



Centennial Valley Association – April 2024

Kiley Martinell

CVA Program Updates

Welcome 2024 Field Staff!

Happy Spring from the Centennial Valley Association! We are looking forward to the field season ahead and are excited to have a full staff Team that will implement programs and projects on-the-ground this summer and fall. Please help us welcome new and returning faces to the Team for 2024!

Wildlife & Range Rider Program Team – Welcome back to Erika Nunlist for her fifth season as the Wildlife Program Coordinator, and Taylor Jackson for her third season as a Range Rider! We are also excited to welcome Joe Zecher as our second full-time Range Rider (May–October), and Patrick Solomon will join the Team in mid-August to step in for Taylor when she heads back to school.

Field Team – Welcome back to Shannon Wilkey for her third season on the CVA Team! Shannon will be the TNCVA Coordinator this season, coordinating the Invasive Species Program for CVA and providing support on projects with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Niah Brass joined the Team in January and will serve as the Field Coordinator, coordinating the Water and Drought Awareness Program and providing support on education and outreach initiatives, as well as invasive species management. Finally, help us welcome Joe Morrissey to the Team as the Field Technician! Joe will be a dynamic part of the team helping within all of CVA's program areas.

The season will kick off on May 20th. We are looking forward to a great field season and welcome any ideas or programmatic input as we plan the season ahead!

-Kara Maplethorpe, Executive Coordinator, communityorg@centennialvalleyassociation.org

Water & Drought Awareness Program

This spring, CVA launched a new monthly Water Topics publication to broaden the information we provide related to drought resilience for the Centennial Valley community and beyond! These topics are an exciting addition to the Water and Drought Awareness Program, and we hope folks find them informative and helpful. The past two topics have addressed snow drought, a relative issue with this winter's underwhelming snowpack, and spring runoff, an important process for our streams, rivers and water users. As the Water Topics continue, they will correlate with the time of year, current water issues, and relate to the Red Rock watershed. Let us know if there is a specific topic you would like to see featured this year!

In addition to the Water Topics, the program will continue to send out monthly water reports with relative data to the season. This year, the program will add at least four (4) soil moisture monitoring locations on the valley floor, which is a new data source for the program and community, add up to five (5) new rain gauges at mid-elevation sites to complement the seven (7) previously established rain gauge locations on the valley floor, and partner with Montana FWP for streamflow monitoring data. We're excited about the expansion of hydrological monitoring in the Centennial Valley to provide the community with new resources and localized data! Growth of the program is made possible by the Watershed Management Grant from Montana DNRC, which also supported our effort to develop fundraising initiatives to sustain this programming. We held a virtual spring fundraiser to provide additional support for the Water and Drought Awareness Program staff and equipment, in which we received an outpouring of support from the community and a \$1,000 grant commitment from the Swanson's through the Vanguard Charitable Donor Advised Fund! In total, we raised nearly \$2,000 for the program, and we are so grateful for the interest and excitement in the program and generous charitable donations from the local community! **Thank you!**

As of the end of the day on April 15, 2024, the seven (7) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) SNOTEL sites that surround the Centennial Valley are reporting the following percents of median for snow water equivalent:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Beagle Springs: 101% | Divide: 81% | Short Creek: 45% | White Elephant: 89% |
| Clover Meadow: 75% | Lakeview Ridge: 56% | Tepee Creek: 83% | |

If you are interested in learning more about the Water and Drought Awareness Program, would like to sign up to receive the monthly Water Reports and Water Topics, and/or would like to support the staff this season, please don't hesitate to reach out!

-Niah Brass, Field Coordinator, drought@centennialvalleyassociation.org

CVA Program Updates (continued...)

