

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Little Beaver CD celebrates local products with Soil to Skillet event

In attempt to reach out to the greater community, Little Beaver CD is hosting a fun event this April. This is the second time they've hosted their Soil to Skillet event, which is a half day with speakers, a hands-on workshop, and culminates in a dinner featuring local food.

"It seems like the same people come to every workshop," says LBCD administrator Sarafina Claeys. "We wanted to bridge the connection to the community, and get some of the people from town, too."

They'll have five speakers on hand, including Sarah Calhoun of Red Ants Pants, Sara Hollenbeck of High Five Meats, Jim Devine of Beaver Creek Brewery, and Patti Armbrister. They'll talk about a range of topics, including soil health, local agricultural products, local food in schools, and building a local business.

At the end of the day, Claudia Krevat, author of *The Lentil Caravan*, will cook a meal for attendees featuring almost 100% local foods. "We got a lot of items donated for the event," says Claeys "everything will be local, from the brisket, to the lentils, even the butter!"

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MDA awards noxious weed trust fund grants

Montana Department of Agriculture: Counties, conservation districts, local communities, tribes, researchers and educators across Montana will have more resources in the battle against noxious weeds after the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) awarded over \$1.6 million in grants from the Noxious Weed Trust Fund.

The Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council reviewed 74 Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant applications requesting more than \$1.7 million and recommended awards totaling more than \$1.6 million for education, research, and cooperative noxious weed management projects. In total, 70 grant proposals were approved for funding awards, including 49 local cooperative projects, 10 research projects,

In addition to the \$1.6 million grant hearing awards, each of the 56 counties and 7 reservations in the state are eligible to receive \$7,500 per year, bringing the 2017 awards to more than \$2 million. A compiled list of award recipients is available at

<http://agr.mt.gov/Noxious-Weed-Trust-Fund-Grants>.

The Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant program was established by the Montana Legislature in 1985.



Big Belts are prime spot for golden eagles

From the Great Falls Tribune: More golden eagles fly through Montana's Big Belt Mountains than any other raptor migration site in the Lower 48, a new report has confirmed.

Primary observer and site supervisor Ronan Dugan, assisted by biologist Jeff Grayum, observed golden eagles Aug. 27 through Nov. 5.

They counted 2,620 golden eagles during that span.

"Our Big Belt count recorded the greatest number of golden eagles of any raptor migration site in the contiguous United States during fall 2016!" gushed a Montana Audubon report on the fall golden eagle migration issued last week.

The only other migration site where more migrating eagles were counted last fall was Mount Lorette in the Canadian Rockies in Alberta, said Steve Hoffman, the recently retired executive director of Montana Audubon, who helped to set up the observation site in Montana's Big Belt Mountains.

At Mount Lorette, 3,388 golden eagles counted.

The accessibility of the Big Belts observation station to the public makes it stand out along with the high number of golden eagles that use the flyway, Hoffman said.

It's operated by Montana Audubon, Last Chance Audubon, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

"This is a great opportunity to enjoy one of the most amazing natural spectacles in nature," Hoffman said.

Although people can hike to the area and watch raptors soaring past on powerful updrafts, it also can be reached by four-wheel drive vehicle.

From Sept. 1 to Nov. 5, an average of 7.4 golden eagles flew by every hour.

Golden eagle numbers peaked Oct. 13 when 223 birds were recorded in nine hours.

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Bridger Plant Materials Center publications available online

From Monica Pokorny, Plant Materials Specialist, Bozeman SO

Did you know the NRCS Montana-Wyoming Plant Materials Program has over 220 publications on grasses, forbs, plantings technologies, invasive plant management, and more?

We have organized Plant Materials publications in a [pdf document](#) for ease of searching for relevant materials. It is available on the updated [NRCS Montana Plant Materials](#) website.

The [National MTPMC](#) also contains additional Plant Materials publications. If you need information on a topic not written, please submit requests to [Monica Pokorny](#). Your requests will help guide activities and needs of Montana-Wyoming Plant Materials program.

Webinars

Plant material webinars, developed by the Western Plant Materials Consortium for improving seeding in the intermountain west, are now posted on the updated [NRCS Montana Plant Materials](#) website.

Webinar topics include

1. Planning a Seeding,
2. Seed Quality,
3. Developing Seed Mixes,
4. Seeding Calculations,
5. Seedbed preparation, Planting
6. Seeding Evaluation & Maintenance.

Willows Planted on Prickly Pear Creek provide stability, shade

From the Helena IR, March 28: Prickly Pear Creek flowing through the Helena Valley has long felt the impact of erosion impairing habitat for aquatic life.

On Monday, volunteers, the Lake Helena Watershed Group, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Lewis and Clark Conservation District continued work at the Upper Prickly Pear Creek Fishing Access Site aimed at reducing some of those impacts by using a natural solution.

