

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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## MACD meets for annual Spring Board Meeting

Board members started on Monday with continued work on the Strategic Plan, which was started in February. This plan sets the mission and vision for MACD and prioritizes actions to guide MACD's services to and relationship with members. By Wednesday, the board finalized and approved actions for year one of the strategic plan and MACD staff will be putting the plan together in the coming weeks to release to members.

On Tuesday the board, staff, partners, and other meeting attendees gathered for a dinner and social hour at the Ten Mile Brewery in Helena. This annual event is always a great time to network and connect with the members of our conservation community.

On Wednesday the board wrapped up some administrative tasks, and then heard reports from our partners. A whole host of acronyms shared their activities: DNRC, NRCS, NACD, MRCD, YRCD, MSCA, DEQ, and Montana Department of Agriculture. We'd like to thank all of the partners who attended and are committed to cooperative conservation.

This newsletter is made possible by a grant from DNRC.

A more detailed summary of this week's Spring Board Meeting will be posted to MACD's website next week.



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## Butte finally sees plan for Superfund cleanup

*The Montana Standard:* After three decades of incremental cleanup work, a sprawling blueprint to “get ‘er done” has landed before the residents of Butte.

While some things could still change — the Environmental Protection Agency has been careful to refer to the plan as “conceptual” — the proposal as it’s been laid out over the last week signals the wide-ranging cleanup that could begin as early as next spring.

Dan Villa, state budget director, talked during the public meetings last Wednesday about what this proposed remedy really means for Butte.

“It’s time to ask as a community, ‘What’s next?’ It’s time to get the Superfund stigma off all of our backs,” Villa said Wednesday before a crowd of about 100 at Montana Tech. “What will Butte be when Superfund is no longer holding us back?”

From rerouting about 2,000 feet of Silver Bow Creek to excavating around 600,000 cubic yards of old mine and smelter waste to tackling the issue of storm water through a variety of remedies, the sketched-out arrangement between all the parties and agencies is, if nothing else, comprehensive, complex, and quite simply big.

[READ MORE](#)

## First Round of Treaty talks wrap up on Columbia River

*Flathead Beacon:* The first two days of negotiations on modernizing the Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada wrapped up last week as the neighboring countries worked to reconfigure a model for sharing natural resources for flood management, hydropower operations and conservation.

During the two days of talks in Washington, D.C., the U.S. and Canadian negotiators discussed objectives and reaffirmed the spirit of cooperation between the two countries.

The U.S. negotiation team included representatives of the Interior Department, the State Department, the Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

On a conference call with reporters June 1, senior officials

with the State Department defined the U.S. objectives as “careful management of flood risk, ensuring a reliable and economical power supply, and better addressing ecosystem concerns in a modernized treaty regime.”

“That was the scope, and it’s as far as I want to go in terms of scope,” one senior official said, adding that the talks were “very productive.”

The Columbia River Treaty is a half-century-old accord that mainly governs hydropower and flood-control operations along the 1,200-mile Columbia River. Set to expire in 2024, the deal needs to be updated to address modern-day concerns, like environmental protections, while taking into consideration the wants and needs of scores of stakeholders.

[READ MORE](#)

## Try togetherness: Study promotes cooperative weed management to curb herbicide resistance

*Corn & Soybean Digest:* In the fight against herbicide resistance, farmers are working with a shrinking toolkit. Waterhemp, a weedy nemesis of corn and soybean farmers, has developed resistance to multiple herbicide modes of action, often in the same plant. Even farmers using the latest recommendations for tank mixtures are fighting an uphill battle, with long-distance movement of pollen and seeds bringing the potential for new types of resistance into their fields each year.

In a study released this week, scientists at the University of Illinois and USDA's Agricultural Research Service offer a new tool that is not only highly effective, it's free. All it costs is a conversation.

"I think we're at a point now where farmers are looking for new tools. This tool is free, but it requires that people talk to each other and work together as opposed to doing everything on their own," says Adam Davis, research ecologist with USDA-ARS and adjunct professor in the Department of Crop Sciences at U of I.

