

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Introducing Montana Conservation Menu's Local Office Finder

This spring, SWCDM introduced you to one of our newest projects, the Montana Conservation Menu. The Conservation Menu is a comprehensive website designed to help landowners and organizations find information on conservation assistance programs across the state. It houses information on all kinds of programs, from fencing cost share assistance with Ranching for Rivers to EQIP special initiatives for honeybees.

We are excited to announce the addition of a new feature on the Conservation Menu, our Local Office Finder. This tool helps users find contact information for a range of local offices. You can click on your county or conservation district, and a list of local agency offices will come up.

Currently, we have Conservation Districts, MSU Extension offices, NRCS offices, local weed districts, FWP offices, and BLM offices listed. We are planning to add FSA, DNRC, USFS, local grazing districts, irrigation districts, watershed groups, and USFWS offices in the near future.

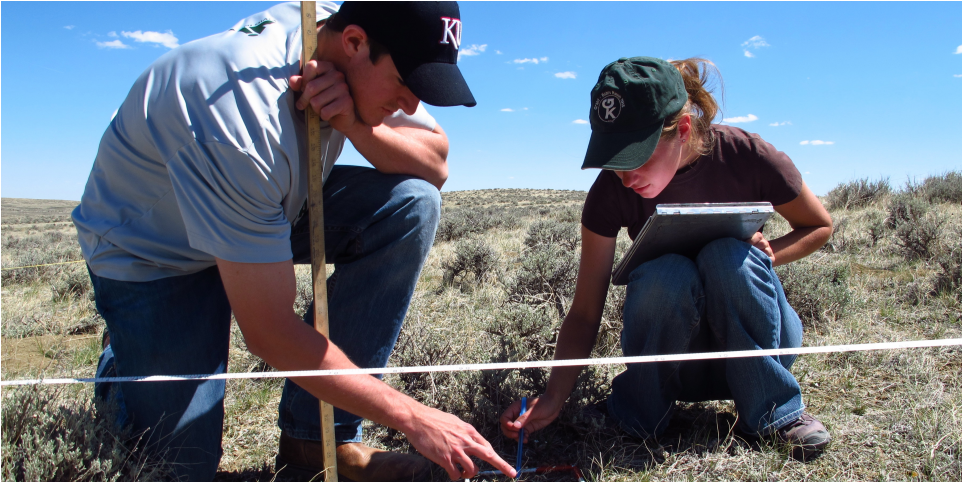
This website is supported & maintained by Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana. Check it out at www.mtconservationmenu.org.



MONTANA ASSOCIATION of
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We're growing Montana's future.

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Taking the bias out of Sage Grouse nesting studies

New study suggests grass height may not be as critical to nest success as previously thought

From Sage Grouse Initiative: When managing habitat for sage grouse, adequate grass height for hiding cover has been emphasized as an important component for these ground nesting birds. However, new findings that replicate previous work further validate that methods now known to be biased are often responsible for identifying grass height as an important driver of nest success.

Together, [these studies](#) suggest that the common practice of measuring grass height around nests directly following nest failure or hatch can lead to a false positive signal that indicates grass height is correlated with nest success even when they are unrelated. This is because hatched nests are measured later in the season than failed nests, which gives grasses more time to grow.

Led by Joe Smith from the University of Montana, the authors re-evaluated more than 800 nests

from several studies that originally showed a positive correlation between nest success and grass height. After correcting the data to account for grass growth, researchers found no relationship between grass height and nest fate. Following correction, median grass heights at hatched and failed nests were within 0.05 inches of one another (the thickness of a penny) across all re-analyzed datasets.

These findings suggest that the height of grass may not be as crucial to sage grouse nesting success as previously thought.

The key takeaway for researchers is to reduce the likelihood of biased results by waiting to measure grass height until after the predicted hatch date for nests. Measuring vegetation as quickly as possible after the incubating female has left the nest should be avoided (currently a common practice among nesting studies of sage grouse and other ground nesting birds).

In addition, Smith's findings should encourage a critical re-evaluation of habitat management guidelines that are based on research now known to have inadvertently used biased methods. Native grasses and forbs are key components of [healthy sagebrush rangelands](#) and high-quality sage grouse habitat, but the importance of tall grass for concealing nests from predators has likely been overstated.

While getting the science right on grass height may challenge long-held perspectives about the role of grazing and grass height in sage grouse habitat management, it also may provide added flexibility for managers to work together with ranchers to achieve overall ecosystem goals in the face of increasingly complex and persistent threats.

Smith and colleagues caution not to interpret their findings to imply that grazing does not matter. Rather, they suggest fundamental, time-tested [range management principles](#) be employed as a tool to ensure sage grouse and other wildlife have the resources they need.

These new findings provide an opportunity for scientists and managers to set down our rulers, step back, and look at the bigger picture. By promoting robust and diverse native perennial plant communities, managers can ensure that rangelands remain resistant and resilient so that drought, exotic annual grass invasions, and catastrophic wildfires are less likely to impact birds. [READ MORE](#)

UN launches comprehensive map of carbon in world's soils

UN Food & Agriculture

Organization: **5 December 2017, Rome** - Marking [World Soil Day](#), FAO today has launched the most comprehensive [global map](#) to date showing the amount of carbon stocks in the soil.

