

RUBY HABITAT FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2010



CHARLES CRAIG WOODSON
1933-2011

"Landowners 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, a Man of Vision and Determination

It was the fall of 1992. My wife Donna and I sat in our living room with Craig and Martha and visited about the Ruby Valley, our common hopes and dreams and the Woodson’s newly acquired ranch property just down the road. It was obvious in that brief meeting that though we had common goals our strategies for realizing those goals were different. As we visited that day, I was a multi- generational, Ruby Valley rancher, currently managing the property that had been in our family for more than eighty years. Craig was a recently retired newspaper publisher and the new owner of a historic ranch in the valley. Though he had closed the deal, he had yet to take possession.

Our conversation that day was about the present and the short term future. I was looking for an opportunity to expand our family ranching operations. I had hopes of leasing Craig’s ranch to raise more hay and graze more cattle. More important to Craig and Martha however, was finding someone with an independent perspective to represent their interest in their absence. I recall vividly the moment that Craig explained to me that it was not possible for me to consider his best interest if my cattle were grazing his pastures, my machinery was on his property and my employee was living in his ranch house. Somewhat naively and quite arrogantly, I couldn’t grasp that his “best interest” and mine could be all that different. In a subsequent meeting, Craig explained to me his purpose for the purchase of the ranch; he and Martha loved the outdoors and Montana in particular. They had chosen the ranch as an early retirement project that they would enjoy as they fished, enhanced the wildlife features and protected the property’s agricultural heritage. Craig’s intention was to leave the property better than he found it. He speculated then, that in ten years or so he would sell the ranch and return to Texas in full retirement.

Things happen in our lives that change our perspective. A new experience, good or bad, a moment of inspiration or tragedy can open our eyes or bring defeat. Paul F. Starrs, author of, “Let the Cowboy Ride” explains that there is “...that reciprocal relationship of people changing the land as it, in its turn, changes them”. That connection to the earth, its demands, its forgiveness, its seasons, somehow gets into the blood of the people who work it and they develop a passion either for or against it. We all know people who cannot be torn away from the land. “They will die with their boots on”. And we know those who could not get away from it fast enough. As soon as they were out of high school or had the opportunity, they enlisted in the army, or went off to college or did anything to get out of the web that bound them to that cursed existence. You rarely find someone with close ties to the land that is vague about their feelings for it.

With each passing year, Craig’s roots grew deeper in the fertile soils of his beloved Woodson Ranch. He was determined to see his project through. He had made great strides, yet as the tenth anniversary approached, his connection to the place he had worried and labored to change had “in its turn, changed him.” It was at that time that he founded the Ruby Habitat Foundation to carry on his work.

Over the past eighteen years, as Craig mentored and inspired me, a number of things changed, but his passion, vision and determination remained steadfast. It was my good fortune to have met him.



On Thursday, January 27, 2011 Charles Craig Woodson passed away and each person that knew him was deeply saddened. Craig had a special way of making each one he knew, feel valued. In the years that he spent his summers in the Ruby Valley, he had become a “local” and that is very rare for someone from outside of Montana and that lives here seasonally. His kind personality won the community over to think of him as one of its own.

To just see Craig’s warm and calm demeanor was to miss a man filled with a vision and commitment that was remarkable to be around. As his love of the Ruby Valley grew, his desire to preserve the land and the culture turned into a passion to demonstrate a high level of stewardship. Each spring when he returned to Montana a fresh batch of ideas to enhance the natural resources came with him. Ways to incorporate wildlife habitat into the landscape, ideas for the diversification of agricultural operations and subjects for education about good stewardship were researched and ready to be applied. His willingness to host any number of events to bring the community together was a great asset for the area. His level of generosity is to be admired by all. Craig inspired the many he came into contact with.

We at Ruby Habitat Foundation have been blest by being brought into Craig’s vision and inspiration. Craig came into the Ruby Valley, rolled up his sleeves and went to work to preserve the rural character and natural beauty of a rural Montana valley. To his credit he did not stop at preservation. He strove to implement ways for the community to function as a viable, healthy habitat for everything from the fish in the streams and river, to the wildlife on the land, to our families we are providing for. We at Ruby Habitat Foundation are committed to continuing in this tradition. We will continue to seek ways to be a positive influence in the Ruby Valley and southwestern Montana. There are new research projects in the works for 2011 and areas of education we are ready to tackle. We will greatly miss Craig but feel inspired to carry on with his vision and passion.

