West, there is a shortage of time and money to address them. In this webinar, Jeremy Maestas and Shawn Connor introduce participants to how to use Bill Zeedyk's principles of "Reading the Landscape and Thinking like Water" to recognize and prioritize meadow restoration.

A beaver dam in Bridge Creek, Oregon, built atop a human-made beaver dam analog constructed to help restore habitat for threatened steelhead. When beavers take over beaver dam analogs, they can further contribute to stream restoration efforts. Photo credit: Nick Weber.

Please send stories, upcoming events, and other resources to:
Sarah Bates
National Wildlife Federation
240 N. Higgins St., #2
Missoula, MT 59802
406.541.6730
BatesS@nwf.org
MT Beaver Working Group newsletters are posted online at:
https://www.nwf.org/Northern-Rockies-and-Pacific-Region/Conservation/Beavers