

# The Mountain Meadow

April 2024

Sublette County  
Conservation District

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## SUBLETTE COUNTY IS HOPPING INTO SPRING!!!

A quarterly publication from the Sublette  
County Conservation District.

"By Working with local people who  
understand local problems, the best  
conservation measures can be  
accomplished."



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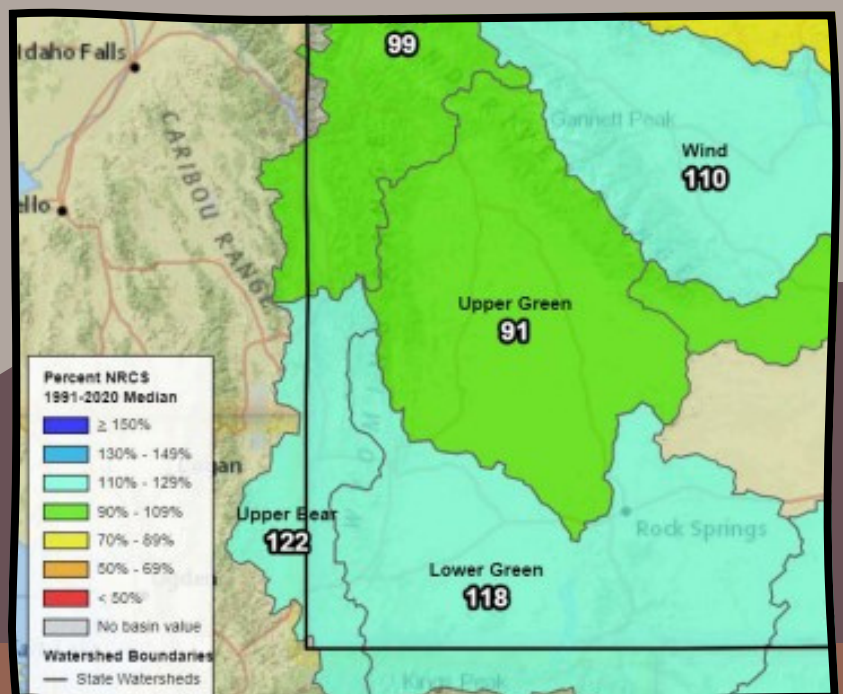
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# What We've Been Up To From the District Manager's Chair

*Snow and precipitation have been the center of most conversations in our community. From winter sports to are we going to have enough irrigation water, these topics have led to a lot of speculation on what Spring will bring for us. The report last week said the at the entire Upper Green River Basin sits at 91% of normal. This is a lot better than a couple weeks ago, but still shy of where everyone wants it. District staff have been getting a little stir crazy as typically happens to people that love to be outside and must sit in front of a computer throughout the winter. We are currently in final preparations for the start of another busy field season. We have started assisting with collaring cattle for virtual fence this spring and in a few weeks will start sampling water around the County.*

*Staff also recently attended our State Employee Association annual training in Casper. There were sessions on education and outreach, leadership, grants and agreements, and agency updates. It was capped off with a legislative update and what bills will need to be addressed in our daily operations.*



# Meet Our Newest Employee!



Fiona Shine, Natural Resource Technician Sr.



*I joined the conservation district at the beginning of January as a Senior Natural Resource Technician. This position was created thanks to funding through The Nature Conservancy, Wyoming Chapter, for wet meadow restoration. My position with the district is working to expand on efforts to utilize low-tech process-based restoration in mesic areas around the county.*



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*I am originally from East Lansing, Michigan, where I grew up working on farms and was introduced to conservation from early on. I completed my undergraduate education at Lawrence University in Wisconsin, where I studied Environmental Science with a focus on agriculture and natural resource management. I was first introduced to Sublette County and Wyoming during my undergrad when I took an internship on the Bar Cross Ranch in Cora, working on implementing wet meadow restoration in 2021. This experience opened my eyes to alternative approaches to land restoration, and landowner-led projects. I loved the landscape and climate that was so vastly different from my own home, and knew I wanted to come back to Wyoming. In 2022, I returned to Bar Cross to continue monitoring my project, and to assist with the ranch's summer operations.*

*I am excited for the opportunity to work with all different types of landowners to implement these projects, and to have a positive impact on the mesic areas of the county and all those that rely on them for survival. I am looking forward to this field season as an opportunity to get to know the lands and faces of our community.*

