

MRR Newsletter

Madison River Ranch Association

Spring, 2011

Madison River Ranch Association Annual Meeting

Saturday, June 25, 2011

Time and Place TBA

Fishing Report...

By Gene Welch

Why is the Madison such good fishing?

There are understandable reasons why we at MRR are lucky to enjoy the excellent fishing in the Madison - and other MT streams for that matter. The Madison's outstanding fishery is partly due

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Cooking with Martha

By Martha Crawley *page 2*

Introducing...

Gene and Karen Welch
and Family *page 3*

For Sale!!

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Blue Skies for Bluebirds

Do you enjoy the bluebirds on your property each year? Did you know there are three bluebird species in Montana?

Learn more... *page 5*



Winter Visitors....

From the President's Corner...

by Bill Hoolan

Montana Greetings

As with most of the country, it's been a big winter in Montana also, one of those winters you can drive your snowmobile over the fences. For the first time in 5 years the MRR elk herd, which is about 75 animals, tired of pawing through the deep snow, moved down the valley just before Christmas, where winter is so much easier. We really missed walking out of the house and seeing them sleeping in the yard. The larger groups of migrating elk also came through the ranch headed down the valley to the reserve, without hanging around too long. The deer also left about the same time. We had one moose that stayed on the ranch for the entire winter. So with no elk, there were no wolves, even most of the coyotes had to move down the valley. The snow was so deep and fluffy, the coyotes couldn't get around very well. They much prefer the snow to crust over so they can walk on top of it, but that crust never

See Bill Hoolan on page 2

Annual Association Work Day

Sunday, June 26
Noon – 4:00 p.m.

We will be mowing/cleaning up the common area and removing old interior fencing. Please bring weed eaters, gloves, wire/bolt cutters.

Cookout will follow in the common area.

Cooking with Martha

Martha Crawley

This recipe is a wonderful side dish with beef, chicken, pork, lamb, just about anything! If you have any left (unlikely) it is excellent with eggs the next morning too.

The Wrangler's Favorite Cheese Grits

1 cup grits

4 cups boiling water

2/3 t. salt

Bring the water to a full boil. Add the salt. Stir the grits into the boiling water gradually so that they don't clump. Cook according to package directions.

Mix the following ingredients into the grits as soon as they finish cooking so that the butter and cheese will melt:

1 ½ t. Lawry's Seasoned Salt

½ stick butter

8 oz. NY Sharp cheddar cheese, grated (it doesn't have to be NY, you can use extra sharp)

2 beaten eggs

Bake at 325 for 1 hour, covered.
 Serves 8

Enjoy!

Bill Hoolan, continued from page 1

came this winter, it was continuous new snow.

Sandra and I have exciting news, Oxbow on the Madison, has new owners, Jim and Dana Dawson. We are confident your new neighbors are going to do very well in Montana. By way of a little background, the Dawson's history with the Madison goes back as both of their families would spend summer vacations here when they were young. The Dawson's have 4 kids now and a son-in-law. Three of their four kids are college students as is Dana, who is finishing another degree at San Francisco State. Although the Dawson's live in the Bay area, Jim doesn't describe them as Californians, "we are more of an invasive species that moved there". Jim is employed in high tech and worked for a company that, before California, moved their family to Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and London. Having lived in all of those countries they still find Montana to truly be the last best place.

The Dawson's spent most of the Christmas holiday on the ranch and Jim reported the fishing was surprisingly good and lasted "as long as you could still feel your thumbs". One evening upon returning to the parking lot to make the final sojourn home on snowmobiles, after having dinner in Ennis with friends, the temp was – 25 below. Rather than diverting to an alternate plan, Jim, in his typically good manner, grabbed the video camera and offered Dana and the kids a chance to record any last thoughts they had, just in case they didn't make it home safely. Now that's a good spirit. They made up for their inexperience with snow machines and dangerous cold, with courage and determination. The Dawson's are going to be a great addition to the MRR. Please welcome them as you get a chance.

I am in the process of acquiring another property on the ranch; Sandra and I can't imagine not having a home here. We'll keep you all posted.

