

It's Finally Over!

Judge Rules In Favor of Intake Diversion Project

By Dianne Swanson

The excruciatingly long battle to save the Intake Diversion Project is finally over with the decision by District Judge Brian Morris to grant the Federal Defendants/Intervenor Defendants' cross motions for summary judgment and to dismiss the Plaintiff's (Defenders of Wildlife) request that the court order the Bureau to finalize a plan to bring its operation at Intake Dam into compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Morris also dismissed the Plaintiffs request that the court order the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to finalize a plan to bring its operation of Fort Peck Dam into compliance with the ESA since that claim was rendered moot by the Corps re-initiation of consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in 2015.

The Corps is now accepting bids on the project through the last week in August. Construction should begin this fall, probably starting with the fish bypass so that the water has a place to go during construction of the concrete weir.

Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project Manager James Brower is delighted with the ruling. "After substantive and significant analysis of an incredible amount of evidence brought up in the last three years, Judge Brian Morris put out a very well thought out and correct legal opinion on all counts," he said. All claims concerning Intake have been resolved with any remaining points involving Fort Peck.

Brower also expressed his deep appreciation to the entire community for its on going support during this difficult process. "Thank you to each and every member of our community who didn't give up and made the time to help and pray for us! I testify God helped us in the end and this win is going to help farmers all over this nation as a legal precedent."

In his ruling, Judge Morris referred to the 9th Circuit Court ruling, which reversed his earlier injunction, multiple times. He now concluded that the FWS 2016 Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement (ITS) for the Project does not violate the ESA. The Bureau's and the Corp's reliance on the Biological Opinion to authorize the Project did not violate their ESA section 7 substantive duty. The Bureau's and the Corp's ROD and EIS (Environmental Impact statement) for the Project does not violate the National Environmental Protection Act. The Corps selected the bypass channel alternative in accordance with guidelines.

The Plaintiffs' ESA challenge to the Corps operation and maintenance of Fort Peck Dam proves moot at this point. However the Corps and the Bureau cannot continue to stall. He stated, "The day of reckoning will come when the Corps and Bureau must actually complete the consultation process with the incorporation of RPAs, as no one, including the Corps and the Bureau, stands above the law".

Morris recognized that the Intake Diversion dam and its maintenance, including the yearly rocking to maintain water flow, was mandated by Congress and that the Endangered Species Act could not be applied retroactively.

Judge Morris also ruled that the new bypass channel and concrete weir must be built at Intake or he would dismiss the plaintiffs' claims without prejudice and allow it to re-file the claims.



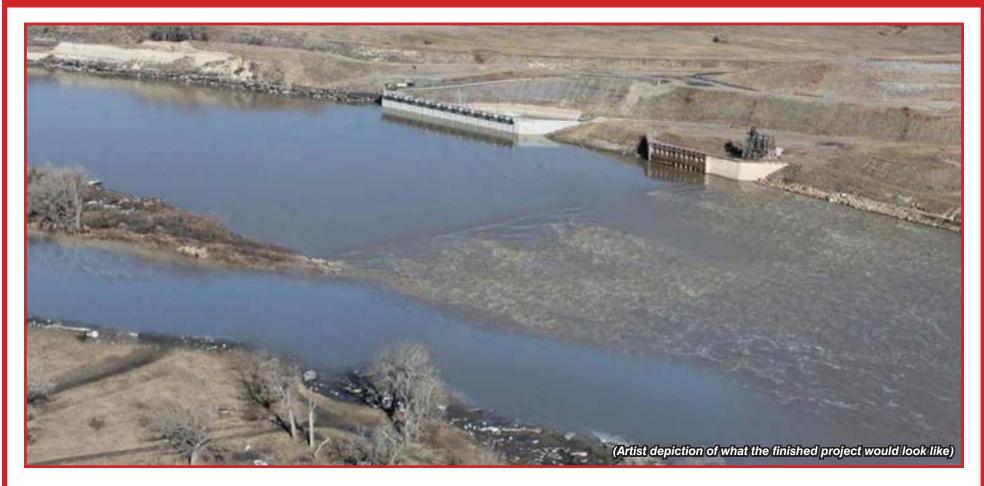


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IT'S FINALLY OVER... AND WE THANK ALL OF YOU!