*If you think you might be interested in initiating a restoration project on your property, please reach out to the district, we would love to hear from you!*



# *Wyoming Department of Agriculture* *"Draft EIS and Relating RMP Related To Sage Grouse"*

Submitted by Justin Caudill, Wyoming Department of Agriculture

*The Public Lands Council had published the following email on March 14, 2024. The email is being shared because it contains links to BLM's 2024 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the relating Resource Management Plan Amendment for sage grouse, along with notices for upcoming virtual and in person public meetings.*

## *Sage Grouse, version 2024: BLM releases draft EIS, Amendments*

*This week, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) and corresponding Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) related to sage grouse habitat management on federal lands. The RMPA would amend 77 separate land use plans currently in place across 10 Western states, and some of the alternatives in the draft EIS include new Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations totaling as many as 11.1 million acres.*

*The BLM has proposed six alternatives for analysis as part of the dEIS. The public comment period on the dEIS is scheduled to close June 13, 2024.*

*Simultaneously, the BLM has opened a comment period on the RMPA, particularly the elements related to ACECs. Public comment on the ACEC portion is scheduled to close on May 14, 2024.*



*Wyoming Department of Agriculture Continued...*  
*"Draft EIS and Relating RMP Related To Sage Grouse"*

*PLC believes a 60-day public comment period for elements of the RMPA and a 90-day comment period for the dEIS are insufficient to review the volumes of text proposed, particularly given the long history of uncertainty stemming from the 2015 and 2019 plans. All documents are now available for public review on the [BLM's sage grouse project website](#).*

*What's next: PLC has requested a comment period extension and will continue to lead the grazing industry response to both elements of this issue. More information will be included in upcoming PLC communications to our members and partners.*

*BLM will also host 13 public meetings on the plans. Meetings begin April 9 and continue through April 25. [Find the nearest public meeting to you on the BLM's meeting website](#).*



# *Ecological Site Descriptions - Bridger-Teton National Forest*



Justice Miller, Rangeland Specialist



***In my time here at the District, the vast majority of my work efforts have been striving to get ecological site descriptions (ESD's) developed on the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF). This effort began long before I started my career with SCCD, but there was never one individual dedicated to the beast that is this project, and that's where I came in. There are a lot of moving parts that keep this machine running and I am fortunate enough to say I have been a part of every piece for the last 14 months. The Natural Resources Conservation Service states that ESD's are reports that provide detailed information about a particular kind of land - a distinctive Ecological Site.***

***ESD's need to be developed within specific areas that are similar in climate, geology, and so much more. These areas were designated by the NRCS and are called Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA's). The MLRAs that make up the majority of the BTNF include the Northern and Central Rocky Mountain Foothills (MLRA 046) and the Central Rocky Mountains (MLRA 043B). MLRA 043B covers the largest area of the BTNF.***



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*One of those ESD project moving parts is data management including what is known as data mining. The data management side of the ESD development process has taken up the majority of my office time because this process is a long and tedious portion of the workload, but it is also a crucial step in the ESD development process. So, what is data mining? Basically, it means going through old paper files of all the data that was collected over the history of the forest, scan it into digital copies, and organize those digital copies into their perfect little homes within a computer server that is easily accessible by the participating parties. The reason for the importance of data management is it gives specialists a glimpse of what the site was, and, if data was collected multiple times on the same site over multiple years. It can give specialists insight into the transitions a site has gone through and what might have caused them.*

*There are two more moving parts that go along with the development of ESDs. They worked very hard before I came on to develop a foundation for this project. The Elements and Methods group developed a detailed handbook for field crews to follow for the best and most consistent data collection possible. The Land Resource Unit (LRU) subgroup developed a document with the intent of fully exploring the LRUs as currently delineated for use on the BTNF. Both documents are equally as important because one tells the field crew where and why to collect, and the other tells the field crew how and when to collect.*

*Of all the data collection that goes along with a fully read site, there is one that is just a bit more important than the others. Don't get me wrong, they are all very important in the ESD development process, but only one determines what the ecological site is. That one is soils data. The soils data is collected by a soil scientist and is collected by digging a soil pit. We try to dig the pit as deep as we can go, but sometimes that means only digging about 12 inches because there can be very large rocks that restrict digging further, or the site might be very shallow, and you hit bedrock. Once the pit is dug, there is all kinds of data that is taken down including number of horizons (which is a layer parallel to the soil surface whose physical, chemical, and biological characteristics differ from the layers above and beneath), soil texture of each horizon, color of the soils from each horizon, and so much more.*



