

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a farm with several buildings, including a prominent red barn. A dirt road winds through the fields. The middle ground shows a patchwork of green and brown fields, with a small cluster of farm buildings. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains, some with snow-capped peaks under a clear blue sky.

RUBY HABITAT RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT
2005

OUR MISSION

The Ruby Habitat Research Foundation is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the natural resources and the social and economic climate of the Ruby Valley and Southwest Montana by:

- supporting agricultural operations to ensure the long-term viability of working ranches
- working with landowners, educational institutions, foundations and other entities to protect and enhance wildlife habitats
- encouraging education and training efforts to broaden the understanding of resource management issues and responsible management of private lands
- promoting the concept of resource accountability and developing examples of minimal impact resource management for agricultural and recreational uses while protecting the environment

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Immature Bald Eagle and friend

Wetland and Riparian Projects

Wetland and riparian area management and restoration

It has been said that the highest value of our riparian areas is in the cool clean water that comes from them. In addition to the forage that grows in the riparian and wetland areas, and the wildlife that thrive there, these areas serve as filters and storage sponges for the water that flows through them. Healthy, functioning riparian areas provide a wealth of resource value that is difficult to quantify.

In an attempt to manage and ultimately improve the condition of riparian areas on the ranch and restore wetland areas, we have implemented a variety of practices on the Woodson Ranch. The creation of a series of mini-wetlands appears to have tremendous potential to provide resource benefits at minimal cost. Taking advantage of topographic features to capture natural and irrigation runoff serves to prevent erosion, remove sediment and nutrients, recharge groundwater and affect the vegetative community in the overflow areas. Wildlife habitat is improved and little or no ground is taken from agricultural production. Visitors to the ranch are able to view the results of these practices and adapt them to their own situation.



Though quite shallow, mini-wetlands offer breeding opportunities for ducks and other waterfowl.

Vegetation Projects

Regardless of the size of landownership and the objectives of the landowner, the primary variable in decision making for the property has to be vegetation management. Each land base comes with fixed soil and water resources. The addition of sunlight and the effect of climate determine the vegetative options. In our climate, depending on the availability of supplemental water, we can grow hay, small grain, livestock forage, wildlife food and cover, and certain ornamental plants.

The interrelationship of these uses is complex. One use may benefit the other in some cases and compete with it in another. The production of small grains for instance provides a tremendous food source for upland game birds and waterfowl in the fall of the year, but the process of producing the small grain often requires the removal of spring food and nesting cover.

Big game hunters contribute significantly to the local economy, but the predation of private forage resources by big game animals is no small matter to agricultural producers. Our mission statement outlines our commitment to maximizing the benefits and minimizing the conflicts among these competing uses.

We continue to experiment with various vegetation practices on the Woodson Ranch, in an attempt to perfect sustainable methods of meeting our goals. We are moving toward no-till farming for our small grains. We are working on establishing perennial wildlife food and cover plots on field borders and corners. We continue to work on reestablishing native plant communities. Two other projects are outlined in more detail below:

Intensive grazing plant varieties

Maximizing forage production and minimizing harvesting costs are key factors in the sustainability of agricultural operations in what has become an increasingly narrow margin business. Where soil, water and labor resources allow it, intensive grazing is filling the niche in meeting these goals. Confining a relative large number of livestock on a small area for a short period of time encourages the livestock to graze the area uniformly, maximizing the forage harvested, and optimizing the plants physiology by stimulating it to grow and continue to photosynthesize. Allowing the livestock to harvest the forage rather than doing so mechanically keeps cost to a minimum. A great deal of work has already been done on the benefits and methods of intensive grazing.

Our research project will attempt to determine which plant varieties, suited to our climate, will respond most favorably to intensive grazing. Eight small pastures were seeded in the spring of 2005 and allowed to become established. Beginning in the spring of 2006, these pastures will be grazed with a small herd of cattle on a rotational basis with each pasture being grazed for three days and allowed to rest for twenty-one days before being grazed again. Forage samples from each pasture will be clipped prior to grazing and will be analyzed for quantity and quality. Results from the project will be available to area producers and the local Natural Resource Conservation Service.



Indian Rice Grass has economic value, in addition to offering cover and forage for game birds and small animals.

Low input cattle production

The slow upward trend in cattle prices, punctuated by large cyclical swings, is not keeping pace with the increasing cost of production inputs. This often results in operating losses for cattle operations. There has been a great deal of discussion of late by experts in the industry regarding the benefits of working with the natural cycles of weather and animal and plant physiology to minimize inputs. "It's expensive to fool Mother Nature."

The most expensive aspect of livestock production in our climate is the cost of supplying harvested winter forage. Standing winter forage, when you can find it, has a market value of \$14 to \$16 per cow per month. Harvested forage fed has a market value of \$31.50 to \$36 per cow per month. Over a five month feeding period, the difference is \$100 per head. A large number of variables contribute to the need to provide supplemental winter feed and not all of those variables can be easily modified by livestock producers in our area.