Soil organic matter, with carbon as its main component, is crucial to soil health and fertility, water infiltration and retention as well as food production. As a major carbon storage system, conserving and restoring soils are essential for both sustainable agriculture and climate change mitigation.

The world's soils act as the largest terrestrial carbon sink, reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Intensifying this role could significantly offset the rapid rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In a historic decision on agriculture, the recent climate change conference in Bonn (COP23) recognized the need for improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility.

The Global Soil Organic Carbon Map, illustrating the amount of soil organic carbon stock in the first 30 cm of soil, reveals natural areas with high carbon storage that require its conservation, as well as those regions where there is the possibility for further sequestration.

[READ MORE](#)



Townsend ranch honored by MT Stockgrowers for conservation work

The Hahn Ranch was honored as the 2018 Environmental Stewardship Award winners Dec. 13 at the Montana Stockgrowers' Annual Convention in Billings. The award recognizes cattle ranchers who are exemplary stewards of the land, livestock, wildlife and natural resources.

The family has been ranching in the Missouri River Valley near Townsend for more than 100 years, working to preserve and enhance their natural resources for generations to come. Chuck Hahn, Dusty Hahn and Cory and Jennilee Bird accepted the award on behalf of the family ranch.

The ranch was nominated for the award by collaborators with the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) for their partnership on projects that have benefited fisheries and water quality on the ranch and for downstream users. But their conservation practices expand far beyond the creek beds of their southwestern Montana ranch.

Ron Spoon, a FWP fish biologist, has worked with the Hahn family since 1990.

"I believe Chuck and his family provide a valuable example of how a long-term ranching operation can simultaneously create agricultural products and foster clean water," Spoon says. "Folks that collaborate with Chuck will know that he thoroughly protects the function of the ranching operation, but they know he genuinely pushes for solutions that benefit resources beyond the ranch."

The multi-generational ranch includes Chuck, his sons Dusty and Buck Hahn, his brother John Hahn, sister Bev Bird and her son Cory and wife Jennilee and matriarch Dorothy Hahn.

For nearly 30 years, the Hahn family has worked cooperatively with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Broadwater Conservation District (BCD), the Broadwater-Missouri Water Users Association (BMWUA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC), Montana Ditch, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on restoration and conservation efforts on Deep Creek.

[READ MORE](#)

USDA announces 2018 EQIP special initiatives

Bozeman, Mont., Dec. 19, 2017—The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering additional funding through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to target specific resource concerns in Montana in 2018: on-farm energy, honey bee pollinators, organic, high tunnel systems, Sage Grouse Initiative invasive conifer removal, Sage Grouse Initiative cropland seeding, and wildfire recovery.

While NRCS accepts EQIP applications on a continuous basis, NRCS has set a deadline of Jan. 19, 2018, to apply for 2018 initiatives funding. Below is an overview of each initiative:

- National On-Farm Energy Initiative
- Honey Bee Pollinators
- National Organic Initiative
- High Tunnel Systems
- Sage Grouse Initiative Invasive Conifer Removal
- Sage Grouse Initiative Cropland Seeding
- Wildfire Recovery

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

Conservation practices must be implemented to NRCS standards and specifications. In Montana, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

[READ MORE](#)

Ever on the brink: Government Shutdown continues to be possibility

Editor's Note: Although A government shutdown seems unlikely, it is important for districts to stay up to date on the issue and have a backup plan. MACD can help with this by providing an email address that is not associated with NRCS as a backup. Here is a recent update:

From The Hill: Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) signaled on Monday that Senate Republicans are eyeing a short-term bill that would fund the government through Jan. 19, breaking with House Republicans.

"We're also looking at the likelihood of another bill ... with some anomalies, some additions

that takes us to Jan. 19," he told reporters.

The government is scheduled to shut down Saturday unless Congress passes a bill to fund the government by the end of Friday.

House Republicans are poised to move forward with a bill that links a full year of defense funding with a continuing resolution to fund the rest of the government for a few weeks. But that bill can't pass the Senate where GOP leadership needs the support of at least eight Democrats or independents to help pass legislation, if they can hold their entire caucus together.

[READ MORE](#)

Bipartisan program aims to fund public land access

From the Missoulian: Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock and Rep. Alan Doane (R-Bloomfield) praised a new program Monday to increase access to public lands.

Doane carried a bipartisan bill in the last legislative session to form the Montana Public Land Access Network, or MT-PLAN. The network creates a mechanism for the state to take donations for creating or improving public land access via private easements and funding other projects to facilitate access.

"In Montana we have a rich history of coming up with collaborative, innovative ways to conserve, protect and open up access to our public lands," Bullock said.

"We're blessed here in Montana to have access to millions of acres of public lands, but there's always more that we could do to increase that access. Legal access to public lands is essential to present and future generations of Montanans from all walks of life."

