

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Bill Milton honored by Western Landowners for conservation work

October 10: Western Landowners Alliance was delighted to publicly recognize Montana resident Bill Milton with the first annual "Lands and Livelihoods Award" for his exceptional contributions to the stewardship and conservation of working lands throughout Montana.

The award was created to recognize an owner or manager of working lands who has made exceptional contributions as a citizen in sustaining working lands, connected landscapes and native species. The award is given to recognize exceptional vision in helping to create, as Wallace Stegner once said, "a society to match the scenery."

Before a crowd consisting largely of leaders in agriculture and conservation last night, WLA Associate Director Cole Mannix praised Milton for his lifelong commitment to caring for land and community. Over the last 40 years, Milton has worked with a number of organizations. He was a founding board member of the Montana Land Resilience and continues to participate in—and sometimes facilitate—many working groups in central Montana, including the Musselshell Watershed Coalition, the Winnet ACES, the CMR Community Working Group, and the Musselshell Valley Community Foundation. Milton has a particular interest in helping ranchers and local communities figure out how to monitor the health of the working landscapes and communities.



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Flathead Forest proposes 70,000 acre restoration, resilience project

The Flathead National Forest is pitching a new project in northwestern Montana's Swan Valley that it says would benefit forests, streams and human communities.

And it's a big project, says Flathead National Forest Supervisor Chip Weber.

"In the past, we've typically done projects where maybe we're treating 3,000 or 4,000 acres," Weber says. "Here we're looking at a much larger land base and a much longer time period. And treating more acres, and treating more waterways, roads, etc. So that comprehensive approach allows a cumulative positive effect across a landscape instead of an individual watershed."

The project has a big name to go with its big footprint: The 'Mid Swan Landscape Restoration and Wildland Urban Fuels Reduction Project.' It would cover some 70,000 acres of forest stretching from just south of Swan Lake down to Condon. That's almost 30 percent of that area's landscape.

"What we're looking to do is foster the development of a resilient landscape. Really restore a lot of what has been the effect of fire exclusion for the most part – that's the broadest effect – and then also to restore some effects of past treatments – roading, harvest, those kinds of things," Weber says.

Wyoming oil and gas auction in sage grouse habitat delayed

Casper Star Tribune: In deference to Wyoming's most famous bird, the Bureau of Land Management will delay leasing the majority of the land proposed for an upcoming oil and gas auction in Wyoming until early next year.

The Bureau of Land Management is pulling about 778,000 acres of land from its December lease sale following an Idaho court decision that questioned whether the Trump administration's accelerated pace for leasing oil and gas gives the public enough time to review industry activity where sage grouse live — both the bird's most crucial areas and its general habitat.

That leaves just three parcels of federal land up for auction in Wyoming.

Leasing has taken off under the Trump administration. The BLM has tried to shorten timelines and cut red tape for development on federal land in a victory for industry at a time when crude pricing is improving. But the change has not been missed by environmental

groups, which accuse the administration of disregarding its own rules and ignoring the multi-use edict of public land. In Wyoming this discord has focused at times on sage grouse, given the bird's presence in potential oil and gas areas and the multilayered protections that exist for the bird.

Sage grouse were nearly listed as an endangered species three years ago due to habitat and population losses. Wyoming has been a main player in building strategies to balance the bird's remaining habitat with interests like mineral development and ranching. An endangered species designation for sage grouse could deal a significant blow to Wyoming's fossil fuel economy.

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Missoula forestry tour emphasizes collaboration in reducing wildfire risk

The Missoula Current: In a nation that is increasingly divided, it appears there's still at least one thing that can bring neighbors, nonprofit groups, and state and federal agencies together in Montana: wildfires.

That was evident on Thursday when about 40 interested citizens and employees of the U.S. Forest Service, the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and a smattering of lumber companies spent the afternoon touring three forest projects intended to reduce the risk of wildfire.

Sponsored by the Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce, the tour is an annual event, but this year's focus was a little different. In addition to jobs and the local economy, talk often turned to community, collaboration and coming together to reduce the amount of fuel that's accumulated in forests, especially near residential areas.