Invasive Species Management Program

Spring is here, and right before you know it invasive weed season will also be upon us! Both the CVA and TNC will have full crews this season, which will allow us to really ramp up invasive weed management efforts throughout the Centennial Valley. CVA will be closing out the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) grant this year, which has dedicated a lot of time to managing weedy hotspots and reseeding within Alaska Basin, Wolverine, Monida Hill, Long Creek, Metzler Creek, and around Kennedy Hill. Thank you to Montana FWP for supporting this effort over the last four years! In addition, CVA and TNC submitted a joint application to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to secure funds for invasive weed and invasive annual grass management within the Centennial Valley for the next five years. This grant would support management and reseeding efforts on public lands, as well as private lands bordering the BLM, if landowners are interested. Fingers crossed!

<u>Spray Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time & Meeting Spot</u>
Lima Dam	June 25 th	8:00am @ Lima Dam Spillway
Lima	June 26 th	7:30am @ Lima Rest Area
Big Sheep Creek	June 27 th	8:00am @ Sheep Shearing Pens
Snowline	July 9 th	8:00am @ Snowline Gravel Pit
Little Sheep Creek	July 10 th	8:00am @ Straight Creek Cabin
Monida Hill/Price Peat	July 11 th	8:00am @ Top of Monida Pass
Medicine Lodge	July 30 th	8:00am @ Hansen Creek Turn-Off
Red Rock Pass *CVA Day*	August 7 th	9:00am @ Top of Pass
Lima Dam *CVA Day*	August 8 th	8:00am @ Lima Dam Spillway
Snowline	August 13 th	8:00am @ Snowline Gravel Pit
Wolverine *CVA Day*	August 14 th	9:00am @ Wolverine Gate

WHIP monitoring transect.
Shannon Wilkey



CVA will be sponsoring three (3) Spray Days again this year, in partnership and coordination with the Beaverhead County Weed District. At Red Rock Pass, Lima Dam, and Wolverine Spray Days, all in August, CVA will provide a homemade lunch, dessert, and drinks to those who come and participate for the day! A full list of Spray Days in the area are provided below. CVA will also be leading four Weed Weeks this summer and early fall, which allows staff to intensively target noxious weed infestations throughout the Centennial Valley. Weed Weeks are scheduled for June 24-28, July 15-19, August 12-16, and September 16-20. We hope you will join us at one or more community Spray Days or at a Weed Week this year!

If you have questions, have a weed infestation you would like to share with us, or would like more information about Spray Days, Weed Weeks, or other noxious weed management efforts in the Centennial Valley, please reach out to Shannon Wilkey, TNCVA Coordinator, at invasiveweeds@centennialvalleyassociation.org.

Range Rider & Wildlife Program

Greetings from the Centennial Valley! Seasons are changing in the Valley, and the range riding season is just around the corner. This summer our team will consist of Wildlife Coordinator Erika Nunlist, returning Range Rider Taylor Jackson, and new Range Rider Joe Zecher. Taylor will be leaving again for school mid-August, and we've hired Patrick Solomon to join the team for the second part of the season in her place. We are looking forward to another great season with some great folks, old and new!

The 2023 season was productive and flew-by. Range Riders worked with seven (7) producers. By and large, everything went well, and most of our observations and reports were positive. Producers reported a total of three (3) confirmed depredations from grizzly bears, and no suspected depredations, which is lower than recent years. Game cameras were set out throughout the Centennial Valley, and we were thankful to have a full set of working cameras again thanks to a new set. Range Riders documented fewer grizzly and wolf observations, via cameras and tracking. We suspect weather and forage conditions contributed to lower conflict and fewer overall observations of predators this past season. More specifics will be included in the final report, coming your way soon.

The 2024 season will start mid-May, and the first bi-weekly report will be out around June 1st. Wildlife reports from the community are a valuable addition to our efforts, so please consider reporting your wildlife sightings (big or small!) to us this coming season.

As always, look out for our red and white '86 Dodge or gold '05 Chevy; we will try to stop and say 'hi' if we see you in the Valley! If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or just want to chat, please feel free to reach out anytime.

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



James Waxe

Partner Updates

Beaverhead County Weed District

Beaverhead County Weed District is gearing up for a busy weed season! Earlier this year, we submitted a grant proposal for noxious weed cost-share dollars for the Upper Red Rock, and have been recommended for funding. We are waiting for the Montana Department of Agriculture Director to sign off on the project. If you submitted your paperwork for the grant, be looking for more information soon. Didn't get the paperwork or would like to learn more about the cost-share opportunity? Contact the weed office and we'll do our best to help with some noxious weed management cost-share.

