

STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND AT THE RESORT AT PAWS UP

by *Paws Up Co-Ranch Manager Leigh Kelley*



Paws Up participates in and supports a variety of conservation and land stewardship efforts. For example, the famous Blackfoot River has a substantial impact on the Blackfoot River Valley. It effects how we grow food, how businesses survive and how animals move across the landscape and provides a place for a multitude of native fish species to thrive. Paws Up's drought management plan conserves 3,000 gallons of water per minute during low flows. As part of the plan, Paws Up carefully selects early maturing crops for underneath our irrigation pivots. This allows us to irrigate when flows are ample and to limit irrigation during the summer.

Elk Creek also meanders through our property. The creek provides vital spawning grounds for native fish. Elk Creek is also a prime corridor of connectivity that helps wildlife link up and move to other parts of the Blackfoot River Valley. The corridor helps maintain genetic diversity and range health for wildlife in the valley, which includes black bears, mountain lions, occasional grizzly bears and daily sightings of white-tailed deer and elk. Paws Up participates in habitat improvement around Elk Creek for good soil health, ample residual forage and clean water for domestic livestock and wildlife use.

The Black Angus cows that roam our acreage are indeed easy on the eyes. However, their purpose is so much greater. They are a moving herd of organic fertilizer, they suppress fire danger and they keep grasses palatable for wildlife. The cows do all of this while providing clean, lean and delicious protein. Paws Up cows are managed under a program that promotes grass diversity and sustainability, because at Paws Up, our biggest asset is the grass we grow. Without this high-quality forage, we would have no way to provide food for the animals here.

An interesting but obscure fact about the Blackfoot River Valley is that all 200 animals and birds identified here by Lewis & Clark are still on the landscape today. The farmers, ranchers, conservationists and loggers who call the valley home have worked side-by-side to protect the land, and we are proud to be a part of this effort.

PAWS UP CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP EFFORTS

- Strategically plant low-water-demand farm crops to conserve water.
- Conserve 3,000 gallons per minute of river water daily during drought restrictions.
- Work closely with the Blackfoot Challenge, the Nature Conservancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and other conservation agencies to manage our lands.
- Support local youth through 4H and FFA livestock auctions.
- Support the nonprofit Wild Skies Raptor Center for better bird habitats and raptor rehabilitation.
- Allow public access at designated Blackfoot River sites.
- Encourage healthy deer and elk populations with managed hunting for youth and disabled hunters.
- Participate in a program with Hellgate High School to decrease twine found in osprey nests.
- Encourage local youth horseback activities by allowing no-fee use of our arena for 4H clubs.
- Utilize our bovine herd to improve soil health and to distribute organic fertilizer.
- Implement cell-grazing programs for all livestock for healthy grass management.
- Participate in the Montana Tree Farm System to keep our forests healthy.
- Use biological controls for weed management.
- Practice catch-and-release-only fishing.
- Encourage outdoor youth education by hosting annual field days.
- Produce 1,800 tons of hay annually.