This project will attempt to monitor the results of a low input operation. A small herd of cattle will be wintered on standing forage on the Woodson Ranch. The cattle will calve on their own in late spring/early summer. In the fall of the year the herd will receive the recommended vaccinations, the cows will be pregnancy checked and the calves will be weaned. The labor, equipment, infrastructure and supplemental feed inputs will be kept to a minimum. Pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed to the bull, together with the cost per pound of production will be compared to the same statistics on herds operating under more traditional late winter/early spring calving scenarios. Results from the project will be available to area producers and the local Natural Resource Conservation Service.



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 Seligman Cash Mngt Fund
 Steven Strauch Living Trust

IN MEMORIAM

Ben Woodson
 Bud Kanouse
 John Rhodes
 Clyta Manning
 John Shivers, Jr.
 Jack Phelps

Ruby Habitat Research Foundation 2004 Financials

2005 General Fund

Income: \$ 157,972
Expense: \$ 36,891

Net Income: \$ 121,081

General Fund Cash on Hand: \$ 49,282

Pays the day-to-day expenses that finance the operation of the foundation.

Rural Heritage & Open Lands Fund: \$ 84,128

Designed to provide funding for outreach and land conservation efforts. General fund surpluses and designated gifts create the balance of this account.

Hill Education & Outreach Endowment: \$ 12,341

Income finances conservation education and outreach to landowners and the general public. These funds come from specifically designated gifts.

Woodson Ranch Endowment: \$ 152,390

The income from the corpus will be used for operation and maintenance of the Woodson Ranch, to ensure its protection and continued viability. The ranch is home to the foundation and its research efforts. The principal for this endowment, as well as current ranch operating capital, is being provided by Craig Woodson.

Other Assets (Equipment, Art and Books) \$ 20,480

Total Assets as of 12-31-05: \$ 318,621

RHRF is a 509(a)(3) tax-exempt support organization to the Montana Land Reliance, a 501(c)(3) corporation. Our Tax identification number is 45-0487621. Each entity is audited annually and independently by Kindred, Booker & Co., P.C.

Audit copies are available upon request.

From *the Montana* LAND RELIANCE

"Around the office at MLR we talk about the Woodson Ranch and Ruby Habitat Research Foundation on an almost daily basis. MLR has changed a lot since becoming more than just an idea in 1978, and the relationship with the Woodson's and RHRF has begun another change. The change is one of place, or a sense of place, that RHRF and Woodson Ranch bring to the organization. This sense of place and community that our good friends at RHRF bring to MLR makes the relationship between the two organizations even more meaningful, as we look at the challenges facing agricultural neighborhoods today.

"The continuing partnership between RHRF and MLR gives the Montana Land Reliance a place to bring individuals to get a first hand look at a working landscape; a landscape of working ranches that very much reflect the new ownership patterns cropping up all over Montana. On a tour of Woodson Ranch and in the surrounding Ruby Valley, visiting land owners and donors can see for themselves the mix between old and new and how that mix can work together to build on existing community.

"All if us here at MLR congratulate RHRF on another great year. We look forward to working together on new projects for 2006."

Photo Credits

Front Cover - Ruby Valley: Chris Boyer, www.kestrelaerial.com

Page 2 - Eagle and friend: S. Corl

Page 3 - mini-wetland: S. Corl

Page 4 - Indian Rice Grass: S. Corl

Page 5 - Cows: Les Gilman

Page 6 - Twilight in the Valley: S. Corl

Back Cover - cows: S. Corl; fishing/cranes: Brian Grossenbacher; "M.D. Special" fly designed, tied and fished as part of a merit badge project by Matthew David Mitts. (the fly caught and landed a trout on the first cast!)

Some of what we are hearing from friends . . .

It was great to hear about a grassroots movement in habitat preservation and enhancement that we could support directly. So often foundations espouse wonderful goals and high ideals and end up just being big organizations that eat up a large portion of the small donor's offering with their administrative expenses. Thank you for a direct link....

Eric R. Carson, Yucaipa CA

We had such a great day of experiencing the many facets of your remarkable property – the views, birds, and other wildlife, relaxing in the shade at the cabin, and the amazing fishery. My boys had "the best fishing of their lives" and wonderful memories to hold them over in Chicago and Boston until they get home again to the Big Sky.

Chris Phelps, Helena, MT



RUBY HABITAT RESEARCH FOUNDATION



Land owners and resource managers are inherently bound to a high level of resource accountability. We are bound by law to protect the environment and prevent resource degradation, but we have a higher obligation to be good stewards of our natural resources, sharing them today and preserving them for future generations. The decisions we make and the actions we take affect our own environment as well as that of the wildlife, our neighbors and future generations. (Craig Woodson, founder RHRF)