

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Down by the River

SWCDM & Partners host Riparian Grazing Workshops

A series of workshops focused on riparian grazing and management were held in Thompson Falls, Helena, and Deer Lodge the last week of June with 75 people participating across the three locations. The keynote speaker for each workshop was Ms. Sandy Wyman, who recently retired as a Riparian and Rangeland Management Specialist with the BLM and National Riparian Service Team. Sandy's message with respect to riparian management is that, with proper management, ranchers and landowners can enjoy the benefits and values germane to riparian areas within their operation while at the same time protecting and enhancing the resource.

Sandy's presentations focused on setting up your riparian area for success, which included the importance of monitoring and photo monitoring in particular, and key management strategies for enhancing riparian areas through grazing. Sandy also discussed the many factors to look for in identifying riparian problems and to focus on the marginal areas that can see improvement fairly quickly and with less money rather than focusing on the more highly degraded areas.

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SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
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MONTANA ASSOCIATION of
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1101 11th Ave • Helena, MT 59601
(406) 443-5711 • www.swcdm.org

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Ag Research Center: Growing Knowledge

Prairie Populist: From the very beginning, Dr. Patrick Carr made it clear he would be adding research on alternative crops to the Central Agricultural Research Center when he was hired as the superintendent.

The keyword here is adding.

Patrick joined the research center with the specific goal of finding alternatives to winter wheat. Most agree that Montanans have that crop figured out fairly well, but many are eager to find out what else can make a profit.

So the center has started to look into warm season crops, like corn and sunflowers.

"They still may have a place, our climate is changing," Patrick said.

These warm season crops used to be more risky in Montana. Like tomatoes, one late freeze and some warm-season crops, like dry beans, are done. (We suspect a couple people with home gardens

may know this all too well right now!)

In addition, the research center has plots for cool season pulses and are looking into cover crops, forage crops and grains.

While driving around the plots Patrick began rattling off different crops they had in the ground, and I had to admit to myself that I just could not write down all of them fast enough to keep track.

"My hunch is we're looking at about thirty different crops," he said when I pushed him to give me an estimate.

Research on organic farming methods will also begin next year. However, the rumors of the center switching to organic at the expense of conventional farming are not true. Primarily, Patrick has always wanted alternative projects to be additions to the research center.

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Riparian Grazing Workshops

Continued... A field tour in the afternoon was included with each workshop too, so participants had the opportunity to see management applications in the field and hear from landowners and their experiences.

Although local landowners were targeted for this workshop, a number of district supervisors and agency staff were also in attendance and got a lot out of the workshops. Mindy Ferrell, a supervisor from Green Mountain Conservation District (GMCD) who attended the Thompson Falls workshop, said "Workshops like these continue to open my eyes to the extent and possibilities of providing resources to the public by GMCD. Although not a management entity, we are certainly a permitting and guiding entity that should continue to be aware of best-practices. We should be well-versed and aware of the many resources available in order to act as a clearing house for the public."

Sandy's presentations are available online at <http://swcdm.org/programs/riparian-grazing-workshops/>. These workshops were presented by Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana, Missouri River Conservation Districts Council and the Rangeland Resources Executive Committee with funding support from DNRC's Forestry/CRP program and many other workshop sponsors. A special thanks to host districts and administrators – Leona Gollen, Chris Evans, and Susie Johnson - who helped make these workshops happen. Thank you all!

Water committee to consider 7 bills

Members of the Water Policy Interim Committee will review draft committee reports and bills at their upcoming July 16-17 meeting. The committee will review seven pieces of legislation that may be introduced at the upcoming 2019 legislative session. The bill drafts to be considered would:

- 1) Define a "supplemental notice" within the Montana Administrative Procedure Act (LCw001)
- 2) Revise certain water right adjudication processes, such as motions to amend a water right claim, final decree requirements for reserved water rights, and appeal deadlines to the Montana Water Court (LCw002)
- 3) Allow an extended response deadline for a water right permit or change application (LCw003)
- 4) Clarify that legal availability analysis does not determine adverse effects as criteria in a water right change application (LCw004)
- 5) Clarify that a water right permit or a water right change application relying on a waiver of adverse effect does not require a legal availability determination (LCw005)
- 6) Study Montana's stream gauge network (LCw006)
- 7) Allow DNRC to compile a distribution list of water right holders from FWP (LCw007)

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Tour highlights work to preserve Sage Grouse in Montana

Billings Gazette: WINNETT — In a region of Montana often known for its dry weather, about 130 western wildlife officials participating in a greater sage grouse tour last week continually had their route readjusted by wet, muddy roads.