There is an applicator training scheduled for April 23rd and worth up to five (5) credits towards your applicator license! The training will be from 8:30am—4:30pm at the Beaverhead 4-H Building in Dillon. Lunch will be provided! You can attend the morning session for two (2) credits, the afternoon session for three (3) credits or attend the whole day to receive all five (5) credits. Topics include:

- ☼ Restoring Invasive Grass Dominated Rangeland
- ☼ EDDMapS Pro
- ☼ Biological Control
- ☼ Grasshoppers in Montana
- ☼ Ground Squirrel Control

Remember, by the end of 2024 a total of six (6) credits are needed to renew your license.

Spray days have been scheduled, so please mark your calendars! As always, please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. Hope everyone stays safe and has a wonderful spring!

-Amber Burch, County Weed Coordinator,
aburch@beaverheadcountymt.gov

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Greetings to all of our Centennial Valley friends, neighbors and partners. We welcome two new employees to the Refuge. Joe Cerasaro filled our Maintenance Worker vacancy. His previous location was at the Southeast Idaho National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Joe arrived in November and has met many of our winter neighbors already. He brings an amazingly large set of skills and experience to the job. Joe is truly a maintenance professional in every sense of the word. Bridget Canning joined our staff more recently. She is filling the Refuge's Fish and Wildlife Biologist vacancy. Much of our management involves habitat, which means plants. Bridget has a great background and interest in plants. She will be a big help with our invasive plant control program, and in all things biological. We are also working to fill our Wildlife Refuge Specialist vacancy. This position functions as an assistant refuge manager. We hope to have the position filled before July. Please be sure to meet these two new Centennial Valley residents when you get the chance!

-Mike Bryant, Wildlife Refuge Manager



Xavier Rolet

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.

Carol Bergstrom



University of Utah — Taft-Nicholson Center

The staff from the University of Utah soon be in the valley with some old and new face. Stop by and see us as we prepare the Taft-Nicholson Center for another packed season of speakers, artists and events. If you would like to get on our email list for notifications on our speakers and events please email us at taft-nicholsoncenter@utah.edu and we will add you to our weekly event email.

Ruby Valley Conservation District

The Ruby Valley Conservation District's annual banquet is on Saturday, April 20th at The Round Barn in Twin Bridges! Join them for a night of fun, food, and dancing. Dinner, 5:30pm-8pm, is being catered by the Blue Anchor Bar & Grill and tickets are \$50. Music and dancing begins at 8pm for a \$10 cover at the door. Live music from Band of Drifters. Tickets can be purchased [here](#). If you have any questions, please contact Christina Smathers at administrator@rvcd.org or (406) 842-5741 x 105.

Madison Valley Ranchlands Group

The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group is hosting an onsite discussion May 9th at the Norris Compost Site. The discussion will center on the opportunities to use a product known as "Boost" to speed the composting process of large bones. This is a natural product which is widely used in the upper Midwest composting facilities. For more information on attending please contact mvrghdirector@gmail.com.

Western Landowners Alliance

Western Landowners Alliance, in partnership with the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, will be holding a meeting at the firehall in Alder to talk with producers about elk impacts in the form of forage and hay loss, disease, and management. The meeting will be held on June 20th, 2024 from 4-8pm, so mark your calendar! Dinner will be provided with the important conversation!

If you have any questions, you can reach out to Erik Kalsta, Working Wild Challenge Program Director, at ekalsta@westernlandowners.org.

Partner Updates (continued...)