Best regards, Bill

We bought Lot 130 in 1990 and 131 in 1994. Our cabin was built from Karen's plan during the winter of 1991-1992. Our power came from solar the first eight years and a 1,000 gallon cistern has served our non-drinking water needs.



We really had no intention of buying Montana property - 700 miles from home in Redmond (Sammamish now), Washington, but agreed to the Yellowstone Basin Property agent's offer to take a look while on vacation that June. Once we saw it - and goaded on by accompanying son Eric - we did it!

Our "kids" love this place as much as we do. Eric can claim native status because he was born in Montana. At that time, I was a fisheries biologist with the Montana Fish and Game (Parks was added later), first in Great Falls and then in Helena where Eric appeared. Karen taught in Great Falls at Paris Gibson Jr. High - the wing she taught in was later imploded for a movie. Doug came along a couple years later in Seattle. Leaving Montana was difficult - in Helena, Gene was 20 minutes from the Little Blackfoot River! So the entire Welch family has a strong attachment to Montana.

Eric and Xie Ling live in Chicago. Daughters Ceci and Isa are soon-to-be seniors at the University of Wisconsin and University of Delaware; they were six months old and

present when we bought Lot 130.

Eric is a professor of public policy at University of Illinois, Chicago; Xie Ling has a massage therapy business. Eric's lament is that Chicago is no place for a mountain

lover and tree-hugger, but nevertheless likes his job.

Doug and friend Laura live in west Seattle. Doug designs wastewater treatment systems for an engineering firm.

Gene retired in 1997 as professor of environmental engineering (actually lake and stream ecology) at the University of Washington, and Karen in 1996 as a dietitian/lactation consultant with WIC (USDA program for low income women, infants and children).

Everyone in the family fishes except Karen and Xie Ling - Eric and Doug since early youth - it was a requirement! Our family vacationed every summer from 1975 to 1990 - usually camping - in the Greater Yellowstone Area - and on many occasions fished the Madison. That is the principal reason we established this home away from home that we dubbed "beatsatent". In 2001 we added a bunkhouse to more easily accommodate family and guests. Drop by and say hello - if the flags are out, we are there.

Gene and Karen Welch

The Montana Fishing Report

Gene Welch

Continued from page 1

to geological setting and partly due to management by State biologists. First, the geological reason.

Nutrients, especially phosphorus, are the key to producing algae - the Madison's slick covering on the rocks and stringy green stuff along the shore. The insects that drift ("nymphs") and emerge ("dries") are dependent on the algae, either as grazers or collectors of drifting organic particles originating mostly from algae. As the algal production goes, so goes the fish production. But the driver is nutrients (especially phosphorus), which are plentiful in the Madison and other three forks rivers from their watershed soils and bedrock. Much of the bedrock is sedimentary, which weathers, solubilizing calcium and other elements including phosphorus. By contrast, streams draining the west slope of the WA Cascades are poor in nutrients, because their mostly igneous bedrock weathers slowly. They are beautiful, but unproductive. They are good incubators for steelhead and salmon, that put their weight on at sea, but not productive for decent size resident trout.

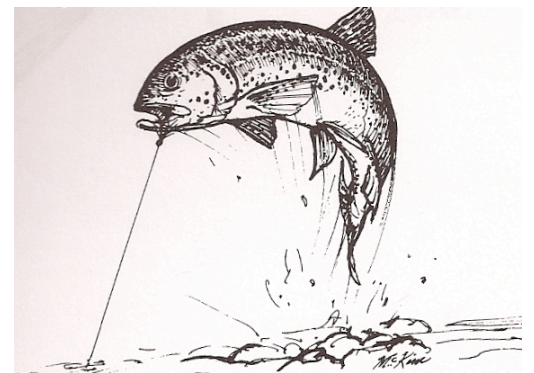
Phosphorus can be a pollutant if too abundant, producing long strings of green algae that present problems to water quality and fisher persons. Luckily there is not so much in the Madison that insect grazers cannot keep up with algae production. So the Madison above Ennis is fertile, but not too fertile. The lower Madison is more fertile as evidenced by long stands of green algae that often nearly cover the river bottom in stretches along Hwy 84 toward Bozeman.