It was a good problem to have, considering the landscape looked more like Ireland than Petroleum County, but sticking to asphalt made it more difficult for state and federal officials conducting the tour for members of the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. Officials were discussing their work to preserve and understand one of the most controversial gamebirds in the nation.

"We're trying to get a lot of big things accomplished," said Austin Shero, a district conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Roundup Field Office.

At the core of NRCS's goals is to improve rangeland health, which

is good for ranchers, sage grouse and other wildlife, Shero told the group gathered around him at the tour's first stop in Lavina.

Toolbox

Among the programs Shero and his fellow officials use to improve habitat on private land include prescribed grazing plans that use NRCS-funded water development on private property in exchange for the rancher meeting the NRCS's goals, as well as easements, which pay the ranchers to keep the habitat intact.

Easements are "relatively accepted here," Shero said. "Folks are using it as a tool to keep their land in production."

"Farmers and ranchers aren't really good at retirement plans, so they're also using that to keep going. Some of them use it to get out of debt."

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New pulse crop processing facility breaks ground

Northern Ag: Roger and Lisa Sammons have been planning on building a pulse processing plant for a few years.

Their business model at Pardue Grain is that of a trans-loader and toll processor. They believed that Montana needed more processing capacity so started planning for a pulse crop processing plant.

For the past 2 years they have been putting together the business plan with the help of the Great Falls Development Authority to attract the necessary capital. First Interstate Bank agreed to finance the \$6,000,000 project. The USDA Rural Development have agreed to a 90% loan guarantee due to the location of the facility in a county with the highest unemployment rate and the jobs it

will create.

The processing line will be state of the art with automation. Roger is told that there is no other plant like it. It is completely food grade with all product contact points only touching stainless steel or high grade polymer plastic.

Roger and Lisa's hope is to attract domestic food ingredient companies that want to buy food grade pulse products. Since they choose to be toll processors, they will process pulse and other crops including organics for anyone. This allows producers the opportunity to go direct to end use markets if they want to develop their own brand.

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It's Farm Bill Conference Time, and challenges loom

Politico: Farm bill conference negotiations are upon us as members of Congress begin to return today from their weeklong Fourth of July recess. First on the list of tasks will be determining which lawmakers make the cut as the committee is formed. It's likely House and Senate Ag staffers have already begun working behind the scenes to start merging the bills, though House Ag Chairman Mike Conaway joked on the day the House passed its measure that he may be willing to give them the July 4th holiday off.

A number of difficult decisions loom over conference talks, and none more so than finding a

solution to the two bills' competing approaches to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Senate Ag Chairman Pat Roberts and ranking member Debbie Stabenow's combined efforts to defeat an amendment that would have tightened SNAP work restrictions provided the latest indication that Senate leaders won't meddle with SNAP.

Conservation challenge: Aside from SNAP, sorting out major disparities between the bills' conservation titles also stands to be a challenge.

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No-till farming can help save water, proponents say

Capital Press: With much of the West either "abnormally dry" or in drought conditions, no-till farming advocates say that method could be a way to better utilize the water that's available.

No-till farming — also called direct-seed farming — is just what it sounds like, growing crops without tilling the soil.

In contrast to traditional farming methods, no-till leaves all of the crop residue — the part of the plant not harvested — on the surface instead of plowed under. The root systems of the plants remain intact, providing soil stability, according to Donald Wysocki, a soil scientist at Oregon State University Extension in Pendleton, Ore.

The crop residue also creates a layer of organic matter that protects the soil from drying out, Stuart Wuest, a soil scientist at the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Pendleton, said.

The organic matter also makes it easier for the water to penetrate the surface of the soil. With traditional tillage practices that leave no crop residue on the field, the soil develops a crust layer after it has been rained on several times, making it hard for water to penetrate, according to Wuest.

In a no-till field, the residue prevents the soil from developing a crust.

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Grants

223, Mini Education, and District Development Grants

The Fiscal Year 2019 deadlines for the 223, Mini-Education, and District Development grants are: **July 26, 2018, October 25, 2018, January 17, 2019, April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

CD Water Projects Grants

The Sweet Grass Conservation District is announcing a second round of funding for water-related projects. The maximum grant is \$21,000 and a new deadline of **August 6th** has been set. If you have any questions, contact Guelda at 932-5160 x 101.