Thank you to the entire community for showing up EVERY TIME for the hearings, first in Sidney, Glendive & Billings, then in Great Falls, regardless of the 6-hour trip, in greater numbers each time. That brought the human element to what is normally an environmental decision.

From kids to great grandparents, farmers, business people and all others, you put your lives on hold to attend the hearings. No where else, during any environmental lawsuit, has everybody from all facets of the community participated in person or through prayer. This made a difference.

Thank you also to the LYIP board and staff, especially those board members who wished to retire but stayed on during this process.

LOWER YELLOWSTONE IRRIGATION PROJECT

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Hard Work Pays Off for 2017 Grand Champion Steer Winner

By Stephanie Ler

Savage's Tyler Lien had never shown a 4-H steer, but swept up two big wins at the 2017 Richland County Fair & Rodeo.

The twelve-year 4-H veteran had years of experience showing pigs in the ring, but had never delved into the steer business. "I always showed pigs because they were easier to keep. We didn't have a whole lot of land to keep a steer," she explained. When the opportunity arose to keep a steer, Lien jumped at the chance. "I started babysitting for Jason and Stacy McNally. They had steers, and they told me I could keep mine there too," Lien said.

Lien travelled to South Dakota to pick up her steer, and kept it at the McNally's, outside of Sidney. Before the fair, Lien was "out there every day washing him, blow drying and tying him up and working with him to get him ready," she said. "You have to make sure they're comfortable around other steers and other humans, and they get used to noise." The McNally's three children helped accustom the steer to lots of noise. "Once the steer got used to other steers, we would all go out there and see how they'd react, making sure they wouldn't freak out".

In the few weeks before fair, the real showmanship work began. "We really started putting him in the show halter and using show sticks. I led him in the ovals and made sure he would set up. I went over every scenario that may happen to make sure he'd get set up right and stay calm," she explained.

Rowdy or improperly trained animals can be a danger to those in the ring, as well as spectators and other animals.

Despite her limited experience, her hard work and time spent with the steer paid off. Lien earned grand champion in the Market Beef Division, as well as Grand Champion Senior Steer in Showmanship. Lien's steer was purchased by Chad Herman of 5H Trucking in Lambert.

So is it nature or nurture that makes a great steer? According to Lien, "It's about half and half." Though Lien's steer was bred to show, the hours she put into the training were the edge it needed to become a winning animal. "He was a great steer, but a lot of it is training. It's all about time and effort. You can take a wild steer if you work with it, you can get it show ready. A lot of it is that training," she concludes.

Lien is hoping for a repeat this year at the Richland County Fair & Rodeo, where she will again show a steer in both the Market Animal Division and Showmanship, as well as a hog.

Of her years of 4-H experience, Lien says, "I think it's a great experience. It definitely gives you a lot of skills. I think it's great for kids who are really passionate and get to stand out and have fun."

Lien is an upcoming senior at Savage High School, and is the daughter of Brandi and Ross Lien.



Tyler Lien shows her Grand Champion steer.



Spent Lime Beneficial in Combatting Low pH Soils, Improving Overall Tilth

By Dianne Swanson

Dryland growers in the MonDak area can take advantage of a program through Sidney Sugars to test the benefits of spent lime on their fields. The lime and loading at the factory yard are free.