The tool is cooperative weed management – in other words, making decisions about how to manage herbicide-resistant weeds in cooperation with neighboring farms. The more farms working together, and the larger area covered, the better. [READ MORE](#)



## Starter guide for healing degraded meadows using hand built structures

*Sage Grouse Initiative:* New NRCS Technical Note provides a case study from Colorado's Gunnison Basin to help partners replicate cost-effective watershed restoration techniques

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Colorado just released a new technical note that explains how to use relatively simple, cost-effective structures to improve riparian areas and wet meadows on sagebrush rangelands.

Across the West, many small streams and meadows have been degraded by erosion and past land use activities, resulting in deep gullies and lowered water tables. Degraded wet areas are less able to store water throughout the year, making rangelands more susceptible to droughts or floods—and leaving wildlife and agricultural operations high and dry.

This new NRCS Technical Note is geared toward resource managers looking for relatively simple solutions for addressing shallow headcuts or small gullies impacting meadows and drainages in sagebrush rangelands. It's called Hand-Built Structures for Restoring Degraded Meadows in Sagebrush Rangelands: Examples and lessons learned from the Upper Gunnison River Basin, Colorado.

"We teamed up with partners in Colorado's Gunnison Basin to walk readers through the process of planning and installing a suite of low-tech, affordable structures that have been applied successfully to improve riparian and meadow function and boost productivity for livestock and wildlife," says Jeremy Maestas, an ecologist with the USDA-NRCS.

[READ MORE](#)



## NACD Reacts To Senate Ag Committee's Farm Bill Draft

June 12: Today, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) sent a letter to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry outlining the organization's reaction to The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 released on Friday.

The letter applauds Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS), Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Members of the committee for the due diligence they demonstrated in drafting their version of the 2018 Farm Bill. Despite budgetary constraints and competing priorities, this bill provides investments into conservation by maintaining overall Conservation Title funding levels. Additionally, the bill increases the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) while not taking funds from other conservation programs and allows increased grazing on CRP acreage. However, the Senate bill includes language

that shifts funding from working lands programs to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), while at the same time authorizing a grant program that would erode the current conservation system with its appropriate checks and balances.

"We commend the Senate Agriculture Committee for their support for conservation," NACD President Brent Van Dyke said. "Maintaining overall conservation title funding was a priority of NACD, and we were pleased to see strong funding levels to ensure conservation continues to be delivered at the local level. NACD will continue to work with the committee to ensure this bill encompasses the strongest support possible for working lands conservation programs and improves the locally-led delivery of programs like RCPP."

[READ THE LETTER](#)

## Blackfeet Nation, Interior Department Implement Water Compact

*MTPR:* Leaders from the Blackfeet Nation and U.S. Interior Department signed documents Tuesday implementing a \$471 million settlement over water rights claims.

The Blackfeet Tribal Water Compact reserves 95 percent of water on the reservation for the tribe and compels the federal government to pay for drinking water and irrigation projects.

Tribal Chairman Harry Barnes called

it a long-fought battle at a signing event with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke in Washington, D.C.

"Look forward to a brighter future for our children, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren," Barnes said in an interview. "This is going to last a lifetime."

Negotiations began in the 1980s but weren't finalized until 2007.

[READ MORE](#)

## How logging and fire suppression created an epidemic of trees

*Billings Gazette:* Columbus fire chief Rich Cowger clicked through slides showing homes torched in a wildfire.

"We think, 'Well, in the town of Columbus, are we safe?'" he said. "Relatively speaking, (yes). Could we have something that happened like in California last year? In the right conditions, (yes)."

Cowger was referring to blazes like one that destroyed more than 1,000 structures — in December. It was an example of fires that spread faster, burn hotter and catch sooner or later in the year.

A presentation at the Columbus fire station Monday talked about why fires have gotten worse and will continue to worsen.