Western States WUI Grants

This program supports the following activities on private and state lands: hazardous fuel reduction; fire-adapted ecosystem restoration; homeowner information and education; assessment and planning; monitoring through community and landowner action. **Closes August 10.** [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Level 1 Noxious Weed Management Certification

This is the first workshop in a 3-part series that provides information on weed identification, biology, ecology, and integrated management. Bozeman, **September 11-13.** [More Info](#)

Montana Range Tour

Please join us for the 2018 Montana Range Tour hosted by the Richland and Roosevelt Conservation Districts. This year's tour will not be one to miss, ranching in oil country, floods, fire, birds, and cover crops. **September 5 & 6**, Sidney [Registration](#). For more info contact Stacey Barta, sbarta@mt.gov.

NACD Soil Health Webinar

The next edition of NACD Soil Health webinar series will cover organic production with Dr. Erin Silva. **July 17, noon Eastern.** [Connect to the webinar](#)

Jobs

Montana Rangelands Partnership Range Tech

MRP is seeking a full-time Range Technician position to conduct range planning and monitoring activities related to the Partnership. This position will be based out of Lewistown. Duties include working with ranchers to help them develop and refine their grazing management plans and rangeland monitoring practices and working with Partnership leadership and partners to streamline monitoring protocols across private and public lands. Closes **July 13.** [More Info](#)

Sustainable Ranching Initiative Program Associate

Since 2011, WWF's Sustainable Ranching Initiative (SRI) has been working to establish a productive dialogue between conservation interests and the ranching community. The Program Associate works to support program goals and objectives through conducting research and analysis, organizing information and materials, drafting reports, proposals and presentations, and assisting with project management, policy development and analysis. Bozeman. [More Info](#)

NOTICE

MACD Resolutions and proposed bylaw changes due September 1

Per MACD bylaws, resolutions to be considered at the annual MACD convention in November must be passed by a local conservation district and submitted to the MACD office by **September 1**. This insures that all districts are able to consider the resolution at their regular monthly meeting before deciding how to vote on the resolution at Area Meetings and at Convention.

If your district is considering submitting a resolution or bylaw change this year, your July and August meetings are a great time to discuss wording and intent.

If you'd like to see what resolutions have passed in previous years, our new website has a great Resolutions Library. Head to macdnet.org/resolutions-library to check it out.

Coming Up

July

- 9 MACD Board Conference Call
- 11-12 River Rendezvous, Great Falls
- 13 Water Pollution Control Advisory Council Meeting
- 15-20 Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp
- 16-17 Montana Floodplain Resource Seminar
- 17 NACD Soil Health Webinar: Organic Production
- 19 Fallon County Weed Pull & Youth Range Contest
- 23 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call
- 26 223, Mini Education, and District Development Grants Deadline

August

- 1-5 Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology Field Course

Have an event to share?
Visit macdnet.org/calendar to add your event to our list!

Supervisor & Employee of the Year Nominations Open

Nominations are now open for MACD Supervisor of the Year and Employee of the Year awards. If you know someone who goes above and beyond in their work for local conservation districts, please consider nominating them. Contact Carie Hess (petroleumcd@macdnet.org) for nomination forms.

Monthly Weed Post: Analyzing control methods for Canada Thistle

When it comes to herbicide vs other methods, it's best to do both.

From MSU Extension Monthly Weed Post

Introduction: Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is the most frequently listed noxious weed in the U.S. and Canada and has been on Montana's noxious weed list since 1895.

There has been a lot of research conducted about controlling Canada thistle, but it remains a management challenge. In order to identify best management strategies and direct future research, we conducted a meta-analysis which can be thought of as "research about research."

Methods: We conducted a literature search and identified 1,819 articles about Canada thistle, but only 45 articles qualified for inclusion in our analysis on management in perennial systems (rangelands, natural areas, etc.). We gathered results from those 45 previously-published studies and pooled them together for collective analysis.

Results: Biocontrol (insects or pathogens), mowing, herbicide, and herbicide integrated with one or more management techniques were all effective.

Competition (seeding desirable species to compete with Canada thistle) had no effect on Canada thistle.

While herbicide was the most frequently studied management technique, we found integrating different strategies with herbicide was more effective than applying herbicide alone. Examples of strategies integrated with herbicides included burning, competition, mowing, and soil disturbance.

Additionally, mowing alone was as effective as herbicide. Non-chemical techniques and integrated weed management were under-studied and warrant future research and experimentation for Canada thistle control.

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