

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Administrators, partners attend digital atlas training in Helena

This month SWCDM coordinated an awesome training on digital mapping tools for conservation districts.

The State Library showed participants how to use its free Digital Atlas mapping application, and how to access the wide range of datasets available for free to the public. In the afternoon, participants were guided through an introduction to GIS software.

These programs are very useful for Conservation Districts in a variety of ways. Participants expressed interest in using the mapping applications for grant proposals, for locating and gathering historical data for 310 permits, and watershed planning, among many other possibilities.

If you missed the training but are interested in exploring Digital Atlas, we've posted the training materials and resources on the SWCDM website at <http://swcdm.org/digital-atlas-training-materials/>. A special thanks to Montana State Library for putting on the workshop and Jessica Makus, SWCDM Program Manager, for coordinating this training event.



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Tester, Daines advocate for Land and Water Conservation Fund ahead of expiration

Helena IR, June 20: The Land and Water Conservation Fund will expire in 100 days without congressional support, and on Wednesday Montana's senators joined a bipartisan rally in Washington, D.C., encouraging their fellow lawmakers to act.

EPA, CORPS will send new Waters of the US rule to OBM

The Hill, June 15: The Trump administration took a major step Friday toward rewriting an Obama administration water pollution rule in a more industry-friendly way.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers on Friday sent their proposal to redefine "Waters of the United States" to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review. It is the final step before the agencies can release the proposal for public comment.

The Waters of the United States rule, also dubbed WOTUS, defines which bodies of water are subject to federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act.

The Obama rule, written in 2015 and known as the Clean Water Rule, was highly controversial.

It was intended to clarify that small waterways like ponds and headwaters can be protected. But agriculture, developers and other industries complained that

it was too far-reaching and would subject huge swaths of land to federal oversight.

"Farmers, ranchers, landowners, and other stakeholders are counting on EPA to listen to their input when it comes to defining 'waters of the United States,'" EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a statement.

"Today, we are taking an important step toward issuing a new WOTUS definition and answering President Trump's call to ensure that our waters are kept free from pollution, while promoting economic growth, minimizing regulatory uncertainty, and showing due regard for the roles of the federal government and the states under the statutory framework of the Clean Water Act."

Pruitt's rewrite is expected to be more industry-friendly, aligning with an executive order President Trump signed early last year. [READ MORE](#)

Using a portion of royalties from offshore oil development, LWCF funds a variety of conservation projects, including land acquisition and grants to state and local entities for everything from conservation easements to municipal parks.

While the law allows funding of up to \$900 million, that has only happened twice in the fund's 50-year history, with funding fluctuating year-to-year. Congress has funded LWCF at \$425 million for this fiscal year, but the program is set to expire Sept. 30.

Conservation and outdoor recreation interests have pushed for full funding and permanent reauthorization to add certainty to the program and invest more in conservation.

LWCF has its detractors as well, typically as land acquisition has been controversial and debate centered on growing federal land ownership in the face of mounting maintenance needs. [READ MORE](#)

MISC issues recommendations for eDNA testing

Montana DNRC: The Montana Invasive Species Council (MISC) today issued recommendations to guide the use and development of environmental DNA testing for the early detection of invasive mussels.

The recommendations address both policy development and scientific protocols for eDNA sampling, analysis, communications, and verification of test results, said MISC Chair Bryce Christiaens.

“At this time, the use of eDNA as a tool to detect the presence of mussels holds both promise and uncertainty. The technology is evolving rapidly, and invasive species managers across the West have struggled with how best to utilize or interpret test results,” Christiaens said.

MISC, in coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Flathead Lake Biological Station, assembled a panel of nationally-recognized scientists in the field of eDNA for a two-day workshop in April. Christiaens said the Council’s recommendations were developed from the input of the panel.

“This is a major step forward for mussel detection and monitoring, and not just for Montana,” he said. “We’re laying the foundation for a knowledge base that will benefit state and federal agencies and stakeholders across the country.”

[READ MORE](#)



University of Montana researcher’s new device could make detecting mussels more affordable

The Missoulian: A device built at the the University of Montana Flathead Lake Biological Station and developed by one of UM’s researchers can detect the DNA of invasive mussels from water samples.

Tom Bansak, assistant director at the station, said the DNA Tracker represents a breakthrough in science in more than one way. It’s small and affordable, he said, some \$50,000 and the size of a small suitcase, compared to \$250,000 and the heft of a chest freezer for a more traditional tracker.

