

MRR Newsletter

Madison River Ranch Association

Spring, 2013

Well, well, well...

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Introducing...

Janet and Isaac Arms

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MRR Association Weekend

Friday, June 28

Potluck Dinner: 5:00 – 10:00 pm
MRR Commons

Saturday, June 29

Association Meeting:

1:00–4:00 pm

Madison Valley Rural Fire Dept.
Highway 287

Sunday, June 30

Work Party: noon – 4:00



From the President's Corner

By Mike Wells

Greetings from the beautiful Madison Valley! It's St. Paddy's Day and while there isn't much green to be seen around here yet, the white has been disappearing rapidly. Recent daytime temperatures in the upper 30s to lower 40s and nighttime temperatures above freezing combined to radically reduce the snowpack on the Ranch. The snow never completely covered the sagebrush this winter however the snowpack in the Madison River drainage is reportedly at 92% of the historical annual average. This winter's weather and snow has been almost identical to last year. Snow conditions were good for the typical winter activities: snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. I'm hoping we get more snow before the season ends and have a rainy spring so we don't have to spend another summer worrying about wildfires or breathing mass quantities of smoke and not being able to see the mountains for days on end.

The people and antelope left the Ranch in late November but elk herds and mule deer roamed our area through January before leaving it to the ravens, foxes and coyotes that amazingly survive here during the harshest months of winter. Very few Ranch

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Mike Wells, *continued from page 1*

residents came in over the winter, which made it exceptionally peaceful and quiet. Dave Schmidt from Wade Lake Resort has been seeing a lot of wolves around the lakes during the last couple months along with some recent bobcat tracks. I've been watching the ridge above Wade Lake like a hawk but have yet to catch a glimpse of either.

The Board of Directors is currently gearing up to tackle this year's maintenance and improvement projects that help make Madison River Ranch such a wonderful place. These projects and other issues will be discussed in detail at the next **Annual Association Meeting on Saturday, June 29, 2013 from 1-4 PM at the Madison Valley Rural Fire Department building just north of the junction of Highway 287 and the Wade Lake Road.** This spring you will receive ballots to vote on an amendment to the CCRs and to vote for members to fill open seats on the Board of Directors. Please remember to make your voice heard by voting on the ballots you receive, and contacting the current Board of Directors about any issues you think are pertinent.

On Friday, June 28, 2013 from 5-10 PM, we will have our second Annual Pot-Luck Social in the Common Area.

Come on down and party with your friends and neighbors! This event is open to all association members and their guests. The Association will provide a tent, some tables, some chairs and a portable toilet. Bring your own food, beverages, grill, plates, tables, chairs, etc. Last year we had plenty of grills to share along with some really good food and some really big fun!

Also, don't forget to put your brains and/or body to work for the common good at the **Annual Association Work Day on Sunday, June 30, 2013 from 12-4 PM.** Please check our website @ <http://www.madisonriverranch.org> for upcoming events and other information you may want.

Happy Trails!

**Cooking with Martha**

By Martha Crawley

This is an easy and quick piccata recipe. It's written for sole, which I've never used but I've used flounder and boneless chicken, and it's delish with both. I'm sure it's also good with sole, but feel free to use whatever mild white fish you can get. If you use chicken, pound the pieces so they're of equal thickness.

Easy Sole Piccata

Serves 4

1 ½ tablespoons olive oil
 4 sole fillets, about 4-6 oz. each
 Salt to taste
 Flour for dredging
 ½ cup chicken broth, fish stock or white wine
 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 2 tablespoons capers
 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
 Butter

Heat olive oil in a large non-stick pan until hot. While oil is heating, season the sole with salt and pepper and dredge in flour.

Saute the sole over medium-high heat, about 2 min. each side.* Remove to a platter and keep warm.

Quickly add the liquid and stir up any caramelized bits from the pan. Cook until liquid had reduced by half. Add the lemon juice and capers. Finish with about 1 tablespoon of butter and pour sauce over fish. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

Enjoy...

**If you have to sauté in several batches, clean skillet out and re-oil in between. Otherwise the flour particles left in the pan will burn.*

We hope to see you
 for the MRR Association Weekend –
 June 28, 29 and 30!

Well, well, well...

