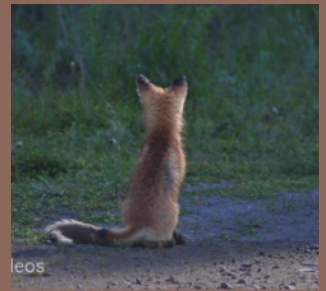


Madison River Ranch News

What's happening at the Ranch



Annual Newsletter

Madison River Ranch Association

2026

From wildfire response to wildlife sightings, this issue highlights recent events and ongoing observations at Madison River Ranch.

We are grateful to contributors who continue to share their experiences and knowledge with the community.

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The Annual MRR Meeting will be held on Saturday June 27 at 10:00 am Gibbs Garage 58 Madison Trail See you there

Close to Home - Horn Fire August 2025

By Sabine & Mike Cramer

On the early afternoon of August 13, 2025, lightning struck and caused a rapidly growing fire quickly named the 'Horn Fire' and Madison River Ranch had a front row seat.



Photo by Mike Cramer

It was first reported around 2:30 in the afternoon and multiple fire personnel were dispatched to the scene, which also included two helicopters and one plane that was used to spread fire retardant. Wind became a huge factor and caused the fire to quickly spread across the sagebrush by Horn Mountain towards Madison River Ranch, Horn Creek and to state HWY 87.

The fire crew worked diligently at creating fire breaks, dousing hotspots and trying to keep it from advancing to nearby cabins, homes and other structures. Many of us at MRR watched anxiously as this fire was fought in hopes that the

wind would abate, weather would be favorable and the fire could be quickly extinguished.

As the evening and night progressed, it became more evident that mandatory evacuations may be a real possibility. Cliff and Wade Lake Rd was closed to any traffic as was Horn Creek Rd and for a period of time, HWY 87(aside from residents and fire crews).

The night sky showed the true fury of this fire. Flames and a red glow continued to advance prompting pre evacuation warnings.



Photo by Mike Cramer

Having our own front seat close the entrance, it was clear to us that this could go from bad to worse and we made a quick assessment what to quickly load. We already had an evacuation plan in place, as we had experienced fires here before, but none this close.

Around midnight, fire crew established a fire break right along the front entrance to MRR and we opted to head back to Ennis at that time.



Photo by Mike Cramer

I was back at MRR predawn the following morning. The air was heavy with smoke, the winds had lessened and the hard work of the fire crew who worked throughout the night had made huge progress in controlling the fire. Helicopters continued to attack hotspots as did the plane with fire retardant and it was clear their hard work paid off.

No lives lost, no structures lost (to the best of my knowledge) and a huge sense of relief knowing that we skirted any devastating loss.

Mother Nature has its own way of healing, and it was amazing to see after only a few short weeks, a hint of green undergrowth starting across the sagebrush.

A deep and heartfelt thank to all of the fire personnel and communication amongst the residents at MRR that were present at the ranch during the fire.

A huge reminder to us all to have an evacuation plan and to also work on clearing sagebrush around our various homes, cabins and outbuildings.

Madison River Fish Count BY Gene Welch

Are there fewer trout in the Madison? Fish population data show that abundance and size of browns and rainbows have held rather constant around the management goals for the past 25 years.

Fish Wildlife and Parks personnel sample the trout populations annually at three long-term sites by electrofishing from a drift-boat mounted, mobile anode system. Fish are attracted to direct current. **The procedure involves three drift runs in mid-channel, left and right banks. Drift distances range from 3.3 to 4.85 miles.** Captured fish in the first run are measured, weighed, and marked with a fin clip. The same stretch is sampled about a week later, with marked fish captured noted and all are measured and weighed. The total population is estimated by comparing the ratio of marked to unmarked fish using a standardized method.



Photo from Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks

The three sites are Pine Butte (near the Kirby Ranch and West Fork), Varney Bridge and Norris, below Bear Trap Canyon. The sites have been sampled for the past 25 years, since the recovery of the rainbow population from whirling disease in the 1990s. The population management objectives for the three sites are for several size groups: 2000 trout 6 inches and larger per mile of river at Pine Butte with 25% over 16 inches, 35% over 16 inches at Varney and 15% at Norris. While the abundance of trout 6 inches or more has averaged around 2000 per mile of river, the range was about 1000-3000 per mile. Percent over 16 inches has ranged from about 15% to 35% at Pine Butte and 25% to 40% at Varney. **Abundance of**

trout in Norris stretch been less during the past ten years due to loss of island habitat for spawning.