Cowger brought that conversation to Columbus' context. Large swaths of Montana are in an area called the Wildfire Urban Interface, where homes encroach on fire-prone areas, including in much of Yellowstone County. Cowger also talked about what homeowners can do to protect themselves in a new era of wildfires and how policy changes could help that — while acknowledging that it's not easy to get everyone on board.

"We know everybody's got some different views on what that looks like," he said.

[READ MORE](#)

## Richland County CD holds Ladies Day on the Range

Richland County Conservation District held their 2nd annual Ladies Night on the Range. We travel out north of Sidney to the Sioux Pass area on the Bar JV Angus Ranch (Jim and Loretta Vitt and Families).

We started the afternoon doing some Range Clipping with the assistance of Jamie Selting, NRCS District Conservationist for the Sidney Field Office and Cheryl Schuldt, SWCDM Range Specialist from Miles City.

Unfortunately the Vitt's were hit with a major hail storm on May 31 st , 2018 so the vegetation on the range was affected. After clipping and a short walk around the pasture we went back inside to figure our stocking rates. Math is always a big hit at every event!

Brandi Skone, FWP non game biologist from Miles City explained to the group about the importance of rangeland for our prairie song birds.

Staff from NRCS, FWP and the Conservation District gave updates on their various programs and deadlines.

Loretta Vitt shared her artistic talents with the group and everyone painted a bird on a rock.

Supper was cooked by the Joe Lyseng and Dave Haverkamp, NRCS staff and Jeff Nielson, FSA staff. We would like to thank everyone who made our 2 nd Annual ladies Night on the Range a big success.

## Ninemile Creek, straightened by gold miners, restored by humans and beavers

*Editor's Note: Paul Parson, featured in this story, is currently a supervisor for Missoula Conservation District. Just one more example of CD people doing tremendous work.*

*Helena IR: NINEMILE — On what he called "a scenic death march through the bomb zone," Paul Parson cheerfully pointed out how looks can deceive in the stream restoration business.*

The results of some million-dollar-a-mile geoengineering looked suspiciously like a toddler was at the controls of the bulldozer. Every tree for 50 feet on either side of the little creek was knocked over. Scraggly willow shoots poked out of No-Man's-Land rock piles. Weird reddish-orange scum floated on stranded ponds.

"When I saw that, I panicked," said Parson, who oversaw the restoration project for Trout Unlimited.

The project was supposed to restore 7,000 feet of stream bed that had been forced into an

artificial channel by gold miners a century before. He called a consultant, certain that mine waste was leaking into the watercourse intended to host trout. She informed him that no, it was a kind of bacteria that only grows in places returning to natural conditions.

For much of the early 20th Century, this creek drainage west of Missoula crawled with gold miners using pressure hoses and dredging machines to gouge their way 20 feet down to the bed of Glacial Lake Missoula, where deposits of raw gold had accumulated.

They moved millions of cubic yards of gravel and rock into long tailing piles, raising parts of the valley floor 15 feet above its original level. Meanwhile the creek had its curves ironed out. The resulting straight stream bed had no floodplain to slow it down, and eroded down another 10 feet below its pre-mining elevation.

[READ MORE](#)



## 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](#)

### Ranching For Rivers Program Applications

SWCDM is seeking applications for Ranching for Rivers – a cost-share program to help rancher with riparian pasture fencing projects. In partnership with the MRDC, SWCDM will offer up to 50% cost-share to landowners to voluntarily construct fences and/or other infrastructure that enable them to better manage the riparian resources on their land. Applications accepted on rolling basis, the first applications will be reviewed **June 15**. [More Info](#)

### Community Forest & Open Space Grant

This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forest land from a willing seller. **June 29** [More Info](#)

### 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 an a new deadline of

**August 6th** has been set. If you have any questions, contact Guelda at 932-5160 x 101.

## Events, etc

### Xerces Beneficial Insect Workshop

Join Lake County CD on Tuesday, **June 19th** at the Leon Hall in Charlo from 9 am-4 pm to learn how to support native beneficial insects – predators and parasitoids of pests – in your farm, orchard, or garden! Course fee \$25. [More Info](#)