Dave Crawley

Hi folks. I had the opportunity to learn the anatomy and physiology of our community well (on Lot 106) last summer after the pump failed. I spent a few days with Monte Davis of Madison Drilling and Pump Supply as he accomplished the necessary repairs. We believe the pump likely failed due to a lightning strike. Pulling the 580 feet of pipe to retrieve the pump became quite complicated when the pipe fractured near the top on the initial pull and the entire rig dropped to the bottom of the casing. Fishing it back out was not a sure thing and could have ended the life of the well right then. However, Monte, with some special tools, and his many years of experience, was able to retrieve it. It was not easy, and this mishap required that all of the expensive wire to the pump had to also be replaced. These issues over doubled the cost of what should have been a straightforward repair.

It appeared that the fractured pipe that caused the rig to drop was a result of freeze damage and this was most likely caused by one of the operators of the well who did not understand exactly how it works.

There are several precautions that all users of the well need to understand to prevent such a problem in the future:

- 1) **PLEASE DO NOT EVER OBSTRUCT THE OUTFLOW FROM THE WELL WHEN THE PUMP IS ON. THIS MEANS NO NOZZELS ON THE END OF YOUR HOSE.** Any obstruction to flow will either burn the pump up or rupture the pipe somewhere between the pump and the top of the well. There is no pressure regulating control because we do not have a pump house. If the pipe is obstructed, pressure will build until the pump fails or the pipe ruptures. This is why we removed the shutoff valve that someone had installed on the pipe since you cannot shut off the flow in that manner without causing damage.
- 2) **TURN THE PUMP ON AND OFF ONLY WITH THE ELECTRICAL SWITCH – NO VALVES.** It must be free to flow at all times for the reasons explained above.
- 3) **NEVER LEAVE A HOSE ATTACHED.** A hose could freeze overnight (or on a cold day) and prevent drainage of the residual water in the pipe. There is a small pinhole in the pipe below the frost line that allows this residual water to drain back into the well casing, but a hose left attached could prevent that. For this reason, we don't want any garden hoses left at the site of the well in case an individual who is not familiar with these precautions might leave it attached. That is likely what caused the fracture of the pipe last summer.

I believe that if all users of the well follow these recommendations we can minimize the cost of any required maintenance or repairs in the future. If any regular users of the well happen to see anyone who is not adhering to the above precautions I would appreciate it if you educate them on the spot.

Also, I would like to remind everyone that the Association does not guarantee that the water from this well is potable (safe for drinking). As far as I know it has never been tested. So if you drink it, it is at your own risk. I admit that I have not heard of any illnesses from it, but that is a strictly anecdotal observation.

I hope you all get to spend lots of time on our wonderful ranch this summer.

Happy trails!

Dave

Don't forget...
the gate code is 1004



Check the bulletin board for important messages

Introducing... Janet and Isaac Arms

Continued from page 1

We had just moved to Bozeman (Aug. 2005) and married (Sept. 2005) and were eager to have a space to retreat in Montana. Both of us grew up out in the country or on land and wanted the same experience in a rural setting.

Janet grew up on a small farm outside of Eugene, Oregon, and Isaac grew up on a forested piece of land in Old Mystic, Connecticut. Isaac moved to Bozeman for college and was familiar with the Madison Valley, having been an avid kayaker, fisherman, and skier during his years at MSU. He left Bozeman to pursue graduate school, where we met at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Isaac studied Art, Furniture Design, and Woodworking, and Janet studied education policy.



As we started our search for land in Montana, Isaac was keen on the Madison Valley. After a couple days looking at available properties in the Valley, we saw Lot 31 on the Wade Lake bench.

We saw the view down to Wade Lake just before it started to blizzard. The lot wasn't in our stated price range, but we immediately realized it was what we were both looking for. As it turns out, Pete McDougall (who ultimately bought Lot 32) was considering the lot at the same time.

We must have felt the urgency so we submitted an offer that afternoon.

We closed on the lot in January 2006 and camped there for the first time that May. We camped many more nights on the land, always planning to build a cabin in the trees on the bench. In April 2009 we had our first son, Griffin, who started camping at the property when he was two months old and did many more times that summer. Our second son, Elijah, was born the next August.

Camping with two young children was more challenging than the enjoyable camping we were used to pre-kids, and we realized that a cabin would make using our land as a family more enjoyable.