Neil Barnosky



Craig and Les, 2002



Mission Statement

The Ruby Habitat Foundation is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the natural resources and the social and economic makeup of the Ruby Valley and southwest Montana by, among other things:

- Supporting agriculture in the community and the diversification of agricultural operations to ensure the long-term viability of working ranches;
- Working with landowners, educational institutions, foundations and other entities to protect and enhance open space and wildlife habitat;
- Encouraging education and training 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.

A 509(a)(3), Tax Deductible support foundation to Montana Land Reliance

Ruby Habitat Research Foundation TIN # 45-0487621

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The Pollinator Project

Early last fall, Craig developed and shared a personal list of hopes and dreams for the Woodson Ranch and the Ruby Habitat Foundation. Within that list were a few short term projects to be completed such as fence construction and bridge repair and some of his long term visions. Over the long term he hoped that we would among other things:

1. Sustain agricultural operations
2. Demonstrate that agriculture and recreation can coexist
3. Develop an awareness of the benefits of “open space”
4. Work on outreach to the community regarding conservation easements
5. Enhance shrub and forb communities for wildlife, aesthetic and pollinator values

The first four items on that list were things that we had been working on since the creation of the foundation. Item five however was something relatively new.

Craig had long been a fan of the beauty of the natural world. Regardless of season, location or circumstance, he held the earth and its inhabitants in high regard. He had encouraged efforts to restore native plant communities to the ranch and we had some success with establishing grass communities and a large native cottonwood grove. As satisfying as those successes were, those communities left him wanting more. Increasingly, we began to work with a variety of native and introduced flowering shrubs and forbs. You can imagine his delight when we discovered that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) had a similar focus. The NRCS supports the use of native species in many conservation practices that involve seeding or transplanting. Selecting pollinator-friendly native species for these practices can provide added conservation benefits. These practices include:

- Channel bank vegetation
- Critical area planting
- Early successional habitat development/management
- Field borders
- Filter strips
- Herbaceous wind barriers
- Range planting
- Riparian herbaceous cover

Source:
<http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/plants/pollinator/>
A vast storehouse of information regarding pollinators is available on this website.



Craig and Joe with “bird distributed” Coneflowers



Wild Beebalm



Blanket Flower



Chokecherry



Prairie Coneflower

The challenge of living in a harsh, high elevation, semiarid climate and sharing that environment with moose and white tailed deer only strengthened Craig’s resolve. With the help of deer-proof fencing, the ranch staff has been successful in establishing small pollinator communities around the Woodson Ranch. Trial and error have provided us with insight into which fencing methods work and which do not as well as which varieties of shrubs and forbs seem to be adapted to our location.

Some of our pollinator successes include:

Native Forbs

Blanketflower
Wild Beebalm
Blue Flax

Introduced Forbs

Small Burnett
Alfalfa
Prairie Coneflower
Birdsfoot trefoil
Cicer milkvetch
Perennial Prairie Sunflower

Native Shrubs

Chokecherry
Redosier Dogwood
Golden Currant
Service Berry
Woods Rose
American Plum

Introduced Shrubs

Canada Red Chokecherry
Yellow Twig Dogwood
Black Currant

The natural process of seed distribution for these pollinators cannot be disregarded. Once some plants have been established and formed viable seeds, birds play a significant role in distributing and establishing new shrubs and forbs the “natural” way. Craig was happy to solicit the assistance of his fine feathered friends in carrying out his intent to establish pollinator species throughout the ranch property. Small Burnett has the added benefit of being somewhat of an “evergreen”. The lush forb has large seed heads and its leaves stay green and attached to the stem well into the winter.

Perennial Prairie Sunflower is extremely showy and provides large quantities of seed and great cover. These pollinators are adding to both the beauty and the habitat on the ranch.

We are always receptive to ranch visits by anyone interested in the work we are doing.