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*I, personally, do not claim to be much of a soil scientist, so I focus more on the vegetative side of the data collection. When collecting vegetation data, we first start with a species list. We do this by walking through the site and identifying whatever plant species we see within the site of interest. We almost never get all of them on the first shot, but we get them later when we read line-point intercept (LPI). We read LPI to estimate foliar cover and ground cover of the plant community. Foliar cover estimates composition of a plant in the community, but composition is only estimated based on first hit along the transect (Herrick et al., 2017). Lastly, we clip for production by functional group (annual grasses, perennial grasses, annual forbs, perennial forbs, and shrubs). We do this because an ESD requires an estimation of plant productivity per acre. We only clip the plants that are rooted within a 1.92 sq ft hoop.*

*There is still a lot of work that is required to get ESDs written for the BTNF, but the ride has been fun so far, and I expect it to continue to be great. I now sit on the local working group (LWG) for the Salt, Wyoming, and Gros Ventre Mountains and Valleys LRU. The LWG is a collection of specialists in their respective fields, and we will work diligently together to get some ESDs written for the BTNF!*



# *UNW Extension Office - Sublette County*

## *Preventing Calving Difficulty in the Beef Herd*

Dagan Montgomery, Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Educator

*As we move closer to spring, many ranchers are prepping for or already entering calving season. This rewarding yet challenging time on the ranch comes with plenty of difficulties and worries, one of which is potential calving difficulties, or dystocia. Most operations expect to deal with dystocia, especially in heifers and younger cows, and have a contingency plan in place. However, as with most things, the best treatment is always prevention.*

*Dystocia can be brought on by several factors, some of which are more difficult to manage than others. This article briefly discusses a few of the factors that we, as producers, can manage to deter calving difficulties.*

### ***Replacement Heifers***

*The largest contributor to dystocia is the age of the cow. In many cases, 2% or less of calving problems occur in mature cows. Studies by the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Nebraska showed less than 5% of cows 5 years of age and older required calving assistance, whereas as 54% of 2-year-old heifers experienced difficulty calving.*

*This proves what many already know: heifers are where the trouble usually comes from. Selecting the right replacements can help curtail that trouble.*

*When it comes to decreasing dystocia, using heifers with proven genetic merit is a good idea. This is often accomplished using the sire's maternal expected progeny differences (EPDs), such as Calving Ease Maternal (CEM). Genomic testing can also be used to predict heifer performance.*

*Pelvic measurements are another great tool in selecting heifers less likely to need calving assistance. However, a good pelvic measurement will not eliminate dystocia, as it is the relationship between pelvic size and calf weight that influences how easy delivery is. The benefits of a good pelvic area measurement can be negated by a calf that is too big. It is also helpful to keep first-calf heifers close and, if possible, in a separate pasture from mature cows to monitor and assist in birth if needed.*

## **Sire Selection**

**Many ranchers are well aware of the effect the bull can have on the delivery of the calf. Certain bulls will yield bigger calves that are more likely to cause trouble. The bull's breed is one selection criterion that allows ranchers to influence calf birthweight. Typically, British breeds like Angus and Herefords yield lighter birthweight calves than Continental breeds.**

**Looking at a bull's EPDs allows a more fine-tuned approach to assess the expected difficulty a sire's calves will pose. Birthweight EPD (BW), expressed in pounds, is the expected difference in a bull's calves at birth, with lower values indicating lower birthweights. Many producers utilize this EPD in selecting bulls to decrease dystocia, especially for first-calf heifers.**

**However, birthweight is not the only factor controlling calving ease. Many geneticists suggest focusing instead on the Calving Ease Direct (CED) EPD, as this utilizes BW as well as other factors in its calculation. Calving Ease Direct is the difference in percentage of unassisted births when a sire is bred to first calf heifers. A higher CED value means that when a sire is bred to first-calf heifers, a higher percent are expected to calve without intervention.**

**Expected progeny differences are a great tool for predicting how much calving difficulty to expect, especially when looking for a sire to pair with heifers.**

## **Nutrition**

**Generally, pregnant 2-year-old heifers need about nine to 13 pounds of TDN per day. This is greater than a mature pregnant cows' requirement of eight to 12 pounds per day despite their smaller size, because the heifers are still developing themselves while at the same time growing a calf.**