Western forests evolved to burn and the drought and higher temperatures brought on by climate change only increase the chance that a fire will start, and people need to accept that fact and be better prepared.

DNRC Director John Tubbs summed it up as he addressed the group at the end of the tour. "There isn't a one-agency approach to managing Montana's forestlands, rangelands and its state." [READ MORE](#)



Opinion: Conservation needs Farm Bill compromise

By Brent Van Dyke, President of the National Association of Conservation Districts

This summer, the U.S. House and Senate passed their versions of the 2018 Farm Bill. With the Sept. 30 expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill, the pressure is on to pass a finished product by the end of this year for farmers, ranchers and consumers. Everyone has a stake in the farm bill and the support it provides for not only a safe, affordable and nutritious food supply, but for the conservation benefits the bill provides for cleaner water and healthier soils. As conferees continue to meet and work out a compromise between their versions of the farm bill, Congress must ensure the locally-led conservation delivery system will continue to thrive in the final product.

As president of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and a farmer and rancher in Eastern New Mexico, I've experienced firsthand the benefits and importance of the voluntary, incentive-based conservation model. Conservation

districts were created in the 1930s during the pinnacle of the Dust Bowl to educate landowners and promote improved conservation practices at the local level. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach to conservation, the locally-led delivery system enables conservation districts along with federal and state government partners to implement locally-based solutions.

Farm bill conservation programs are successful when local stakeholders have a say in what natural resource concerns need to be addressed. Resource concerns look different across this nation. While water quality may be important in the Chesapeake Bay, water quantity may be the focus out West. That's why determining those unique resource concerns at the local level is so important. Unfortunately, this locally-led model could be undermined if certain issues are not addressed in the final farm bill conference report.

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Oil company restores old gas field for sage grouse

Montana Untamed: An expired southeastern Montana natural gas field established in the 1980s on federal land is being dismantled, graded and seeded to once again provide habitat for greater sage grouse and other wildlife.

"This is the first project in the state to do that, create habitat," said Todd Yeager, manager of the Bureau of Land Management's Miles City Field Office.

The remediation work is being done to offset the impacts of a proposed 110-mile-long CO2 pipeline that Denbury Resources will begin constructing in Eastern

Montana this spring. The Texas-based company is the first to take the initiative and propose a restoration project, as well as purchase a 4,400-acre conservation easement on Carter County's Ringling Ranch, to offset the impacts of its pipeline project.

"Those two things more than offset the impacts of the pipeline," said Carolyn Sime, manager of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

As a result, the mitigation plan was approved in September by the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team. [READ MORE](#)

Yellowstone Valley Audubon starts baling twine recycling project

The Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society recently informed us that they have received funding to move ahead on an innovative project to collect and recycle baling twine. Polypropylene baling twine can be deadly to both Osprey nestlings and adults, which bring it to the nests where the birds get entangled. Without human intervention, the birds most certainly would die. Along the Yellowstone River, studies show 2 – 4% of nestlings become entangled each year.

The project will involve establishing a Twine Collection Site where twine will be baled and stored until there is enough to fill a semi-trailer. The twine will be shipped to a twine recycling facility in Minnesota or Utah. While this is

not a money-making project, recycling companies have assured the group that if the twine is fairly clean and the semi-trailer shipment of twine is full, the payment for the twine should be enough to reimburse the loading and shipping costs.

Recently YVAS received sufficient funding that will allow them to lease two-acres on State Trust Land near Laurel, purchase and build the twine/equipment storage shed, and buy a box baler and other needed equipment. They hope to have the Twine Collection Site ready to accept twine from the public by late spring or early summer of 2019.

[More Info](#)

No-till champion tests method in poorly drained soils

Successful Farming: When agronomist Jason Cavadini began as assistant superintendent of the University of Wisconsin Marshfield Agricultural Research Station five years ago, he got glazed looks from farmers at his mention of trying no-till at the station.

No-till would never work, they said.

"I knew they had more experience with the soil than I did, and so I knew there was good reason for what they believed," he says. "But we're a research station. If we just demonstrate the status quo without trying something else, then what's our purpose for being here?"

