



DILLON BLM EMPLOYEE RECEIVES VALOR AWARD

David Abrams, Western Montana Zone

A Montana BLM employee received the Department of the Interior's Valor Award May 6 for his role in rescuing a family of four from an approaching wildland fire in southern Utah two years ago.

George Johnson Jr., fuels program manager for the Dillon Field Office, accepted his award from Interior Secretary Salazar during a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The award honors employees of the DOI and its agencies as well as private citizens who have performed acts of heroism in emergencies or demonstrated longstanding excellence in serving Interior's mission.

On July 7, 2007, Johnson was traveling south to assist in the management of a fire near Cedar City, Utah, when he realized the smoke he had been seeing for quite some time and was driving into was not drift smoke, but was coming from a fire adjacent to Interstate 15.

The wind suddenly changed direction and Johnson knew it would be dangerous to travel further into the smoke and the oncoming fire front, so he safely crossed the interstate median. He was driving north toward Fillmore, Utah, when he encountered a two-vehicle accident. The driver had also been trying to cross the median to avoid the oncoming smoke and fire but became stuck and was then hit by another vehicle.

Johnson saw that the people involved in the accident were injured and in need of medical

assistance. At the same time, he was aware that the accident location was about to be overcome by the approaching fire and there wouldn't be time for emergency personnel to reach them before the fire did. He knew if he stopped, he would possibly be compromising his own safe retreat from the rapidly-advancing fire. Calling upon his 35 years of fire experience, he stopped and put the four travelers into the back of his pickup. When Johnson was out of immediate danger from the wildfire he pulled over, assessed their injuries, and moved them into the cab of his vehicle.

On his way to Fillmore, Johnson contacted the local 911 center and informed the Fillmore hospital he was inbound with the crash victims who required medical assistance. As he traveled north, Johnson said it wasn't unusual to see the fire lapping at the highway's edge and into the median as well.

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George Johnson Jr., (right) receives the Valor Award from Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar during a ceremony in Washington, D.C., May 6. DOI Photo

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A Message from our Associate State Director

Maybe the theme for this summer should be "Keep Up If You Can" since it promises to be especially busy. With the influx of about \$18 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding, we'll be challenged to complete projects across our three states. Almost the full range of programs that we manage will be impacted – everything from public health and safety projects such as properly abandoning orphaned mining properties in southwest Montana, to improving visitor services at Pompeys Pillar.

These projects come on top of a predicted "normal" field season, if there ever was such a thing. Funding for a number of programs is up for '09 and it appears the same may hold true for 2010 as well. Besides the continuing high demand for conventional sources of energy, we're also seeing a higher national priority on renewable energy projects. Montana/Dakotas BLM has already had two of the bureau's largest oil and gas lease sales this year.

Additionally, our long anticipated initiative for improving access to our public lands is gaining momentum with the selection of a program manager. As word of this initiative spreads, we are hearing from numerous partners and interested publics excited to join the effort to resolve access issues. Balancing the level of interest with the finite amount of resources will be like trying to drink from a fire hose, as the old

saying goes. It won't be easy, but one thing is for certain: we can accomplish far more by working together than by working separately.

We see a great deal of internal and external enthusiasm for what our public lands have to offer, and in the proper management of the same. It takes a highly motivated work force to do this job and to do it well. The results speak for themselves. I can't tell you of all of the examples Gene and I see of people doing their jobs in an outstanding manner, and with such professionalism. No doubt it is the rule and not the exception.

If you are new in our organization, or if our organization is new to you, we want you to know how welcome you are and how proud we are of the work that's being done. Join on in, have some fun, and as I said before --Keep Up if You Can!

Here's wishing you a great and safe summer season. On behalf of Gene and myself, I have to say again that it is our considerable privilege and good fortune to get to be a part of OUR PUBLIC LANDS here in Montana/Dakotas.



Howard A. Lemm

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He safely delivered the injured to the hospital, informed the 911 center that the occupants of the wrecked vehicle were at the Fillmore hospital, and continued his journey to Cedar City by an alternate route.

Johnson later learned that the fire he had encountered was the Milford Flats Fire which

eventually burned a total of 363,000 acres and would go on record as the largest fire in Utah history.

Johnson has worked for the BLM in Dillon since 2007, and was previously employed by the U.S. Forest Service since 1974 in several fire management positions.

TRIG-STAR 2009

Ann Boucher, MSO

“When would you *ever* use this in real life?”

What teacher or parent hasn’t heard the protests of a student struggling to grasp a new concept? And how refreshing when the answer can be demonstrated by someone whose career is built on that skill.

For the last 21 years, Montana BLM surveyors have done just that through Trig-Star, a high school competition based on the practical application of trigonometry. The program demonstrates how professional surveyors use mathematics, then challenges students to solve a four-part survey problem. The student who most quickly finds the correct answers is declared the Trig-Star. Cash prizes and scholarships are awarded to winners at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Additionally, regional winners in Montana receive a calculator donated by Selby’s Essco, a survey supply company in Billings.