**A misconception persists that underfeeding cows and heifers during late pregnancy will lead to a smaller calf and lessen the likelihood of calving difficulty. This is not the case. Genetics are the predominant determinant of calf size. Underfeeding the mother can cause her to be weakened at calving, which increases the chance of dystocia.**

# *UNW Extension Office - Sublette County Continued...*

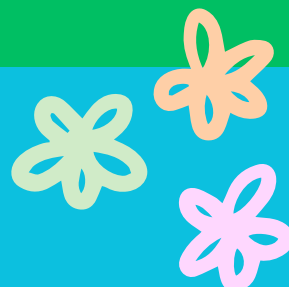
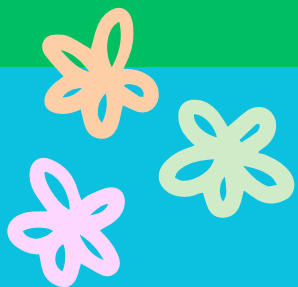
**Research shows that feeding the recommended level of total digestible nutrients (TDN) does lead to a slightly heavier birthweight than underfeeding but does not cause a greater instance of dystocia. Underfeeding will especially hinder 2-year-old heifers pregnant with their first calf by jeopardizing skeletal growth and, therefore, pelvic area. It can also decrease milk yield, increase calf scours, and, most importantly, decrease pregnancy rates the following breeding season.**

**Research trials at the USDA-ARS research station in Miles City, Montana show the relationship between dystocia and nutrition: cows receiving a low plane of nutrition had higher percentages of dystocia than those on a high plane of nutrition, despite the high plane group having a higher calving weight.**

**Overfeeding a heifer or cow to the point of obesity can lead to dystocia due to fat obstructing the pelvic canal and hampering her ability to physically strain, but this usually only occurs at a body condition score (BCS) of eight or more. Obese cows are rarely a problem on Wyoming ranches, but both underfeeding and overfeeding can be monitored by keeping cows and heifers at a body condition score of five to six. For help in determining BCS, the University of Wyoming Extension has published a three-step guide for body condition scoring range cows that can be found at [www.wyoextension.org/publications/](http://www.wyoextension.org/publications/). This is a simple method of monitoring the nutrition of your herd as a whole.**

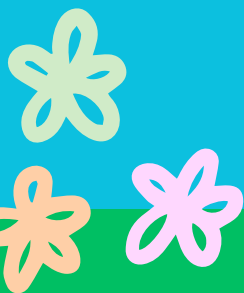
**The battle against dystocia in cattle requires a comprehensive approach, from strategic heifer and sire selection to good nutritional management. There are other factors that determine how likely it is we will have to pull a calf, but understanding how to manage the cow herd can improve our chances of easy births each spring. Even the best management is not bulletproof against dystocia, and calving problems will still rear their head from time to time, so it is best to remain prepared to address the issue when it arises.**





# Kid's Corner

**Find All the Bog Wildlife:** 2 trout, bullfrog, 2 bullfrog tadpoles, leopard frog, spring peeper, caddis fly, mayfly, dragonfly, backswimmer, water boatman, giant water bug, spider, 3 minnows, whirligig beetle, frog eggs, lily pad, salamander, water strider.



# Who Are We?



Find us on Facebook!

## Sublette County Conservation District Board of Supervisors

*Coke Landers - Chairman*  
*Darrell Walker - Vice Chairman*  
*Dave Pape - Sec/Treasurer*  
*Meghann Smith*  
*Milford Lockwood*

## Sublette County Conservation District Staff

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*Traci Berg, Administrative Coordinator*  
*Melanie Purcell, Wildlife & Habitat Program Manager*  
*Shari Meeks, Assistant District Manager*  
*Adrienne Kirkwood, Water Resource Specialist*  
*Justice Miller, Rangeland Specialist*  
*Keller Hyde, Rangeland Specialist*  
*Kamryn Kozisek, Natural Resource Technician Senior*  
*Fiona Shine, Natural Resource Technician Senior*

## Partners: USDA/NRCS Staff

*Simon Teaff, District Conservationist*  
*Jason LeVan, Rangeland Management Specialist*  
*Joey Galanti, Ecological Site Specialist*  
*Dillon Gray, Autumn Boxum, Taylor Kepley, Jenna Platt-Soil Survey Team*



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