That fall 2010 we decided we would build a cabin and set to figuring out the building site. "We" is a nice term--Isaac has done 99.9% of the work on the cabin while Janet keeps the boys from aiming nail guns at each other. After walking the land a number of times, discussing fire protection, access, utility hookup, and view shed, we ultimately decided to build below the trees and look at the Henry Range. Isaac spent the winter designing the cabin and preparing to break ground. This included a road trip to Illinois to pick up a 16' sliding glass door that he found on Craigslist. Following many other Craigslist acquisitions, and a lot of sweat equity, the cabin is nearing completion.

Juggling raising children and our professional lives, extra time working on the cabin is increasingly sparse. Isaac owns and operates Isaac Arms Studio Furniture while also teaching welding at



MSU, and Janet works at Gallatin College at Montana State University as the Assistant Dean. We are still very lucky to both have a day or two at home during the week with the boys, now age 3 1/2 and 2 (as of October 2012). And, we hope to be enjoying our finished cabin by July 2013!

Janet and Isaac

From the Treasurer: Capital Improvement Plan Assessment

by John Clark

At last year's annual meeting, the Association approved the proposal from the Board for a capital improvement plan assessment for the Madison River Ranch. There have been some questions from owners who were not in attendance at the annual meeting about the details of the plan and its implementation. I would like to answer some of the questions I have been asked and present the plan going forward.

The Board decided to present a capital improvement plan based on the fact the Madison River Ranch is approaching 25 years in existence and some of the infrastructure needs replacing. There were also projects that have been voted on and approved that were stagnating due to lack of funds. The Ranch is in good shape and the annual dues are providing sufficient funds to implement the yearly budget. However, there were some pressing projects that were in need of being accomplished for which we did not have the additional funds. The most significant was the common fence with Three Dollar Ranch along the roughly two-mile stretch on either side of the main gate. It was in terrible shape and was not keeping the cows off our Ranch, which graze on Three Dollar Ranch. The next priorities were to add a fire fighting water cistern by the common well, repair the northwest fence line, replace the gate entries, and complete restoration work on the homestead in the common area.

The Board discussed a number of solutions and decided to present the plan that was approved at the 2012 annual meeting. The plan included the capital improvements (as outlined above) and projected costs of the projects. The Board recommended a \$150 per lot assessment for three years. The Madison River Ranch covenants (section 7.4) allow for a special assessment as long as it is voted on and approved on an annual basis.

The new fence along the main gate was installed last summer; our good neighbors on Three Dollar Ranch coordinated and hired the fence contractor to do the work. We shared the costs as we have in the past when we share common fence lines. As you will see when you drive through the main gate, it is a beautiful wildlife-friendly fence that will last for years. We also replaced the jack fence adjacent to the main gate, which dramatically improves the appearance of our entry to the Ranch.

Those of you who were on the Ranch last summer or lived anywhere in the west know what a terrible fire season it was. The Association has long been discussing how we could help the fire department address the fire danger on the Ranch. A couple of years ago we began to mow the easement on either side of the roads to increase the fire break which will allow the fire trucks safer access on the Ranch in case of a fire. We have also been discussing the best way to add a water source on the Ranch so the fire department could refill their trucks without having to travel to the Madison River for water. It was decided to install a 13,000 gallon, underground water cistern with the plumbing necessary for the fire department to quickly refill their trucks in the event of fire. With the dedication and planning (along with a few headaches) of Dave Crawley the cistern was installed and filled last August.

We now look forward to this summer when we can replace the fencing on the northwest corner of the Ranch. It too is in disrepair and cows grazing on the national forest land are able to gain access to our property.

The next project will be to begin the restoration of the homestead structures on the common area. They will be a lasting memory to the history of our Ranch and the Madison valley and may even become usable structures for our owners. Hopefully the gate log entries will last long enough for us to complete the other projects; they will be replaced as needed.

As Board members, we do not take our responsibility lightly and we always consider the best interest of the Ranch when making financial decisions or decisions that maintain or improve the Ranch's value and safety. The vote for the second year of the assessment will take place at the annual meeting and the Board is hopeful it will be approved. Please remember to return your proxy votes if you are unable to attend the meeting to make your voice heard.

Hopefully I have answered a few questions and given a clear picture of the capital improvement plan. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me or any Board member via the Association website at: <http://www.madisonriverranch.org> and select "contact us". Hope to see you on the river this summer.