Beaverhead Watershed Committee

The Beaverhead Watershed Committee continues to work on Grasshopper Creek. We're about to see final design for the tailings stabilization project, and hope construction will start this fall. We've been reaching out to

agency partners to hear their priorities for our Red Rock Watershed Restoration Plan, and will also be reaching out to all of you. The Conservation District is still running the Kidd boat check station, and I'm sure you've noticed it's back up & running for the season. The crew out there is doing a great job. The Conservation District is also still working on local BLM Wilderness Study Areas, and Forest Service Proposed Wilderness Areas. We're putting the finishing touches on recommendations for Hidden Pasture, Bell-Limekiln, Henneberry Ridge, Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak areas! If you have questions, comments, complaints or even rants about these areas, we really do want to hear them.

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

Ruby Habitat Foundation

Given the recent dire reports about declining fish numbers in Southwest Montana, including on rivers like the Big Hole and the Ruby, Ruby Habitat Foundation is excited about their next natural resources project. Ruby Habitat Foundation, whose mission includes balancing wildlife with agriculture, while providing managed access for recreational purposes, has begun replacing a legacy fishing pond system with a new spawning tributary that will be open to the river. The new system will be nearly half a mile long and will be built with gravels of the size trout seem to prefer for spawning. The project was funded by a Future Fisheries grant from Fish, Wildlife and Parks (40%), as well as donations from individuals (60%).

Contact dave@rubyhabitat.org for more information or to arrange a tour of the new project.



Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM's Dillon Field Office is requesting public input for its Programmatic Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment. This assessment will address the health, function, and species composition of vegetation within the entire Dillon Field Office and primarily focus on restoration activities to promote healthy rangelands and riparian vegetation. It will also include activities to improve the health and resilience of aspen and curl-leaf mountain mahogany communities. Managing vegetation available to wildfire where fire may present a threat to human health, safety, and private property is another priority. Input from the public will help formulate alternatives and define issues for the assessment. Comments should be submitted to the Dillon Field Office by April 26th. The environmental assessment is [available online](#) or you may request a paper copy from the office. Written comments may be mailed to 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, MT 59725 or emailed to MT_Dillon_FO@blm.gov.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Dean Waltee, FWP Wildlife Biologist, completed the Gravelly Elk Management Unit elk survey in seven flights between February 10–March 16, covering the Ruby Mountains, western Greenhorn Mountains, western Snowcrest Mountains, Sweetwater Hills, Blacktail Mountains, Basin and Sage Creek watersheds, western Madison Valley, and portions of the Centennial Valley. Most elk were observed within traditional winter range, but many groups were widely distributed and relatively small. A noticeable proportion were observed outside of traditional winter range. Wide distribution of elk was expected this year given late arriving snow and relatively low snow accumulation. Given wider distribution of wintering elk, it's likely that survey observability was lower than years when elk were tightly concentrated in large groups.

Nine thousand and eighty-four (9,084) elk were observed, compared to 8,509 last year, a 10-year average of 10,033, and a long-term average of 5,705. The observed year-over-year increase in observed elk was 6.7%. The 2023 Montana Statewide Elk Management Plan outlines a population goal of maintaining the 3-year running average number of elk observed during winter aerial surveys between 5,000 and 10,000 for the Gravelly Elk Management Unit. The average of the most recent three surveys was 9,455, meeting the management goal.

As part of the FWP's recent regulations simplification directive, the seven hunting districts that previously comprised the Gravelly Elk Management Unit (322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, and 330) were combined into one deer/elk hunting district labeled 322. Following the recent completion of radio-collar monitoring of elk across the Ruby Mountains portion of the elk management unit, Dean recommended the Gravelly Elk Management Unit be re-divided into three deer/elk hunting districts—322 (Ruby Mountains), 323 (Blacktail Mountains and Sweetwater Hills), and 324 (Gravelly, Greenhorn, Snowcrest, and Centennial), which was adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission last December. Those hunting districts separate management of elk herds local to the Ruby and Blacktail Mountains, that often concentrate on private agricultural lands during the fall, from migratory elk herds that spend most of the year on public lands. Such management separation will allow for focused application of antlerless B-license harvest towards elk concentrations on private agricultural lands and would become critical if hunter access to harvest elk on private agricultural lands among the Ruby or Blacktail Mountains herds ever diminished. If you have any questions about the survey or would like to discuss elk management, please feel free to contact Dean at dwaltee@mt.gov.