Management is another reason we lucked out. If the Madison were still planted with thousands of catchable size hatchery rainbows and regulations were catch and keep, as was the case prior to the early 1970s, fishing would be much poorer, especially given the extreme pressure the river receives today. Some of you know the story of why Montana has not stocked hatchery fish in streams and rivers since 1974. I have recounted that story in an earlier newsletter (2005). If interested, I can send you a copy. Also, see "Why Montana Went Wild", Montana Outdoors, May-June, 2004.

To summarize, an experiment in the Madison and O'Dell Creek (near Ennis) during 1970-1974 demonstrated that hatchery rainbows were detrimental to wild trout in the Madison. Even initiating the experiment was politically challenging, because people believed that fishing would deteriorate without stocking. However, experimental results were so dramatic that stocking hatchery rainbows was stopped in streams and rivers of the state. Regulations were shifted to protect large fish - the ones fisher persons like. So we owe much to a few progressively thinking and acting biologists 35 years ago.

The explanation of why hatchery fish were detrimental to wild populations was the increased stress imposed by greater numbers and hatchery fish tend to be more aggressive. There may also have been an effect on reproduction. New research has shown that reproduction of wild fish declined in proportion to the relative abundance of hatchery fish in 89 salmon and steelhead populations in Pacific Northwest rivers. An entirely hatchery-originated population was calculated to have a recruitment performance of only 12 percent that of an entirely wild population (Can. J. Fish and Aquatic Science, 2011).

Despite our fortune of the geological setting and going wild, Madison fishing would not be nearly so good without the no-kill restriction. Three years are required for a trout to reach 14-15 inches in the Madison and this and larger size groups make up a small percent (~ 20) of total population numbers. So the fish you carefully release in good condition is still there for another fisher person. If that fish were removed, at least three years are needed to replace it. With catch and keep, the total mass in the river may not change, due to the river's productivity, but the average size would decrease. Who among us would like to see that? Just count the cars at Three Dollar and boats going down the river nearly bow to stern. How do Madison trout cope with that? Much of the reason is geological setting, "gone wild" and catch and release.



Blue Skies for Bluebirds

Once common, then increasingly rare, Montana's three bluebird species have made a remarkable comeback in recent years thanks to a growing legion of nest-box-building devotees.



Mountain Bluebird Male

Montana is one of only a few states to attract all three bluebird species: mountain, western, and eastern. Mountain bluebirds range statewide, western bluebirds are found mainly in the northwestern corner, and eastern

bluebirds are confined to the far southeast. Members of the thrush family, all three species are easily recognized by their blue color. Slightly slimmer than the other two species, male mountain bluebirds are completely blue—and the blue is lighter and more vivid—except for a pale gray underbelly. The male western has a blue throat, back, wings, and belly and an orange chest and shoulders; the male eastern looks similar except the throat is orange and the belly is white. Females of all three species are paler versions of the males.

Bluebirds nest in tree or other cavities made by woodpeckers. Daytime ground feeders, bluebirds frequent open areas such as pastures, golf courses, cemeteries, and treeless shortgrass fields to find insects, which comprise most of their diet. Grasshoppers are a favored food.

After wintering in Mexico or the southwestern United States, bluebirds fly north to Montana in late February and early March. Similar to the behavior of the other bluebirds, the mountain bluebird male establishes his territory (usually encompassing about 12 acres) then sings and performs a flight display to attract a female. Often returning to the same site each year, the female builds the nest using grass, exposed plant roots, and hair. She lines it with feathers before laying five to six light blue eggs between late March and May.

The female incubates the eggs for roughly two weeks, after which the chicks hatch. Helpless, blind, and featherless, the chicks mutate immediately into food-demanding monsters requiring three feedings per daylight hour. In May and June, the hatchlings fledge (grow flight feathers) and soon are able to catch their own prey. If bad weather, aggressive birds, or predators don't hinder their attempts, the bluebird pair may hatch a second clutch, which

fledges by mid-July.

Bluebirds suffer a housing crisis when aggressive birds such as sparrows and starlings take over tree cavities, leaving bluebirds out in the cold.