BLM surveyors Randy Thomas and Craig Frichtl introduced Trig-Star in Montana in 1989 through a Career Day event at four Billings-area high schools. In 1990, the Montana Association of Registered Land Surveyors (MARLS) launched a state Math-Star competition. In 1994, MARLS and the BLM joined forces. The program has spread to more than 30 states, with Montana being one of the first. It is sponsored nationally by the National Society of Professional Surveyors; on the state level by MARLS; and locally by MARLS and the BLM.

This year, 694 students from 22 Montana high schools took the Trig-Star test. Two students scored 100 percent, but the fastest (in just under 48 minutes) was Spencer Hopkins, a junior at C.M. Russell High School in Great Falls. Hopkins will take the national test later this summer.



MSO surveyors Randy Thomas and Josh Alexander demonstrate the use of surveying equipment and present a practice question to students at Billings West High School this spring. Similar presentations are made at high schools throughout southeastern Montana before students take the Trig-Star test. *Photo by Ann Boucher*



Cooperative Efforts Improve Public Access and Facilities at Payola Reservoir

Craig Flentie, Lewistown Field Office

Payola Reservoir covers a little over three surface acres of public land in a deep coulee about eight miles northwest of Winnett, Mont.

It's a welcome oasis for recreationists in an otherwise dry, wind-swept, sage brush environment -- a landscape that lends itself mostly to critters like cattle, antelope, sage grouse, and sharp-tailed grouse. It's also rumored that Payola holds a pretty good yellow perch population (however, this fisherman has not been able to confirm such hearsay).

Over the course of any year, recreationists from as far away as Missoula and Billings as well as the more local folks make their way to Payola Reservoir for a little rest and relaxation.

For years, those recreationists have found their way to Payola by turning off a county road (Cemetery Road) and bouncing over about a mile of rough, rutted two-track trail across private land before reaching another mile of rough, rutted two-track trail on public land. The private landowner has been very good about allowing the public to cross his property; however he is not interested in selling or allowing the BLM a right of way as a means of ensuring continued public access.

There is no immediate indication that this access situation will change. However, land managing agencies have learned (just as quickly as the

public) that few opportunities can change as quickly as unsecured public access across private property.

In response, the Lewistown Field Office has increased its efforts to secure public access to public resources. Obtaining rights-of-way, completing land exchanges with willing landowners, and building new access routes entirely across public lands are the most common means of reaching this goal.

As it turns out, Payola Reservoir sits on a parcel of public land that lends itself to a new access route built entirely across public land. The Lewistown FO penciled out the route on a map; stood back to have a look and consider the need; and then decided to move forward with the concept. Plans began taking shape for an excavated/crowned and environmentally sound graveled road that would allow year-round public access.

As with many good ideas for improvements on public land, the pathway between concept and implementation is a perilous journey. Every potential improvement has to survive numerous priority-setting exercises, the planning

process, funding requests, and then contracting or scheduling the Lewistown FO force account crew to complete the work.

The idea of building this public access road seemed to prove its worth when it received a green light at every intersection. At that point, those involved with the concept and planning phases (accustomed to using pencils and computers) stepped back and the Lewistown FO force



Mike Barrick installs an end cap on the shelter.

account folks (those accustomed to using scrapers and dump trucks) stepped in.

The boots soon hit the ground.

It didn't take long for Fred Roberts, Loyd Bantz, Ed Bradley, Mike Sweeney and Dwight Martin (from the Malta Field Office) to stake the new road location; move in the heavy equipment; and begin moving dirt. In a matter of days, a newly excavated/crowned road



Loyd Bantz steadies the new shelter at Payola reservoir.

The Lewistown FO also found a few dollars to make some noticeable improvements at the reservoir site. Previously, recreationists would park on a user-created, pounded out flat with no shade, and walk through the grass to the edge of the

south east of Payola Reservoir on the Cemetery Road. We went by their house countless times with dump trucks and a variety of equipment and every trip created dust and noise, but they never expressed any frustration with our effort. They stopped and waved every time we went by. We appreciate their patience," offered Lewistown FO force account crew member Mike Sweeney.

This project has been a real cooperative effort that involved many. The new access road to Payola will provide public

was snaking north across public land toward Payola Reservoir.

Throughout this project, several cooperators were very helpful and lent their full assistance. From the onset, the Lewistown FO was able to borrow a scraper and a large dump truck from the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Another dump truck came from the BLM's Butte Field Office. And, when the road base was nearly finished, the BLM was able to purchase gravel for surfacing the road from Petroleum County at a very competitive price. Without this kind of help, these remote projects would certainly be less feasible.

When it was time to gravel the road surface, Mike Sweeney and Ronnie Hayes drove the dump trucks between the gravel quarry and the site while Ed Bradley stayed on site to spread the material and shape the road surface with a grader. The end result is a new public access road (about 1.7 miles long) to Payola Reservoir that should be maintenance-free for years to come.

reservoir. Now they are greeted with two concrete picnic tables, three fire rings, a rocked surface, and a shelter fenced to exclude livestock.