Photo Credits

Woods Rose: Rosa woodsii: Peter Lesica.

Chokecherry: Prunus virginiana: Margaret Williams @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Blanket flower: Gaillardia aristata: USDA-NRCS.

Wild Beebalm : Monarda fi stulosa: Peter Lesica.

Fenced shrubs: Les Gilman.

Small Burnett: Sanguisorba mino in snow: : Les Gilman.

Perennial Prairie Sunflower: Helianthus maximilianii:

<http://calgary-gardening-adventures.blogspot.com/2009/08/native-prairie-plants.html>

Prairie Coneflower: Sam Corl

Craig and Joe: Sam Corl



Fenced Shrubs



Small Burnett



Woods Rose



Perennial Prairie Sunflower

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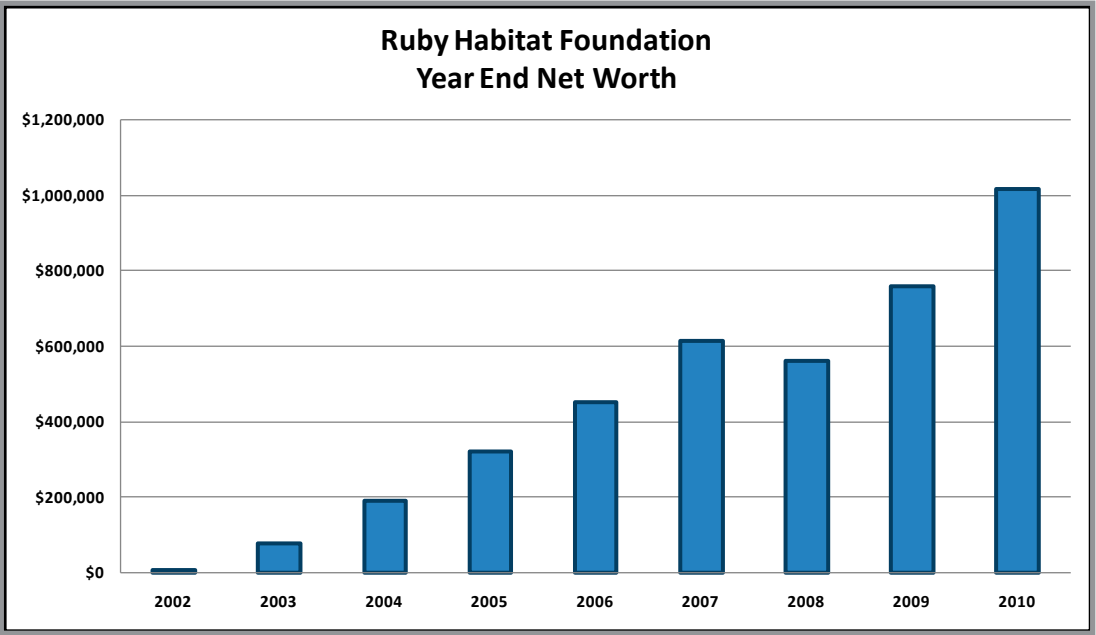
In Memoriam



Polly Bradley
Dick Lower
Frank Muller
John Robertson
Roxie Stevenson
Craig Woodson

Ruby Habitat Foundation 2010 Financials

2010 General Fund	
Income:	\$ 310,041
Expense:	<u>49,804</u>
Net Income:	\$ 260,237
General Fund Cash and Investments: (Pays the day-to-day expenses that finance the operation of the foundation.)	\$ 72,926
Rural Heritage & Open Lands Fund: (Designed to provide funding for outreach and land conservation efforts. General fund surpluses and designated gifts create the balance of this account.)	\$ 167,636
Hill Education & Outreach Endowment: (Income finances conservation education and outreach to landowners and the general public. These funds come from specifically designated gifts.)	\$ 15,576
Woodson Ranch Endowment: (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.)	\$ 699,788
Other Assets (Visitor Center, Art & Books):	<u>\$ 61,465</u>
Total Assets as of 12-31-10:	\$1,017,391

RHF 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.
Audit copies are available upon request.





RUBY HABITAT

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