In the vast dryland fields of eastern Montana and western North Dakota, high acidic soils are becoming more common, preventing healthy crops. About five years ago, soils in the Froid area tested between 5.0 and 5.8 pH, which indicates high acid. In response, the USDA-ARS applied spent lime at a rate of three tons per acre. ARS Research Agronomist Bart Stevens said the lime was applied as a corrective measure, not a research project, so he has no research data showing how much the pH changed because of the lime, but he is sold on the benefits. Before Stevens moved to Montana, he spent a couple of years in Nebraska where he was involved in a study evaluating different materials including spent lime from a sugar beet factory in western Nebraska, applied to sandy soils in west central Nebraska. He said that beet lime applied at about 6 tons per acre increased soil pH from 4.6 to 5.6. In this Nebraska study, beet lime was slightly more effective than conventional agricultural lime at increasing soil pH.

In low pH soil, some nutrients are not as available to the plants as in soil with a more neutral pH. Aluminum and the plant nutrient iron become more soluble at low pH and can become toxic to plants if the pH gets too low. Simply by raising the soil pH, nutrients such as phosphorus and molybdenum become more available for plant uptake, while iron and aluminum become less abundant. Spent lime is also a great source of the plant nutrients calcium and magnesium, which balance out the soil nutrient composition.

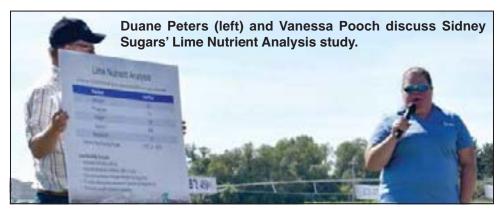
Universities such as North Dakota State University and the University of Minnesota Crookston have seen positive results for the ten years they have been conducting research on spent lime.

Based on those results, as well as those from her own local plots, Sidney Sugars agriculturalist Vanessa Pooch would like to expand spent lime into more irrigated and dryland test plots.

Ag Golf Tourney Winners



The Sidney Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture held its annual Ag Appreciation Golf Tournament on July 9 at the Sidney Country Club. Awarding first place was Ag Committee Chair Will McCament (far left) and Sidney Chamber Executive Director Susan Joy (far right) to team members Rochelle Franzen, Tim Franzen and Dustin Cymbaluk. The first place prize was Friday Night RCFR Rodeo Tickets (photos submitted).



Pooch follows the recommendation from the universities in spreading eight to ten tons of spent lime per acre, which is really just a dusting. The lime is incorporated into fields where possible, but may be top dressed as well, where it would likely take a little longer to see the effects.

In addition, studies on North Dakota dryland, as well as Pooch's irrigated plots have shown the physical condition or tilth of the soil improves in both.

The initial reason for lime testing by Sidney Sugars in 2013 was to help stem the disease aphanomyces in sugar beet fields. With the wetter spring this year, and more disease, interest in lime has increased in area growers. Improved drainage is also a benefit in areas where water may accumulate in fields. Improved microbial activity and symbiotic nitrogen fixation by legumes are also benefits of spent lime application.

Pooch said the most important thing growers can do is have their soil tested first. Then spread the lime on only ½ the field so the benefits can be monitored.

Lime and loading is free to local growers but they must provide their own trucking and applicating.

To find out more about spent lime, contact Pooch at Sidney Sugars, 406-433-9314.



Left: Second Place - Thursday Night RCFR Rodeo Tickets: Floyd Miller, Rod Miller, Lowell Sandvik, Myron Lee (Executive Director Susan Joy)

Right: Third Place - \$50 Gift Cards to Lee's Tire: (Ag Committee Chair Will McCament) Ryan Forbes, Jenna Olson, Kaila Forbes, lan Pennington



MSU Faculty See Troubling Soil Acidity Levels In Montana Agricultural Lands

By MSU News Service

Montana State University scientists are seeing increased soil acidity, meaning low pH, in parts of the state and are urging farmers to keep an eye on their plants and soils to avoid lower crop yields and even crop failure.

Clain Jones, a soil fertility specialist with MSU Extension and a professor in the MSU College of Agriculture's Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences, said fields in 20 Montana counties have been found to have pH levels that could harm crop growth.

"This is an emerging issue in the state, where low soil pH has traditionally not been a concern," Jones said.