Loyd Bantz, Mike Barrick, Aurora Northerner and Mona Driskell were meticulous in their work while installing the improvements. You'll never find a better built shelter or more level picnic tables.

"We would also like to acknowledge a landowner and his family who live about two miles



Mona Driskell puts the torque on a picnic table.

access for generations to come and the improved recreational facilities will make every visit a more pleasant experience. Now,

if someone could show me how to catch a perch, all would be well!

The Lewistown FO would like to say thanks again to all those involved with this effort.



The newly constructed picnic shelter at Payola Reservoir.

Photos by Craig Flentie

On the Range in Central Asia

Mitch Iverson, South Dakota FO

Two Montana/Dakotas BLM employees got out of their normal range last summer through the DOI's International Technical Assistance Program (ITAP).

In August 2008, Mitch Iverson (South Dakota Field Office) and Lou Hagener (retired, Havre Field Station) spent nearly a month in Tajikistan working with Tajik officials on rangeland management issues.

Tajikistan is a former Soviet republic bordered by Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, and other



Mitch Iverson and Lou Hagener talk with a village leader about Protected Areas.



Mitch Iverson discusses water quality and riparian issues with Tajik officials.

former Soviet republics. It is very poor and densely populated. Mountains dominate the landscape; the highest peak is more than 27,000 feet in elevation. Tajikistan is a Muslim country influenced by Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. Land within and around "Protected Areas" is administered by the Tajikistan government and has varying degrees of management; commercial uses such as grazing and logging are allowed in some areas, while others are fully protected from all human activities.

The Protected Areas functioned fairly well under Soviet rule. Unfortunately, a civil war that erupted soon after Tajikistan declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1993

resulted in their uncontrolled use. They have been heavily impacted by wild fires, poaching, overgrazing by livestock, refuge settlements, and excessive firewood harvest.

After the cease fire in 1998, management of the parks remained ineffective. In 2008, CARE International sent in an ITAP team of BLM range specialists to assess the situation and recommend solutions. The BLM range specialists met with Tajik forestry personnel, Protected Area staff, the Agriculture Ministry, village leaders, and university officials to identify problems and search for solutions.

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Lou Hagener, Mitch Iverson and interpreter Backhtiyor Nakhshiniev inspect range conditions near the Tajikistan/Uzbekistan border.

The ITAP team hiked into the protected areas and camped in the Gissar Mountain Range to look at conditions and talk with herders and locals. The team found the Tajiks to be friendly, gracious people. Most Tajiks the team met were very surprised to see Americans as travel to this country was limited until recently.

At the end of the tour, the team met with Tajiki officials to present its findings and recommendations. Tajik officials were receptive to the ideas brought forth to create orderly and controlled grazing while providing benefits to

local communities. After returning to the states, the ITAP team developed and presented a report to CARE International and Tajik officials. The report was given wide distribution to other relief agencies working in the country. Although conditions were very primitive, all team members found the experience worthwhile and rewarding.

The United National Development Program is now taking over the project to implement many of the recommendations of the ITAP Team.

Photos by Tim Burke (BLM California)

Miles City FO Hosts Outdoor Education Day

Annual event draws 175 third and fourth graders to Matthews Recreation Area on May 6 to learn about archaeology, recreation, gold panning, engineering and fire fighting.



Geologist Dan Benoit demonstrates gold panning technique.



Rick Herman, civil engineering technician, shows some third graders the finer points of surveying.



Archaeologist C. J. Truesdale discusses lithic technology.

Attention BLM Retirees

The BLM Retirees Association

Stay in touch! The BLM Retirees Association has a social gathering at 11:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of even-numbered months at Guadalajara in the Riverboat Casino (444 S. 24th St. West) in Billings. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please call Shirley Heffner at 259-1202, Cynthia Embretson at 252-1367, or send your address to Cynthia at ceatsage@wtp.net.

The Public Lands Foundation

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) offers new retirees a free one-year membership. If you're interested, contact David Mari, Montana PLF Representative, at (406) 538-7121, or email dmari@earthlink.net (please note "PLF" on the subject line).

What is the PLF? It works to keep America's public lands in public hands, managed professionally

and sustainably for responsible common use and enjoyment.

The goals of the PLF are to:

- Keep lands managed by the BLM in public ownership and open to use by the public.
- Support multiple use management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- Encourage professionalism by BLM employees.
- Increase the public's understanding of and support for the proper management of the public lands.

Although PLF membership consists largely of retired BLMers, current employees and anyone interested in the goals of the organization are welcome to join.

Get on the *NoteWorthy News* Mailing List

The Montana/Dakotas BLM also produces the *NoteWorthy News*, a monthly electronic newsletter for employees and retirees. If you would like to receive a copy, send your email address to aboucher@blm.gov.

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