Cavadini had grown up on a no-till farm in western Wisconsin, and he'd studied no-till and cover crops as a graduate student. The soil conditions he found at Marshfield, in the central part of the state, threw him a curve ball, causing him to consider local farmers' bias against no-till.

"The soil here is wet – poorly drained," he says. "We have 8 to 12 inches of silt loam soil at the surface, and below that it changes to dense clay."

The poorly drained soils combined with a short growing season have historically caused farmers to till the soil to promote drying and warming of the seedbed. Without it, the thinking is that yields would suffer. During his first year at the station, Cavadini followed suit.

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Waterfowl hunters can help prevent the spread of AIS

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks reminds waterfowl hunters that they can help prevent aquatic invasive species from infesting Montana's wetlands, rivers and lakes.

The three steps of Clean, Drain, Dry greatly minimize the risk of spreading invasive species. Waterfowl hunters use gear that should be inspected before hunting in a new area.

Waterfowl hunters should:

- Clean aquatic plants, animals, and mud from boat, trailer, waders, boots, decoys, decoy lines, and push poles.

- Drain water from decoys, boats, motors, and other hunting equipment.
- Brush hunting dogs and rinse off muddy paws.
- Never move plants from one body of water to another. When using vegetation to construct blinds or conceal duck boats, use only what is available in the immediate hunting area.

Many inspection stations are closed for the season, but FWP offers inspections at all FWP area and regional offices. For more information or to find an inspection station, visit CleanDrainDryMT.com.

National Conservation Foundation Leadership Campaign **from Brent Van Dyke, NACD President**

Dear Conservation Leaders,

I've been involved in agriculture my whole life, but my career in conservation began when I realized at an early age that production agriculture couldn't be sustainable without preserving the nation's natural resources.

However, as I look out during NACD meetings, I am stricken with reality that it's time to pass the torch. If we go away, who is going to tell our story? We're an older generation, and the average age of American producers continues to get older. It is so crucial we get the next generation to understand the significance of what we do

as a national association and get them involved. It's our responsibility to invest in future leaders and get them excited about carrying on this legacy.

That's why earlier this month, the National Conservation Foundation (NCF), in partnership with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), launched the Next Generation Leadership Campaign to support the next generation of conservation leaders. Identifying and aiding these individuals will allow the conservation mission to live on through the next generation of conservation leaders.

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Comments sought on proposed Greater Sage-Grouse Stewardship Act rules

The Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team is seeking public comment on proposed rules for implementation of portions of the Greater Sage-Grouse Stewardship Act. The Act was passed by the 2015 Montana Legislature. Proposed rules address mitigation and Stewardship Fund grants.

"The purpose of mitigation is to offset the impacts of development in sage grouse habitats so that Montana can maintain enough habitat to support viable sage grouse populations in the future," said Carolyn Sime, Sage Grouse Conservation Program Manager. "Mitigation is a central component of Montana's Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy to balance development with conservation," she said. The overall approach and scientific methods were developed through a two-year stakeholder effort.

The proposed mitigation rules designate the habitat quantification tool and the accompanying policy for how development impacts and conservation project benefits will be measured, and direct the implementation of two, more detailed documents.

The proposed rules also outline the process for how the Oversight Team will update the habitat quantification tool and mitigation policies through adaptive management in the future.

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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: **January 17, 2019, April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

Urban & Community Forestry Program Development grants

Grants providing local governments funds to conduct tree inventories, develop an Urban Forest Management Plan, write a Tree Ordinance, or conduct an innovative urban forestry project. Awards range from \$2,000 to \$15,000; 100% Match is required. Due **November 9**. [More Info](#)

Watershed Management Grant Program

This DNRC program provides financial support for the development and implementation of locally led watershed related planning and capacity building activities that conserve, develop, improve or preserve state water resources. Entities are allowed to receive up to \$20,000 per biennium. Deadline **November 15**. [More Info](#)

Aquatic Invasive Species Grants

The Montana DNRC offers state-funded grants for the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species. Up to \$15,000 for most projects, deadline **December 3**. [More Info](#)

Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grants

Grants up to \$75,000 are available for innovative noxious weed research projects, educational projects, and local cooperative cost-share projects. Funding is available for private landowners, local governments, researchers, and educators who are solving noxious weed problems in Montana. Application deadline is **January 6th, 2019**. [More Info](#)

BoR Cooperative Watershed Management Grants

Qualified watershed groups may apply for up to \$300,000 for collaborative, on-the-ground watershed management projects related to ecological resilience, water quality, and water supply. Deadline **January 30, 2019**. [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Soil Acidity Roundtable Discussion

Producers, Educators and Agri businesses are invited to attend a soil acidity round table discussion on **November 7** from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Community Bible Center located at 1600 Main in Fort Benton. All present will have the opportunity to share what they have learned about soil acidity and soil acidity management in 2018. Chouteau County Conservation District will provide coffee and cookies.

Noxious Weed Education Summit

MWCA is hosting a summit to improve participants' Noxious Weed Education programs. Billings, **November 7 & 8**. [More Info](#)

Soil Moisture Workshops

Two full-day workshops focusing on soil moisture measurement, technologies, and applications supporting agricultural management and drought resilience. Hosted by the Montana Climate Office, **Nov. 7** at Lubrecht Experimental Forest or **Nov. 9** in Columbus. [More Info](#)

Water Pollution Control Advisory Council Meeting

The Water Pollution Control Advisory Council plays an important role in formulating Montana's water quality policy. The next meeting will be **November 9** in Room 111 of the Metcalf Building in Helena. [More Info](#)

Noxious Weed Grant Writing Workshop

Free interactive workshop that covers all aspects of writing a Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant and what to do after a project has been awarded. Agenda includes herbicide selection, budgeting, completing an environmental assessment, and monitoring progress with EDDMapS West/Pro. **November 13th, 2018** in Lewistown. RSVP to jreimer@mt.gov.

Coming Up

November

- 7 Soil Moisture Workshop, Lubrecht Experimental Forest
- Soil Acidity Roundtable, Fort Benton
- 7-8 Noxious Weed Education Summit
- 9 Soil Moisture Workshop, Columbus
- Water Pollution Control Advisory Council meeting, Helena
- 13-15 MACD 77th Annual Convention, Billings**
- 13 Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant Writing Workshop
- 15-16 Montana Invasive Species Summit, Helena

Have an event to share?
Please email tmc@macdnet.org with details.

Montana Invasive Species Summit

The Summit will be a forum to review law review findings, suggest action, provide the latest science, and develop recommendations to address invasive species regulatory issues. **November 15-16**, Helena. [More Info](#)

Montana Lakes Conference

The Montana Lakes Conference will gather diverse resource professionals to exchange information, scientific advancements, and management strategies that promote clean and healthy lake and reservoir ecosystems. Whitefish, **March 13-15 2019**. Hosted by the Whitefish Lake Institute, sponsored by DNRC, Flathead CD. [More Info](#)

Ranching for Rivers program open for applications

The Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM) is seeking applications for Ranching for Rivers – a cost-share program to help rancher with riparian pasture fencing projects. SWCDM will offer up to 50% cost-share to landowners operating next to rivers and creeks to voluntarily construct fences and/or other infrastructure (crossings, water gaps, off-stream water, etc.) that enable them to better manage the riparian resources on their land.

SWCDM has obtained a grant through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) federal Clean Water Act Section 319 program to provide this funding. This funding is limited to those landowners along rivers or streams included in a DEQ-approved Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP).

Operation benefits of the program include improved management flexibility, the ability to use livestock grazing to manage weeds, increase usage of upland range habitat, and decreased maintenance costs of fencing and off-stream water resources. Natural resource benefits include improved riparian and vegetation habitat, improved water quality and quantity, improved wildlife and fishery habitat, and improved access for wildlife to stream areas.

This cost-share is funded on a reimbursement basis only and will cover materials, labor, and equipment use. Applications will be reviewed by a funding recommendation panel that includes individuals from a range of organizations.

The Call for Applications began on October 30, 2018. Applications will be accepted until funding is expended. For more information on the Ranching for Rivers program and to download an application form, please visit www.swcdm.org or contact: Jessica Makus, SWCDM Programs Manager, at jessica@macdnet.org or 406-443-5711.