The Chemical Character of the Madison: a product of geysers

by Gene Welch

The chemical character of the upper Madison is very unusual among natural waters. Three major dissolved elements that characterize natural waters are calcium, magnesium and sodium. Calcium is normally the most abundant. In fact, water "hardness" is defined as the quantity of calcium and magnesium. Sodium content is usually small in natural waters, but in the upper Madison above Hebgen, it is 12 times that of calcium. There is a shift farther downstream with calcium dominating sodium by a factor of 2 in the middle and lower Madison. Calcium also dominates over sodium in the Gallatin (7x) and Jefferson (2x), as well as in MRR groundwater (5x) and the Commons Creek (4x).

The Madison's chemical character is not too surprising, because the underlying bedrock in Yellowstone Park, where the Madison originates, is largely rhyolite (an igneous rock) and welded tuff (consolidated volcanic dust and ash). By far the largest constituent

of that bedrock is silica, which comprises most of the earth's crust. The deposits around geysers along the Firehole River are largely silicates - "siliceous sinter". Also, sodium is 7 times more abundant than calcium in Yellowstone bedrock. Igneous rocks are usually quite resistant to chemical weathering and water draining. Such bedrock is low in dissolved chemicals. However, dissolution is enhanced by contact with the hot geyser water along the Firehole. The result is unusually high concentrations of sodium and low calcium and magnesium.

What about nutrients in the geyser stew? Phosphorus, usually the key to production in fresh water, is present in Yellowstone bedrock, but not to the extent as in limestone areas of the Rockies. Nevertheless, phosphorus is abundant enough, but it is nitrogen that is in short supply in Hebgen and the river. There are blue-green algae in Hebgen that can fix atmospheric nitrogen and they form blooms at times, especially in the Grayling Arm.

The upper Madison does not produce as much algae attached to rocks as expected, given the amount of phosphorus available, because there is insufficient nitrogen. Apparently, there are some algae that fix nitrogen in the river, but likely not to the extent as those in Hebgen.

If there were more nitrogen, the amount of algae would probably at least double, an amount that existed during 1997-2000 below Ennis dam and at Three Forks. That could mean more aquatic insects and more trout at Three Dollar Bridge.

Are there more trout at Norris, below Ennis Dam, consistent with more algae, than in the upper Madison, above West Fork? Electro fishing shows that abundance of trout greater than 12 inches was about equal (~1,500/mile) at the two sites during 1999-2006, of which about 55% were browns. While food abundance is of paramount importance, other factors often limit wild fish abundance and size, such as adequate physical habitat, fishing pressure (catch and keep is legal in the lower river), temperature (often limiting in the lower river), disease, and stress from stocked

fish. Fortunately, the latter is not a problem in Montana streams, where trout are wild.

These observations are based on multiple years of data from PA Power and Light, Butte; MT Dept. Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Ennis; MT Dept. of

Environments Quality, Helena; a PhD dissertation by D. B. Martin, and MS Thesis by T. D. Miller, Montana State University; and personally collected samples.



Half a Century

The year 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of the Montana Stream Protection Act, legislation that has protected hundreds of miles of coldwater and warmwater streams across Montana.

A Primer on Sagebrush Ecology

By Frank Davis, MRR Secretary

A sagebrush vegetation covers most of the Madison River Ranch except in forest-covered ravines or where the sagebrush has been cleared and converted to grassland. I suspect my fellow MRR Association members have diverse opinions about this much-maligned and misunderstood vegetation type:

- Maybe you appreciate its low stature, which allows expansive views of the surrounding landscape?
- Or perhaps you like it because it is so easy to maintain (no gutters to clear out, no fallen trees to contend with)?
- Maybe you may have grown to appreciate the summer wildflowers, sparrows, northern harriers (a common hawk in sagebrush country), short-eared owls and pronghorns that inhabit these shrublands?
- Or do you find sagebrush monotonous?
- In sore need of windbreaks and trees?
- Do you see a catastrophic wildfire waiting to happen?
- Maybe a bit of all of the above?