MT-PLAN takes private donations, and will also get funding through an opportunity to donate when purchasing a conservation license. The easements must be approved by the Montana State Land Board and are enforced by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Along with Montana's heritage of public land use, access is important economically, as evidenced by a report identifying \$7.1 billion in consumer spending in the state and more than 70,000 jobs. [READ MORE](#)

Grants

223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2018 are as follows: **October 18, 2017, January 16, 2018, April 25, 2018.** [Grant Info](#)

Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grants

The MT Department of Agriculture is now accepting applications for Noxious Weed Trust Fund grants and Emergency grants for FY18. Funding is available for noxious weed research projects, state and community education/development projects, and local cooperative - landowner cost share. Applicants may apply for funding up to \$75,000 per project. Applications for emergency grants are due Nov. 1, regular grants due Jan. 6. [More Info](#)

Three-County Yellowstone Conservation Project

Agricultural producers in Big Horn, Carbon, and Yellowstone counties have until January 19, 2018, to apply for financial assistance for conservation practices funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program. [More Info](#)

National Forest Foundation Matching Awards Program

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) Matching Awards Program (MAP) provides funding for results-oriented on-the-ground projects that enhance forest health and outdoor experiences on National Forests and Grasslands. Due January 23. [More Info](#)

Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grants

The goal of this program is to accelerate strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds. Up to \$3 million is available and applications are due February 1, 2018. [More Info](#)

Grazing Lands Education & Demonstration Project Funds

GLCI is accepting applications for mini-grants and demonstration projects. Mini grant funds are for education projects to support awareness of grazing lands and natural resources; up to \$1000 per award. The current focus for demonstration projects is on innovative projects addressing grazing management, soil and rangeland health, concentrated animal feeding operations/animal feeding operations, or noxious weeds on private Montana grazing lands. Due February 16. [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Western Montana Grazing & Agriculture Conference

This two day event in Missoula features 30 speakers in 15 different talks and panel discussions, with industry leaders, researchers, farmers and ranchers. Internationally recognized keynote speaker Dr. Fred Provenza, Ph.D. will highlight the event. January 25 & 26. Register now! [More Info](#)

REGISTER NOW FOR SOIL HEALTH WORKSHOPS

SWCDM, NRCS and MT SWCS are hosting a series of soil health

workshops this January, which will feature speakers Brendon Rockey, Steve Kenyon, Wendy Taheri, and Derek Axton (2 of the above at each event).

1/16: Three Forks

1/17: Great Falls

1/18: Billings

1/19: Miles City & Sidney

[Register at swcdm.org/soil-health](http://swcdm.org/soil-health)

Save the Date: Montana Water Summit

Join a diverse group of water users, community members, policy-makers, scientists, and natural resource managers for thought provoking sessions on managing and adapting to changing pressure's on Montana's water supply. March 6-7, 2018. [More Info](#)

27th Annual MEEA Conference

The annual meeting of the Montana Environmental Educators Association will feature keynote speaker Steve Running, University Regents Professor of Global Ecology at UM. The Conference will be held March 22-24 in Great Falls. [More Info](#)

Jobs

Flathead CD Assistant Conservationist

This position is responsible for a variety of programmatic and educational activities, including, but not limited to, public outreach, landowner workshops, and school/vocational programs. Additional duties include drafting communications materials for advertising, marketing, and website content. Applications due January 19. [More Info](#)

Coming Up:

December

25

MACD Executive
Committee Call
CANCELED (It's Christmas)

January

8

MACD Board Conference
Call

16

223 Grant Deadline

17-19

Soil Health Workshop
Series

22

MACD Exec. Committee
Call

25-26

Western Montana Grazing
& Agriculture Conference

29-31

NACD Annual Meeting

February

6-7

Winter Grazing Seminar

Have an event to share?

Visit macdnet.org/calendar to
add your event to our list!

Meet Loni Blackman, Montana Rangelands Partnership Range Tech

Please join us in welcoming SWCDM's newest staff member, Loni Balckman, who was hired as the new Montana Rangelands Partnership Range Technician in Lewistown. She joined our staff on December 4, replacing Emily Stanley, who is now an MSU Extension agent.

Here's Loni in her own words:

I am from a little town called Craig located along the Missouri River, known for its fly-fishing and being the halfway point between Great Falls and Helena. There I grew up on a cow-calf operation, at the same time raising sheep and helping out with the family's corn maze. I got my start in range through FFA, and then later on joined the research project out of Roundup studying Sage-Grouse. I ended up spending the last three summers working on the project. I graduated this last spring from Montana State University with a degree Rangeland Ecology with a minor in Economics. I am excited to be in Lewistown and working on the Montana Rangelands Partnership.

* MERRY Δ°
Christmas
▽°°

All of us at MACD and SWCDM would like to thank you for reading The Montana Conservationist this year, and wish you a merry Christmas and Joyous New Year! Here's to another year of partnerships, collaboration, and most importantly, conservation.

