

MISSOULA COUNTY'S LAND STEWARDSHIP AWARD PROGRAM RECOGNIZES MISSOULA-AREA RANCHERS

The Missoula County Commissioners announced July 11th, 2019 that Bart and Wendy Morris are the recipients of the 2019 Land Stewardship Award. They received their award at a ceremony on August 7th at their Oxbow Cattle Company ranch in Miller Creek. The Morris' are being recognized as outstanding land stewards for their outstanding stewardship practices and activities on private lands that provide natural resource and community benefits.

The goals of the Missoula County Land Stewardship Award Program are to recognize individuals who are demonstrating outstanding land stewardship practices and to share information about these stewardship practices so that others can learn from their work.

Bart and Wendy Morris have been sustainably ranching on the southern edge of Missoula in Miller Creek since 2014 as Oxbow Cattle Company. The Morris' conservation and stewardship ethic are evident in every aspect of their lives. They have protected their legacy through a 168-acre conservation easement on their land that conserves open space for continued agricultural production, important agricultural soils, and fish and wildlife habitat. Their business goals are to provide customers with the highest quality beef, improve the ecological integrity of the land through good stewardship, and contribute meaningfully to the community. They continue to raise their standards to improve their land management and stewardship practices on their ranch and on other private and public lands they lease as part of their ranching operation.

Bart and Wendy use many different stewardship techniques and practices to meet their ranch management goals. These include installation and design of wildlife-friendly fence, building healthy soil through use of cover crop seed mixtures and intensive rotational grazing systems, and low-stress livestock care.

They work on benefitting natural resources, including riparian area conservation around Miller Creek via vegetation planting and fencing. They've worked with the Missoula NRCS office to develop spring-fed water sources on their land to prevent their cattle from spending too much time and thus damage water features. Bart and Wendy also worked with renewable energy specialists and NRCS to install an off-the-grid water pump using solar and geothermal energy. This allows for year-round water flow for livestock and seasonal crop irrigation.

The Morris' are committed to the long-term sustainability of agriculture within our communities and have done an exceptional job involving and engaging others in stewardship activities. They invest in future stewards through educational partnerships with local organizations and agencies, and they frequently host volunteers, students, and community visitors on their land. They have partnered with agriculture, conservation, and community organizations including NRCS, Five Valleys Land Trust, Bitterroot Water Forum, MPG Ranch, Ecology Project International, Community Food & Agriculture Coalition, and several departments at the University.

Bart and Wendy were recommended for the award by the Stewardship Award Selection Committee composed of Missoula County's Open Lands Citizens Advisory Committee members and local resource experts from the Missoula Conservation District, Missoula County Weed District, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. The Committee appreciated the Morris' all-encompassing philosophy of land stewardship that focuses comprehensively on stewarding for land, community, and animals both wildlife and domestic.