

Synopsis of a Forest Steward: Richard Briskin

By Cindy Bertek, MSU Extension Forestry, Forest Stewardship Coordinator

Richard knew he wasn't going to retire and hang out in the big city. His work was in heavy industrial manufacturing and machining for light and medium duty trucks; although he longed for the good life in a rural area along with the enjoyment of hard work, ranch life, and giving his energy to improving the environment.

Montana was a good place to look for the ideal place to live the best part of his life. Montana offers beautiful landscapes, some wildness, recreational opportunities, and a style of living that Richard was looking for. Richard found his peace of heaven in 2001. "This is such a beautiful place in the heart of the Blackfoot," says Briskin. "When I first saw this property in the heart of the Ovando valley, it was untouched and offered the opportunity to do good things for the environment. God has smiled on me and given me educational opportunities, recreational opportunities, and the opportunity to manage and improve the forest where I live."

Richard's objectives included building a home, for recreation, a skeet field, and working with the forest to improve its health and quality. He acquired his 315 acres in 2001. The property was flat enough for his first recreational criteria; to have his own skeet field so he could practice for competitions. His forest was beautiful but he knew it was in need of management to improve its health. Richard was willing to take on this challenge even though he had no knowledge of what his forest needed.

Richard turned to the University of Montana for education. He knew that fire was a part of the environment so in his first year he took a fire management course with Ron Wakimoto. Ron told him about **MSU Extension Forestry's Forest Stewardship Program**. He told Richard that this program would teach him things he would never learn in school. Richard walked into the MSU office on the UM campus that very day and signed up for a workshop. He attended and inventoried his property then wrote his own Forest Stewardship Plan. Richard went on to complete a Master's program at UM in Ecosystem Management. A publication is required for graduation, Richard's paper was titled: *Land Use and Stewardship Planning for Family Forest Landowners*.

Since acquiring his family forest Richard has built his dream. He now has well managed forest with a home and skeet field. He has worked hard to attain the knowledge he needs to manage his forest in a way that is sound and fitting for the environment. Richard has completed four precommercial thinning programs to enhance tree growth. He has removed some large trees for purposes of beetle removal but keeps as many as he can. He has spent great deal of time improving his forest range through weed control and trimming back sage brush for grazing. The next big project for Richard is to further develop his range resource by developing plans for subdividing his property for grazing rotation which will require fencing and water development.

MSU Extension Forestry appreciates Richard's enthusiasm for the forests and also his involvement on the MT Forest Stewardship Steering Committee on which he has served for 8 years, 6 ½ of which he has served as the committee's chair.

Note from MSU Extension Forestry: Five Forest Stewardship workshops are offered annually, see the calendar at www.msuextension.org/forestry All family forest owners are encouraged to attend as well as Tree Farmers and second/third generation Forest Stewards and repeat attendees.