

Stewardship Award Meeting Summary

Montana Wetland Council and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council joint Stewardship Award Ceremony

May 26, 2011, Montana State Capitol

On May 26, 2011, The Montana Wetland Council and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council celebrated their joint Stewardship Award Ceremony in the State's Capitol. [Press releases](#) on the award recipients preceded the event and KTVH covered parts of the Award Ceremony (video available).

Award Recipients Presentations

At 9:00 am, the Wetland Stewardship Award recipients; Henry Gordon and his daughter Trish-Gruszie Gordon of the Gordon Cattle Company and the many partners of the Flathead River to Lake Initiative gave PowerPoint presentations about their award winning work. Following that the MWCC Award recipients; Sweet Grass County Conservation District and Joel Chavez and Tim Reilly of the DEQ Remediation Division Silver Bow Creek Restoration program also gave award presentations.

Formal Award Ceremony

At 11:00 am, the formal Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Award Ceremony was held in the Old Supreme Court Chambers. Please see the attached [award program](#) for information about the four award recipients and background about the awards. MWCC and Montana Wetland Council leadership provided introductory statements.

Specific to wetlands, Saul highlighted several collective successes of the Montana wetland community:

North American Wetland Conservation Act. NAWCA is an incentive-based, landowner friendly program that fosters the development of public-private partnerships to protect North America's migratory bird-habitat. Montana currently has 27 NAWCA projects either completed or underway since 1990. Federal NAWCA funding to Montana of over \$19 million stimulated partner contribution of over \$92 million. Projects have conserved a total of about 290,000 acres focusing on wetland and riparian rich habitat.

Land and Water Conservation Fund. LWCF is a federal program to conserve irreplaceable lands and improve outdoor recreation opportunities. The USFWS has focused LWCF funding on the Rocky Mountain Front, the Centennial Valley and the Blackfoot Valley. In the last 5 years habitat conservation in these areas totaled just under 50,000 acres including 2,250 wetland acres.

Major advances in Wetland and Riparian Mapping. Montana used to be one of the least mapped states in regards to the National Wetland Inventory. Six years ago the Council was successful in adding Wetlands as one of the official 14 Framework Layers within the Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure. An EPA grant provided the seed money for Montana Natural Heritage Program to create The Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center. The Center now employs 6 full time digitizers mapping Montana's wetlands and riparian areas to national standards with the support of at least 17 different funding partners. BLM has been a major supporter of mapping in eastern Montana. In total, 60% of the state is completed or funded to be mapped (1,681 quads out of 2,953 quads). And on May 25, 2011 the Montana Land Information Advisory Council awarded the Center \$110,000 for additional mapping.

Education and Outreach. Public education and professional training are Wetland Strategic Framework priorities. In the last year:

- 118 individuals attended seven field training sessions on wetland plant identification held across the state by MTNHP Botanist Scott Mincemoyer.
- Nearly all 2000 copies of a new DEQ booklet "*Common Native and Invasive Wetland Plants in Montana*" were distributed.
- The COE, NRCS and DEQ held regional supplement seminars in Billings and Missoula on wetland delineation.
- The Montana Water Center developed a *Montana Decision-Makers Guide to Wetlands* and held online training courses.
- Two multi-day training courses titled "Using GIS in Wetland and Watershed Work" have been given to 55 Conservation Districts, local government planners, watershed coordinators, and others.

Special recognition. The Council Award Committee unanimously agreed to nominate Tim Swanson, recently retired from The Nature Conservancy, for a National Wetland Award. This is based on his 13 years of extraordinary conservation accomplishments in the wetland rich Centennial and Big Hole Valleys. Tim worked collaboratively with the USFWS and numerous landowners to protect nearly 70,000 acres of ecologically diverse private lands in perpetuity. 57% of the private lands are now permanently protected in the Centennial Valley. As one letter of support stated, "his vision and passion are unyielding. His work has brought so many ranching families, agencies and interest groups together to provide long-term protection to the landscape and champion the family ranching culture of southwest Montana." The Council will work with Tim's colleagues to submit a National Wetlands Award nomination package this fall.

Featured speakers in the Award Ceremony, Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger and DEQ Director Richard Opper, presented opening remarks and recognized the accomplishments and congratulated the award recipients. They spoke of the importance of land and water stewardship and the value of wetlands and water resources to all Montanans. Next, nominator's described the award winning work for each recipient and Wetland and Watershed Stewardship awards were presented. Dr. Eloise Kendy, Director of The Nature Conservancy's International Environmental Flows

Program and Helena resident, presented a thought provoking keynote titled “Water Woes? Restore Nature’s Infrastructure”. Her talk explored the economic case for restoring wetlands, watersheds, and natural floodplain water storage. Nearly 100 individuals were present for the Award Ceremony. A complimentary luncheon in the Capitol Rotunda followed the Award Ceremony. Please see [award photos](#) and credit “Ashley Stevick Photography” if you use these photos.

Innovative Wetland and Watershed Approaches

At 1:30 pm, the MWCC and Montana Wetland Council held joint presentations on innovative wetland and watershed approaches. PowerPoint presentations are linked to the titles of the talks below:

[Trumpeter Swan Restoration: Building Community Support for Wetland Conservation on the Wings of an Iconic Wetland Bird](#)

Tom Hinz, Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership and Claire Gower, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

[Cooperative Lake Helena Bioengineering Demonstration Project](#)

Jeff Ryan, DEQ and Tom Anderson, landowner.

[Moving To Win-Win: Channel Migration Easement Program](#)

Jim Darling, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

A sincere congratulations to the Wetland and Watershed Stewardship Award winners for exemplary work and natural resource commitment. Thanks to all who attended the Award Ceremony events and helped to celebrate the accomplishments of these individuals and organizations and thanks also for taking the time to celebrate and reflect on the progress we’ve collectively made toward the overall goal of restoring and protecting Montana’s wetlands and watersheds. Our next joint Stewardship Award Ceremony will be held in May 2013.

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