“This is a new technology and a new tool in the toolbox in the fight against invasive mussels,” Bansak said Tuesday. He also said it’s an example of the contribution science makes to people’s lives. “Research can be esoteric, but this is an example of how research has real practical benefits to society.”

UM noted research Professor Cody Youngbull invented the device.

A small tube in the device sucks up water samples, and the device breaks them up into tiny droplets, each less than one-billionth of a liter in size, according to an announcement this month from UM. Then, the DNA Tracker analyzes each droplet to see if it contains the targeted “eDNA,” or environmental DNA, by comparing it to a template.

Invasive mussels spread quickly, clogging infrastructure and causing severe economic and ecological damage. Researchers note education and prevention are key to keeping mussels from spreading into the Flathead, Kootenai and Clark Fork river systems, which form the headwaters of the Columbia River and last river system in the country considered free of mussels.

[READ MORE](#)

Elections open for FSA County Committees

USDA Farm Service Agency encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants to take part in the county committee election nomination process.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision making and farm program delivery process.

A county committee is comprised of three to 11 elected members from local administrative areas

(LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. One-third of the seats on these committees are open for election each year. County committees may have an appointed advisor to further represent the local interests of underserved farmers and ranchers. Underserved producers are beginning, women and other minority farmers and ranchers and land owners and/or operators who have limited resources. Other minority groups including Native American and Alaska Natives; persons under the poverty level, and persons that have disabilities are also considered underserved.

[READ MORE](#)

Malstrom Air Force Base uses goats to control weeds

The Electric: Goats have returned to Malmstrom Air Force Base for year two of a three-year weed management project.

About 350 Spanish Boer Cross goats leaped from two livestock trailers Tuesday afternoon and raced to find the best weeds to munch on.

They started in a field they'd worked in last year and would spend maybe an hour in that patch before moving into the next area. The herd will grow in a few weeks when more goats arrive and they'll be there for about two months.

The focus is flowering weeds, particularly Canada Thistle, spotted knapweed and leafy spurge. The

goats naturally prefer the flowering plants, which are also non-native invasive species in Montana, according to Lora Soderquist, the project manager from Prescriptive Livestock Services.

The herd will be hitting all the same sites as it did last year to clean up more of those invasive weeds, disrupt the seed bank and reduce overall biomass, which also serves as wildfire prevention, Soderquist said.

After the goats left last summer, base personnel came back with about 1,000 pounds of native seeds to prevent the weeds from coming back in any bare spots.

[READ MORE](#)

Home construction doubles in areas with high wildfire risk

MTPR: A new study says the number of homes constructed in areas with high wildfire risks has doubled in western Montana since 1990, outpacing development rates in areas with low fire hazards.

Kelly Pohl is a researcher with the Bozeman-based non-profit, Headwaters Economics.

"There were more than 11,000 new homes constructed in areas with high wildfire hazard. That represents about one in eight of all new homes constructed in Western Montana," says Pohl.

A report from Headwaters Economics shows Ravalli County easily leading the pack with almost 7,000 homes built in wildfire hazard areas from 1990-2016.

Missoula County is number two with over 2,200 homes, followed by Gallatin County with 430 homes.

Kelly Pohl: We used data that was produced by the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region and they looked at a bunch of factors related to the likelihood of a fire occurring, the potential intensity of a fire if it were to occur there, and in particular how that intensity would affect structures if they were located in that location. They mapped this fire hazard across the counties in Western Montana, it's a 25-county area.

[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](#)

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

Events, etc

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.

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](#)

Water Pollution Control Advisory Council Meeting

The WPCAC advises DEQ on rulemaking and can request briefings on water quality topics throughout the state. Our next meeting is **July 13** in Helena.

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 **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](#)

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
- 23 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call
- 26 223, Mini Education, and District Development Grants Deadline

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.

MACD Poster Contest Winners

Entries into MACD's annual poster contest were judged at the Spring Board meeting. The winners from each age category (pictured here) will compete at the national NACD competition. Thank you to everyone who participated!

Winners

Top to bottom on right: K-1 winner: Halle Domek, Wibaux CD; 2-3 winner: Adino Gonzalez, Wibaux CD; 7-9 winner: Ty Curry, Pondera County CD; 10-12 winner: Rylee Tilson, Meagher County CD

Below: 4-6 winner: Lina Sturman, Lake County CD