Building Profitability & Resiliency Through Regenerating Soil Health

The Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership cordially invites you to this workshop focused on increasing net profitability and resiliency of ranching in SW Montana. Emphasis will include using your livestock to improve soil health, forage biomass, water infiltration and retention, animal performance, and system resiliency. Attendees will gain knowledge and practical skill sets needed to take the best next steps in progress. The workshop will provide extensive hands-on instruction with interactive discussion facilitated by Understanding Ag.

Understanding Ag is a team of consultants who are farmers and ranchers themselves, and who combine decades of experience to help teach others. Their mission is “to use our passion and experience to educate farmers, ranchers and communities in applying time-tested ecological principles to regenerate our living ecosystems thereby restoring the health of all”.

The workshop will take place June 4-5, 2024 from 8:30am—4:30pm both days at the Hamilton Ranch Round Barn in Twin Bridges. Lunch will be provided by the Beaverhead and Ruby Valley Conservation Districts. Attendance is capped at 75 individuals. To register or to ask questions, contact Pat Fosse at pafosse.pf@gmail.com or (406)660-2386.

Job Opportunities

A variety of partners in the area are actively hiring! Check out the job opportunities listed below if you are interested.

Madison River Foundation— Seeking an Executive Director. Position is open until filled. A cover letter and resume may be emailed to info@madisonriverfoundation.org. A full announcement may be read [here](#).

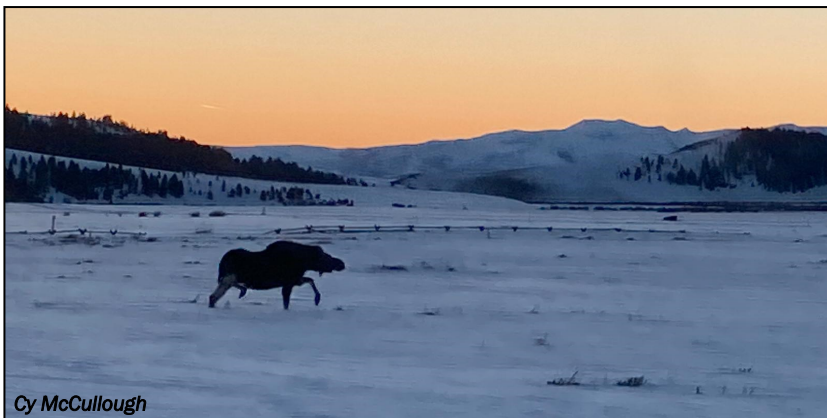
University of Utah, Taft-Nicholson Center— Seeking an [Education Coordinator](#) and one or two [Interpretation and Education Specialists](#). If you have questions, you can email Melissa at melissa.m.parks@utah.edu.

Heart of the Rockies Initiative— Seeking a Managing Director, Development and Communications Coordinator, and a Montana Carnivore Conflict Reduction Manager. All positions and application information can be found [here](#).

2024 Safety Reminder

Some friendly reminders as you plan your summer adventures, work, or travels through the Centennial Valley:

- 🌿 Always be Bear Aware: be alert, make noise, travel in a group, and carry bear spray. Bears are not only in the forest, but in the sagebrush as well!
- 🌿 Bring a spare tire (or two!) and the necessities to change a flat, and always enter the valley with a full tank of gas.
- 🌿 Have extra food, water, blankets, etc. in case of an overnight breakdown. Even on warm summer nights, the weather changes unexpectedly!
- 🌿 Carry a first aid kit, and note that Verizon is the most reliable cellular carrier, but only on the north side.
- 🌿 SLOW DOWN on the dirt roads!



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
- Madison Valley Ranchlands Group
- Big Hole Watershed Committee
- 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
 - Vital Ground
 - Patagonia
 - And Many Others!

CVA Board Members

Yvonne Martinell, Chairwoman

Scott Huntsman

Peggy Dulany & Andrew Anderson (Proxy)

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

Fundraising: Jim Berkey, Bill West, Andrew Anderson