Recent scientific research is changing the way land managers think about sagebrush vegetation. As MRR Association members we are all land stewards that can benefit from this new information. For starters, this article provides brief answers to seven questions:

- 1) **What is sagebrush?**
- 2) **Where does sagebrush vegetation occur and where does the Madison River Ranch fit into its distribution?**
- 3) **Is sagebrush important habitat for native plant and animal species?**
- 4) **What are the main economic values of sagebrush?**
- 5) **What are the main threats to sagebrush?**
- 6) **How likely is wildfire in sagebrush? What can we do to manage fire risk?**
- 7) **Where can we go for more information?**

What is Sagebrush?

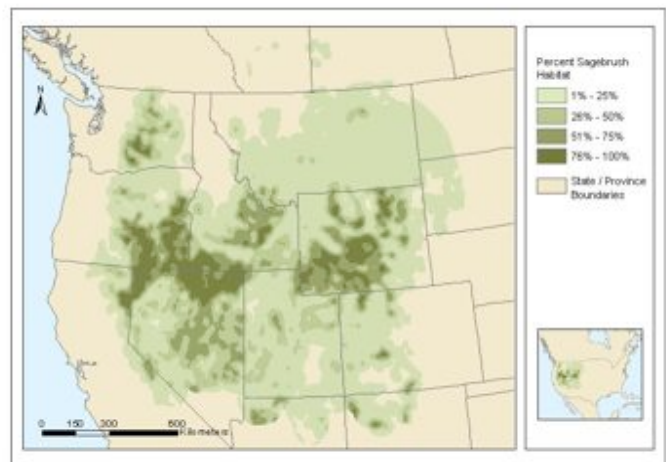
Ecologists refer to vegetation dominated by one or more sagebrush species as “sagebrush steppe” or “sagebrush habitat.” For shorthand, I will simply refer to this vegetation as “sagebrush.” I will stick to “big sagebrush” when talking about the species,

Artemisia tridentata.

Big sagebrush is the most common and widespread sagebrush species in the western U.S. and on the Madison River Ranch. It belongs to the Aster (Sunflower) family, and is in the genus *Artemisia* (named after Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt). There are 400-500 species of *Artemisia* in North America and Eurasia, including big sagebrush (*A. tridentata*, for its three-toothed leaves). In late summer, big sagebrush produces small yellow-green flowers on short stems at the tip of the branches, and thousands of tiny seeds. Like many of its cousins in the genus *Artemisia* (for example tarragon and absinthe), big sagebrush has pungent foliage due to the presence of volatile oils in its leaves. We will return to those oils later on.

Where does sagebrush vegetation occur and where does the Madison River Ranch fit into its distribution?

Madison River Ranch lies north of the main distribution of sagebrush, which is especially widespread in southeastern Oregon, southern Idaho, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming (see map below).



Source: SAGEMAP - A GIS Database for Sage grouse and Shrubsteppe Management in the Intermountain West.
<http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov>

The upper Madison Valley is relatively cool and wet for sagebrush. Most sagebrush occurs on well-drained soils in areas receiving 10-20 inches of annual precipitation. By comparison, long-term annual

Sagebrush Ecology, *continued*

Frank Davis

precipitation in the upper Madison Valley is around 23-26 inches. But sagebrush can also occur on disturbed sites in slightly wetter and cooler forested areas. The extent of sagebrush in the upper Madison Valley has undoubtedly waxed and waned over the past 200 years with changes in climate, land use, fire, and grazing by bison herds and then sheep and cattle.

Is sagebrush important habitat for native plant and animal species?

Sagebrush steppe is surprisingly rich in understory plant species, including many perennial grass species and wildflower species. Based on studies of sagebrush plant communities in our region, a tally of the plant species on a sagebrush-covered lot on the ranch would probably yield 75-150 species of plants, although you might not notice many of them because they are scattered in the gaps between the shrub canopies, are more common some years than others, and are only conspicuous during the few weeks when they flower. Most of these would be native species although non-native weeds also occur in sagebrush, especially near roads.

Sagebrush does not harbor as many wildlife species as some prime habitat types like quaking aspen groves. But it is habitat for over 100 bird species and is key habitat for some wildlife species, for example pronghorn antelope, brewer's sparrow, and, of course, greater sage-grouse (a threatened species that is rare in our area). Big sagebrush provides around 90% of the winter food supply for pronghorns, and is also an important food source for mule deer, elk, and many small mammals. One of my favorite small animals is the sagebrush vole (*Lemmiscus curtatus*), a lemming relative the size of a large mouse that usually forms small colonies. These animals forage year-round (yes, even in tunnels under the snow) on grass and seeds and are an important food source for birds of prey, coyotes and other predators in our

area. You may have noticed them around your cabin. Don't worry, they stay outside.



