



Contact: Melodie Lloyd, Bureau of Land Management, (406) 896-5260 or
Tyler Johnson, Bureau of Reclamation, (406) 247-7609
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Upper Missouri River Highlighted In America's Great Outdoors Rivers Initiative



BLM Park Rangers (Mark Schaefer, Nikki Lyster and Aaron Conway) with Anne Castle, DOI Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.

FORT BENTON, Mont. – Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Anne Castle and her deputy assistant John Tubbs saw firsthand on Thursday, July 26, what hard work and collaboration by multiple partners – federal, state, and local – can accomplish. The pair toured a small segment of the 149-mile Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River to learn about ongoing projects that promote riparian restoration and cottonwood recovery along the river corridor. Representatives were on hand from the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Montana State Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the Missouri River Conservation Districts, and the Friends of the Monument.

The BLM officials – Montana/Dakotas Associate State Director Kate Kitchell and Central Montana District Manager Stan Benes – hosted the day's event that ended with a tour of the Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center located in Fort Benton.

“The Missouri Breaks Monument is living proof that conservation is indeed a part of the BLM’s multiple-use mission,” said Kitchell. “It’s a priority of Secretary Salazar to conserve and restore key rivers across the nation, expand outdoor recreational opportunities, and support jobs in local communities. The BLM, with the help of its partners, is doing just that.”

The Bureau of Reclamation’s Platte River Recovery Implementation Program in Nebraska and the San Juan River Habitat Restoration in New Mexico are also key parts of the Great Outdoors Rivers Initiative. Together, these projects will work to improve habitat for the recovery of endangered species, such as, whooping cranes, interior least terns, piping plovers, and pallid sturgeon, while also benefitting habitats on national parks, tribal and private lands enjoyed by outdoor recreationists.

For the past 10 years the Central Montana District of the BLM has worked diligently to improve riparian corridors along the Upper Missouri River. That effort has included changes in the grazing program, moving away from hot season grazing, and reducing numbers where trends were not in a positive direction. In July 2010, with the assistance of the National Riparian Service Team, a Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessment was initiated to summarize riparian conditions along six reaches of the Upper Missouri River. All reaches were

found to have riparian-wetland plant communities playing a key role in ecological function along the Upper Missouri River and, most importantly, to be functioning properly. Along with the riparian assessment was an interagency effort with the Bureau of Reclamation to assess the need for cottonwood restoration along the same reaches of the Upper Missouri River. A 12-year working partnership with USGS has provided solid science to assist in several cottonwood seedling planting proposals, along with a draft Memorandum of Understanding suggesting the benefit of releasing waters from several dams during high water event years to provide productive seedbeds for future cottonwood stands. Both efforts are ongoing.

Lewis and Clark spent three weeks, in the spring of 1805, exploring what is now the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. Today this portion is considered to be the premier component of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, managed as part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, covers about 375,000 acres of BLM-administered public land in central Montana. These public lands make a significant contribution to the local lifestyle and regional economy.

To learn more about the America's Great Outdoors Rivers Initiative, visit <http://www.doi.gov>. For more information about the BLM in Montana/Dakotas, visit <http://www.blm/mt.gov>. Learn more about the Bureau of Reclamation at <http://www.usbr.gov>.