Why did Montana, then Fish and Game, "go wild" in 1974 with no stocking of hatchery fish in streams? A study that started in 1968 to determine the benefits from increased flows showed that there was more recruitment to the trout population at Norris than at Varney. The apparent cause for the difference was 10,000 to 15,000 catchable hatchery trout stocked per year at Varney, but not at Norris. So, an experiment was conducted that ultimately showed the adverse effects of stocking catchable hatchery trout on the wild trout population. For more detail on the famous experiment see the May-June 2004 issue of Montana Outdoors with an interview of Dick Vincent, who conducted the famous experiment,

Montana fisheries biologists in the early 1960s were not enamored with stocking catchable hatchery trout in streams, largely because they cost too much to produce and end up in fisher's creels, but not because they had an adverse effect on wild trout. I was a fisheries biologist with Montana Fish and Game then and listened to the discussions. Vincent's experiment demonstrated that catchable hatchery fish had a biological cost, as well as a monetary cost. **Moreover, 25 years of population data at the three long-term sites show that natural reproduction has maintained trout populations. Although recruitment has recently declined at the Norris stretch, a project to improve spawning habitat is underway.**

Dusky Grouse

By Karen Roll

A Dusky Grouse is a large chicken-like bird which is found all year in mountainous regions of interior western North America. Its preferred habitats include burned areas, montane forests and subalpine forest clearings with conifers and shrubby undergrowth. They have been reported throughout Madison County from April through November. Usually you see them on the ground although when flushed they may fly to an evergreen limb and just freeze.



Photo by Karen Roll

The male Dusky Grouse is a uniform grayish or gray-brown without strong contrast. When he displays during courtship he shows off a patch of violet-red skin on his neck surrounded by white feathers and red-orange eye combs.

Often in June we see a male strutting up and down our driveway in full display. Very impressive! The female is speckled and spotted overall without a clear barred pattern of other grouse.

These birds eat primarily conifer needles in the winter but during other times of the year their diet shifts to insects, spiders and berries. They forage on the ground. During breeding season they make a nest on the ground in a scrape lined with needles and grass usually sheltered by a stump or rock. They usually lay seven to



Photo by Karen Roll

sixteen eggs but only about half survive due to predators or inclement weather after the hatch.

This past summer other grouse were also seen on the ranch, perhaps because of the fire. The Greater Sage-Grouse which is much rarer was spotted in the area several times.

Introducing Dave and Renee' Maldonado

A "20-Year Dream" tells the story of Dave and Renee' Maldonado.

I, Dave, was raised in Orange, California, by parents who were also born and raised in the area. My wife, Renee', was born in Orange County as well. Her parents moved to Salem, Oregon in the late 1960s, where she grew up playing in the woods and developed a deep love for that lifestyle—one she always hoped to return to. I attended Cal Poly Pomona, where I studied Urban and Regional Planning. Renee' attended Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, where she studied Business Administration and Marketing.

In 1999, I became a partner at KTGy, an architecture and land planning firm in Costa Mesa. We grew the firm to approximately 250 employees before the housing market crash in 2008, after which I was bought out. In 2009, I started my own architectural design firm, D33 Design & Planning Inc. Renee' also works part-time with D33, supporting the business in an administrative role.

Our dream began to take shape after our first family trip to Yellowstone in 2004. From that point on, we actively searched for property in Montana. Nearly every family vacation to a mountainous area included meeting with realtors and touring potential properties—always with the hope of finding a place that matched the lifestyle we loved.

In September 2023, a Zillow notification appeared on my computer for a property on Hilgard Trail. When we finally visited the property in late April 2024, we immediately knew our 20-year search had come to an end. It was everything we had envisioned—a place where fly fishing, hiking, kayaking, and time outdoors wouldn't just be occasional activities, but part of everyday life. We fell in love with everything Madison River Ranch has to offer.

The outdoors has always been at the center of our lives. I have a deep passion for fly fishing, hunting, and golf—whether it's casting a line on a quiet river, spending time in the field, or enjoying a round surrounded by scenic landscapes. Renee' shares that same connection to nature through her love of hiking and kayaking, always seeking out trails, rivers, and peaceful settings that bring her closer to the outdoors. These passions didn't just shape how we spend our time - they shaped where we dreamed of being.

We purchased the property in April 2024 and are looking forward to spending as much time as possible on the ranch with our two adult children and their growing families in the years ahead.