Credit: painting by Todd Zalewski from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press

What are the main economic values of sagebrush?

Livestock ranching is the predominant land use in sagebrush. Big sagebrush is good forage for sheep but poor forage for cattle, thus the long campaign to clear sagebrush from many western rangelands. As noted above, sagebrush is important habitat for some game species, and the shrub cover helps reduce soil erosion and maintain soil fertility.

What are the main threats to sagebrush?

Sagebrush once covered 155 million acres of western North America. That's one and a half times the size of California. Today about half of that area has been converted to grassland or has been highly degraded by non-native plant species like cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), a weedy grass from Europe. In an effort to improve range conditions for cattle, public and private land managers have cleared sagebrush using prescribed fires, mechanical treatments and herbicides, often re-seeding those areas with non-native grasses. Agriculture, mining, oil, natural gas, urban and residential development and roads have fragmented remaining sagebrush habitats.

Increasing fire frequency due to cheatgrass invasion is seen as a significant threat to sagebrush. Depending on location and stocking densities, cattle grazing can promote cheatgrass, which in turn promotes wildfires that knock back the sagebrush while further increasing cheatgrass. This feedback is promoting a new fire cycle in sagebrush of the Great Basin and converting large areas of sagebrush to weedy grassland.

How likely is wildfire in sagebrush? What can we do to manage fire risk?

Ecologists speculate that historically wildfire occurred infrequently in sagebrush, on average once every 50 years or less. Now fires occur more frequently and the average time between fires is 20-50 years depending on local climate and other factors. Open sagebrush with lots of grass in the understory tends to ignite readily in late summer after the grass has dried. Once sagebrush has ignited, the shrubs burn hot and fast because of the volatile oils in the leaves. Depending on the amount of shrub cover, shrub height, plant moisture and weather conditions, flame lengths range from 8-10' in cool burns to 25' or more in hot burns. Fire usually kills the shrubs and consumes all but the thickest stems. Sagebrush shrub species are not especially adapted to fire, and shrub recovery can take several decades.

Summer wildfires pose a serious risk on the Madison

Sagebrush Ecology, *continued*

Frank Davis

River Ranch (which is why we invite local fire officials to speak at our annual meetings and why we have invested in a new 13,000 gallon water cistern at the top of the property). Following a few rules of thumb will greatly reduce your personal risk and risk to your homes:

- Maintain a defensible fuel space of low grass. In sagebrush, that space is typically considered to be up to 100' from structures on level ground, and up to 200' from structures on slopes.
 - Keep flammable substances, firewood stacks, and fuel tanks away from the house.
 - Mow within 10-20 feet of propane tanks, wooden fences and roads.
- Making your property defensible is not equivalent to clearing all sagebrush off of your property. Once you have created a defensible space, consider leaving the rest of the sagebrush as habitat for the many plant species and wildlife species that depend on the shrubs for cover, nesting structure, and food.

Where can we go for more information?

Much has been written about sagebrush ecology and management. Here are a few useful resources. Feel free to contact me if you would like additional information.

- 1) **For sagebrush identification and life history information:**
Pocket Guide to Sagebrush, by PRBO Conservation Science (free online <http://sagegrouseinitiative.com/content/brand-new-pocket-guide-sagebrush>)
- 2) **For sagebrush ecology and management:**
 - a. Countering misinformation concerning Big Sagebrush, by Bruce Welch and Craig Criddle, USDA Forest Service Research Paper RMRS-RP-40, 2003. Free online, <http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/6063>
 - b. Managing sagebrush habitats for bird communities, by Christine Paige and Sharon A. Ritter. Partners in Flight Western Working Group, 1999. Free online, <http://www.partnersinflight.org/wwg/sagebrush.pdf>
- 3) **For fire safety tips**
<http://www.firewise.org/information/who-is-this-for/homeowners.aspx>



MRR Association

Board of Directors:

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John Clark, Treasurer
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Introducing...

Please contact me if you are willing to write about your family and how you acquired your property at MRR for a future edition of the MRR Newsletter.

Thanks, Ann



Thanks to Mike Wells and Isaac Arms for sharing their photos.

Links

<http://www.madisonriverranch.org>

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