Acidity is measured on the pH scale, which counts the concentration of hydrogen ions in a solution. It goes from zero to 14, with lower numbers being more acidic.

Fields with soil acidity levels below pH 5 can experience significant yield loss from aluminum toxicity, depending on the crop species. Durum and barley are particularly sensitive to low pH and aluminum toxicity, but other crops can also be affected, according to Rick Engel, professor of soils in the Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences. In acidic soils, naturally occurring metals like aluminum become more available to plants, Engel said.

Research by Engel, Jones and others indicates that ammonium fertilizers, including urea, are the major cause of soil acidification, especially when more fertilizer nitrogen is applied than crops can use. Acidity problems can then start in low-lying parts of fields, and the symptoms can spread outward.

"The potential is there for problem areas to grow in size," Jones said.

Acidification can be hard to detect, since it can begin in a small area or be isolated to particular soil depths — meaning that acidic soil can be hidden in standard soil test results.

Jones said that soils tend to become more acidic fairly quickly, even with the recommended levels of fertilizer use.

"This means it's not a question of if, but when, this problem will affect a specific, annually cropped and fertilized field," he said.

Jones' and Engel's research stemmed from an investigation into a troubled field in Chouteau County three years ago and bloomed into a cooperative study involving MSU faculty members, Montana non-profits, agency personnel and producers.

The study, funded by the Montana Fertilizer Advisory Committee and a U.S. Department of Agriculture Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant, aims to develop prevention, mitigation and adaptation options for Montana croplands with soil acidity challenges.

Jones said he expects the number of acres affected by soil acidity will continue to increase.

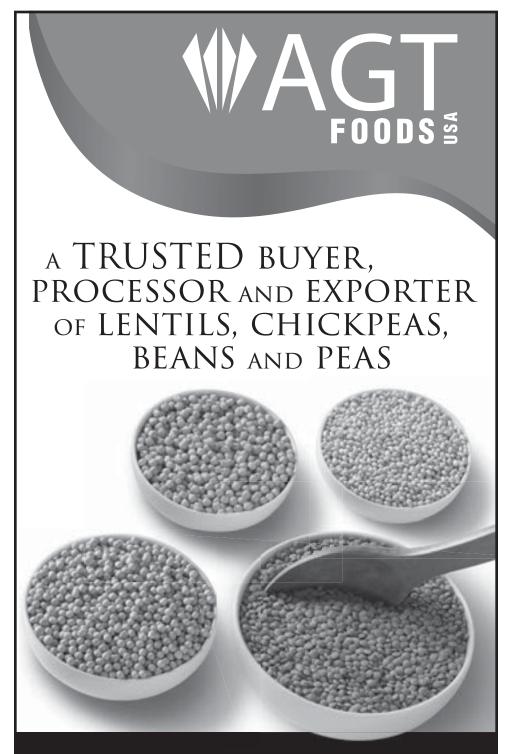
"Though at least we will soon be able to recommend liming rates and acid-tolerant cultivars based on MSU research," he said.

The best advice for producers and their advisers is to test soil pH in the upper three inches in areas that have unexplained growth problems.

"Only after learning whether a field has a low pH problem, and where that problem exists, can appropriate management decisions be made," Jones said.

Liming, cultivar and crop selection, and fertilizer management are all strategies that can be used to mitigate, adapt to or prevent this problem, Jones said.

For additional information, visit http://landresources.montana.edu/soilfertility/acidif/index.html or contact Jones at clainj@montana.edu or 406-994-6076.



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Montana Youth Range Camp



Montana Youth Range Camp hosted 22 of Montana's finest youth at the Eastern Montana Bible Camp near Bloomfield, Montana, July 9-12, 2018.