Sparrows kill bluebirds,

constructing a new nest on top of a bluebird's. Starlings also threaten bluebirds by consuming the berries bluebirds eat in winter. Unable to adapt, bluebird populations suffer.

Unwittingly, humans worsen the bluebird's demise. Historically, bluebirds thrive in the woodpecker-carved cavities of standing dead trees, called snags. But as more and more people move into the countryside and cut down snags for firewood, those habitats soon disappear. "We tend to clean up our world," says Kristi DuBois, coordinator of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Native Species Program. "If there's a dead tree, people want to cut it down immediately." Other human-caused threats to bluebirds include widespread use of agricultural pesticides, which kill insects the birds eat, and rural sprawl.

Hawks, raccoons, weasels, bears, snakes, magpies, crows, jays, and many other predators eat bluebirds. As ground feeders, bluebirds are easy targets, and many predators can easily climb trees and snatch fledglings from a bluebird nesting cavity.

Though people had been building and erecting nesting boxes for decades, help formally arrived for Montana's struggling bluebird population in 1974. That's when Mountain Bluebird Trails was formed.

The organization promotes bluebird conservation through education, nest box programs, and research. Across Montana, members monitor

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Western Bluebird Male



Eastern Bluebird Male

Bluebirds, continued from page 5

Approximately 6,800 nest boxes, which have produced more than 176,000 bluebirds over the past decade.

The grassroots organization relies on individuals who build their own bluebird nest "trails," a series of at least five boxes placed 100 to 300 yards apart, depending on the species. The nest boxes are visible on fence lines surrounding open areas, usually on posts roughly 4 feet above ground.

Bluebird conservation is a growing activity in Montana. More and more people are getting involved, and nest box programs are helping local bluebird populations. Considering how much joy bluebirds bring to people across this region, that's news to put a smile on anyone's face.

A \$15 family membership in Mountain Bluebird Trails gets you a copy of Myrna Pearlman's guide as well as supplies for starting nest boxes. You can reach MBT at mountainbluebirdtrails.com or (406) 676-0300, the North American Bluebird Society at nabluebirdsociety.org or (866) 517-4483, and the American Bird Conservancy at abcbirds.org or (540) 253-5780.

Edited from an article by Becky Lomax. From Montana Outdoors, the magazine of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Used with permission. Bluebird box drawings from *Mountain Bluebird*, by Myrna Pearlman

Standard Top-opening Box (Montana)
Use 3/4 in. cedar

	Inches
Roof	7 x 8
Roof cleat	1/2 x 6 1/2 (3/4 in. at back; 7/8 in. at front)
Front	7 x 10
Back	7 x 18
Floor	5 1/4 x 5 1/2
Side (front)	5 1/4 x 10
Side (back)	5 1/4 x 12
Entrance hole	1 9/16
Wire:	1/8 in. diameter 7 1/4 x 5 (1/2 in. bend at bottom)

(provided by Mountain Bluebird Trails Inc., Montana)

MRR Association

Board of Directors:

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- Gene Welch, Outgoing Secretary
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Webmaster, Marv Gibbs
<http://www.madisonriverranch.org>

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noniann@gmail.com

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PLEASE, if you haven't signed up for electronic delivery of the MRR Newsletter (in living color) go to the Madison River Ranch web site, click on the "**Contact Us**" tab, and sign in.

For Sale...

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------|
| 8'x6' storage shed
heavy duty, hard plastic from Costco, delivered to Ranch, Original cost \$400, sell for \$150 | 400 gal cistern | \$100 |
| | 12v marine pump | \$20 |
| | 35 gal RV tank | \$30 |
| | 75 W Solar panel | \$100 |

Contact John Clark
jclark4js@aol.com

Contact Paul Schirmer:
Email:
schirpaul@gmail.com
or 682-4061 (cabin June-August)

Do you have items at MRR you'd like listed "For Sale?" Please send your information to me at noniann@gmail.com

Services Offered...

Jeremy Clark: mowing, mending fence, hauling trash, painting, etc. Available to work through July, Contact: teleskier187@yahoo.com