### Wetland Rendezvous

The purpose of this gathering is to spend some quality time in the field exploring springs and wetlands with other wetland scientists and learn about new and innovative ways to inventory, monitor, and assess these ecosystems. Hosted by Montana Wetland Council. Lincoln, MT, **June 26-28**. [More Info](#)

### Soil Acidity Management Field Day

MSU Central Agricultural Research Center (CARC) and MSU Extension will be hosting a field day on the Highwood Bench on Wednesday, **June 20**. The field day will begin with a tour of the CARC cereal, pea and canola plots, which have been seeded in low pH soil to determine tolerance to soil acidity. [More Info](#)

### Ranching for Profit with Dave Pratt

The Ranchers Stewardship Alliance is hosting three standalone seminars on ranching for profit with Dave Pratt. Attend one or all, **June 23** in Malta. [More Info](#)

### Gallatin Ventenata Field Tour

Gallatin County is hosting a ventenata tour on Tuesday, **June 26**, starting at 3:00 p.m. We will visit numerous sites in Gallatin County that have been invaded by the winter annual grass Ventenata dubia. Topics will include ventenata identification, biology and ecology, and management. [More Info](#)

### 2018 River Rendezvous

Please join us on **July 11th and 12th** for the 2018 River Rendezvous hosted by the Cascade Conservation District and the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council. Contact Rachel Frost 406-454-0056, or Tenlee Atchison 406.727.3603 x125 for more information.

## ETC

### Montana AWRA Call for Sponsors / Exhibitors

The 35th Annual MT AWRA Conference will be October 17 - 19 in West Yellowstone, Montana. We invite you to support a community of nearly 200 scientists, natural resource managers, students, and guests at the Annual Montana AWRA conference. [More Info](#)



## Coming Up

### June

- 15 Connecting Soil Health with Productivity, Plevna
- 16 RC Mudder's Mud Run for Conservation, Hamilton
- 18-20 Montana Range Days, Red Lodge
- 19 Xerces Beneficial Insect Workshop
- 20 Highwood Bench Soil Acidity Field Day
- 23 Ranching for Profit with Dave Pratt, Malta
- 25 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call
- 26 CMR Working Group Mtg, Flatwillow Hall
- Gallatin Ventenata Field Tour
- Riparian Grazing Workshop Thompson Falls
- 27 Riparian Grazing Workshop Helena
- 28 Riparian Grazing Workshop Deer Lodge

**Have an event to share?**  
Visit [macdnet.org/calendar](http://macdnet.org/calendar) to add your event to our list!

## 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, Montana. Principal duties include working one-on-one with ranchers to help them develop and refine their grazing management plans and rangeland monitoring practices; working with Partnership leadership and partners to streamline monitoring protocols across private and public lands; and provide outreach to ranchers about available range conservation programs. Closes **June 29**. [More Info](#)

### Executive Director Ranchers Stewardship Alliance

This is a new full-time staff position assigned to further the growth, goals and objectives of the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance (RSA). Based in Malta, MT; closes **June 29**. [More Info](#)

## RIPARIAN GRAZING WORKSHOPS

FEATURING SANDY WYMAN

Sandy is a retired BLM Riparian & Rangeland Management Specialist, National Riparian Service Team 2002-2018 and NRCS for 15 years. She has worked throughout the west providing coaching and training in conflict management, facilitation, riparian assessment, restoration, monitoring, and adaptive grazing management.

Learn how to effectively manage riparian grazing areas. Workshops will include a morning session with speakers, catered lunch, and a field tour in the afternoon.

JUNE 26 THOMPSON FALLS

JUNE 27 HELENA

JUNE 28 DEER LODGE

**\$15 pre-registration / \$20 at the door**

Hosted by SWCDM, MRCDC, and DNRC Rangeland Resources Committee

➡ Visit [www.swcdm.org](http://www.swcdm.org) for more information and to register. ⬅