Submitted by Julie Goss

Montana Youth Range Camp was held in Eastern Montana July 9-12, 2018 and hosted by Dawson and Richland County Conservation Districts. Twenty two of Montana's finest youth gathered at the Eastern Montana Bible Camp near Bloomfield, Montana to learn about plants, soils, range management and wildlife. Staff from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Marni Thompson, Josh Schrecengost, Rick Caquelin and Ashley Gould along with Emily Standley, MSU Extension-Fergus County shared their knowledge of Soils, Wildlife, Plant ID and Range Management. Mother Nature smiled on the area this year and the vegetation was incredible. FWP Non Game Biologist Brandi Skone, along with some of her staff and conducted a bat study for the campers. Big Sky Watershed Corp member, Andrew Kretschmer led the campers in a session using the Rolling River Trailer. Kaylee Olsen and Alyssa Nordlund won the Green Hand buckles for new campers and Jesse and Wyatt Isaacs tied for the Top Hand Buckles awarded to returning campers. Campers compete for the prized buckles by taking quizzes each day on plant ID and other questions based on the classes each day. Montana Youth Range Camp is a program for youth interested in Montana's greatest natural resource, Rangeland. Funding for the camp is made possible in part by the DNRC- 223 grant program. Montana Youth Range Camp is one of the many events Stacey Barta, Range Specialist with the DNRC-Rangeland Resource Program plans and produces each year along with the host Conservation Districts. Plans are already being made for next year's camp to be hosted by Gallatin Conservation District, June 25-28th, 2019. A big thank you to everyone who helped with the 2018 Montana Youth Range Camp. It's great to see Montana's youth wanting to learn about Rangeland.

Montana Range Tour To Highlight Recovery From Flood And Fire, Energy Development On Rangeland

Submitted by Julie Goss

SIDNEY, Mont. – The 2018 Montana Range Tour will feature a great lineup of ranches and farms showcasing conservation projects and creative solutions to common ranching issues; there will also talks on topics such as grassland songbirds, oil development on grazing lands, and the recovery process following floods and wildfire. Also featured on the tour is a lunch stop to learn about Dry Prairie Rural Water, which is vital to life on the range in Eastern Montana.

This year's tour will take participants around the Sidney and Culbertson areas on Sept. 5-6, 2018. A banquet with keynote speaker Steve Kenyon will take place on the evening of Sept. 5 at the Richland County Event Center in Sidney, Mont.

This year's tour is sponsored by the Richland and Roosevelt Conservation Districts and the Montana Rangeland Resources Committee. For more details, including a full two-day agenda and registration details, visit http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/conservation-districts/rangeland-resource-program. Online registration is also available at www.eventbrite.com.



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38th Annual MSU-EARC/Extension Field Day Highlights

The MSU-EARC/Extension 38th Annual Field Day was held on July 17 in Sidney. Eastern Ag Research and Northern Plains Research Laboratory scientists presented their latest research and findings for producers of grains, pulse crops and sugar beets. For more on the field day and Ag research important to local producers see future editions of the monthly Ag Roundup publication.

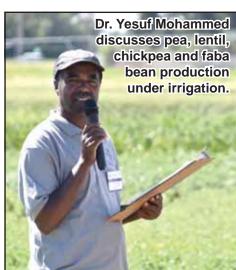


Pictured is MSU-EARC research agronomist Dr. Chengi Chen presenting a new study on irrigated mung bean and adzuki bean as alternative to soybeans for the Chinese market. Chen is holding moon cake made from the adzuki bean. The mung bean is starch for noodles.











Dr. Aziz Nilahyane (left) spoke on tillage and nitrogen affecting sugarbeet growth, yield and quality. His associate demonstrates the remote sensing technology for in-season nitrogen monitor and potential to use NDVI for sugarbeet yield estimation.



Left: Dr. Jamie Sherman presents new improved varieties of barley for malting and livestock feed as well as hull-less barley for human consumption. In her discussion, Sherman mentioned utilizing MSU's malt quality lab to produce malt barley for craft brewers.

Below: Duane Peters, of Sidney Sugars, gives a sugarbeet crop update and status of the sugar industry.







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