Volunteer Opportunities

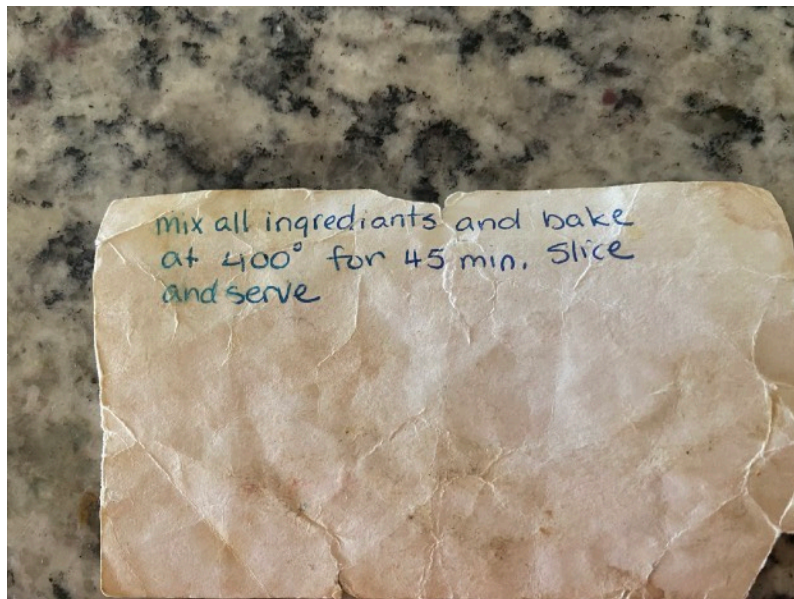
Looking for ways to make improvements around the ranch? There are several ways to get involved and we will have some projects announced as part of the annual member meeting. Prior to that, we need help mowing the common area and under the jack fencing. Planning to complete mowing June 20th -25th. Last year we had a surge in noxious weeds around the ranch - most important please dedicate time to walk your property and spray, or have your property sprayed by professionals (<https://terranoamt.com/>). We are responsible for our own tract maintenance. Additionally, if this year is similar to last, we will need help spraying road easements a second time, expected around the end of July. Please be on the lookout for announcements included in future emails for additional projects.

Mark Juranek



Quiche Sue McMahan

Thanks to Sue for sharing this family recipe for quiche. It looks like it might have been prepared and enjoyed more than just a few times.



How to Drive on Gravel Roads

John Clark

- **SLOW DOWN** - The best thing you can do to prevent rough washboard roads is to slowdown. The ideal speed is less than 25 miles per hour. When you drive too fast, the dust trail following you is the smooth part of the road blowing away and leaving washboard and rocks behind. Please limit your speed to save our roads and to protect the people and the animals who live here. If you drive slowly you get to see more of the wildlife and are less likely to run it over. Driving slowly around other vehicles and homes is just good manners. No one wants rocks thrown up damaging their vehicles or their homes. **The slower you go the longer our roads and your tires will last.**
- Once we have maintained the roads near your property, please drive on the whole road and slowly. At lower speeds, your tires compact the road making it more solid and sturdy. If tracks start to form, drive on other parts of the road to compact the rest of it and prevent ruts from forming.
- If your road is wet and muddy please allow it to dry as much as you can before you drive on it. Driving our roads when they are wet and muddy is one of the best ways to damage the roads. If you let the roads dry naturally the damage will be minimized.
- Never speed up when you are traveling up hill. Keep a steady and slow momentum going. This will help prevent washboards.

Another reason to slow down:

There are always puppies on the Ranch.



Enjoying the Night Sky

MRR Covenants Section 6.17: "No Annoying Lights, Sounds or Odors. No light shall be emitted from any Tract or other portion of the Property which is unreasonably bright or causes unreasonable glare; no sound shall be emitted from any Tract or other portion of the Property which is unreasonably loud or annoying including but without limitation, speakers, horns, whistles, bells or other sound devices; and no odors shall be permitted from any Tract or other portion of the Property which are noxious or offensive to others."



Photo by Mike Cramer



Photo by Mike Cramer

Thank you all for the wonderful photography it truly makes this newsletter fun to produce and hopefully read.

MRR Board of Directors**Paul Wilkinson, President**

Lot 126

Sally Niess, Secretary

Lot 135

Mark Juranek, Treasurer

Lot 60

John Graifemberg, Board Member

Lot 61

Dave Maldonado, Board Member

Lot 93

Marv Gibbs, Webmaster

<http://www.madisonriverranch.org>**Reminders**Gate combinationMembers only section of WebsiteFedEx / UPS combination5971

Trading Post

Marv Gibbs, our web master, designed with input from Jon & Sally Niess, the Trading Post during the cold snowy months of Spokane's 2025 winter. Jon Niess produced the help video which makes using the Trading Post so easy. A great addition to our Ranch website

Thank You All

Many thanks to all the kind & helpful neighbors working together to make MRR an amazing & beautiful place to be.

Special thanks to Hillary Hoskinson for the years of service on the Madison River Ranch Board. Hills researched and set up the ElectionBuddy for voting electronically. What a substantial improvement! Much appreciated.

The ranch road signs look fantastic because Sue & Scott McMahan & Geoffrey Burling removed, sanded, stained, painted and replaced them. Also speed limit signs were placed along the roads.

We Would Like To Meet You

We would like to meet our neighbors on the ranch! There are many ranch owners that have not yet had a chance to write an article to introduce themselves. It is interesting to learn what drew people to the Madison River Valley and the Madison River Ranch.