Working in twos or threes, they punched holes near a marshy side channel. Following close behind was a dormant willow shoot, cut about a week ago at the Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir. Once in the ground, the willows should establish their own root systems, reducing some erosion and shading the stream.

"It's an impaired stream for sediment and temperature," said Valeri Stacey with Big Sky Watershed Corps, "so we're working on reconstructing and stabilizing the banks, and the willow planting provides shade and reduces temps."

Crews were planting between 500 and 700 willows along the side channel and creek, said Jennifer McBroom with the Lake Helena Watershed Group. Volunteers were "instrumental" in that effort, she said, with more than 20 cutting willows last Tuesday and a half dozen on hand for Monday's planting.

Prickly Pear Land Trust acquired the 35 acres for the fishing access site located at the end of Olsen Road after a proposed subdivision went bankrupt on historic farmland. Two years ago and following FWP's creation of the site, officials began restoration along the creek and property.

In May 2015, heavy machinery prowled the property as crews shaped the stream channel to alleviate erosion. Other work included construction of small ponds, building a water gap for livestock, re-establishing a spring creek for fish spawning and placing gravel and constructing riffles to flush sediment.

Monday's willow project was part of that ongoing restoration, including some areas where they had hoped vegetation would take better hold, said FWP fisheries biologist Eric Roberts.

"It makes for really good fish habitat," he said of the willows, adding that Prickly Pear Creek has seen better fish numbers during biannual surveys.

During surveys of the creek, FWP documented 196 brown trout per mile in 2010. By 2014 populations hit 400 browns per mile and 405 in April 2016. Surveyors observed more size groups and size classes indicating a healthier population.

[READ MORE](#)

On-farm research in North Dakota makes the case for industrial hemp

Editor's note: Although the MACD resolution regarding industrial hemp did not pass, we felt that there may be some interest in how other states are handling this issue.

From the Bismark Tribune: BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Real-world research in more than a dozen states in recent years is giving farmers new understanding of how to grow industrial hemp and showing that it has promise to be a viable commercial crop in the U.S.

The 2014 federal farm bill allowed for university and state-sponsored research programs of the plant

whose fiber can be used in products from paper to clothing and whose oil can be an ingredient in food and health products. Programs have now been launched in 15 states, with two more states coming online, according to the hemp advocacy nonprofit Vote Hemp.

"These last several years, those (programs) have been a big first step," Hemp Industries Association Executive Director Colleen Keahey said. "It's just really important that we get the government agencies ... all working to have a definition for industrial hemp that is equal to that definition in the farm bill."

Federal drug law doesn't distinguish between hemp and its cannabis cousin, marijuana, even though hemp doesn't contain enough THC to get a person high. A bill in Congress that would have changed that failed to get a vote last year, but advocates will try again this year, Keahey said. Her association also is fighting DEA hemp restrictions in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled in 2004 that the federal government can't regulate hemp food products as controlled substances.

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Cattle response to prescribed fire in mesic sagebrush

Researchers in Idaho recently published a paper titled "Prescribed Fire Effects on Activity and Movement of Cattle in Mesic Sagebrush Steppe" in the journal *Rangeland Ecology and Management*.

In this study they tracked mature cows with GPS collars before prescribed burning (2 years) and after prescribed burning (5 years). The site was mesic sagebrush steppe.

The effect of the fire on cattle behavior was an increase in foraging activity budgets, duration of foraging bouts, number of foraging bouts, and length of paths relative to prefire paths or cattle in unburned sites.

The prescribed burning did not seem to influence the steepness of cattle foraging paths.

Authors concluded that "Prescribed fire in mesic sagebrush steppe can be used to create opportunities for cattle to improve foraging efficiency by altering their activity budgets and movement path characteristics. Any consequent improvements in foraging efficiency could, in turn, promote increased rates of weight gain, better body condition, enhanced reproductive success, and ultimately, more pounds of beef for market."

[Check out the study here.](#)

Nominate a Rancher for Environmental Stewardship Award

The Montana Stockgrowers Association is seeking applications and nominations for its Environmental Stewardship Award program. The goal of the Environmental Stewardship Award Program is to acknowledge producers who go the extra mile when it comes to preserving and enhancing the resources on their land.

Applications for the 2017 Environmental Stewardship Award Program are *due by May 15*. All materials must be submitted to kori@mtbeef.org or mailed to 420 N California, Helena, MT 59601.

[READ MORE](#)

FWP wardens will focus less on enforcement if current funding bill passes

From the Helena IR: Wardens for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will have their jobs restructured to emphasize less enforcement if the bill designating their funding for the next two years is passed as amended.

"It will change things, no doubt about it," said Dave Loewen, FWP law enforcement chief. "We'll have to shift some priorities for sure."

The Montana Senate revised FWP's budget to cut controversial federal funding for wardens by half of what the House had proposed, dropping the federal dollars from more than \$5 million

to \$2.4 million for the next two years. That still means that 25 percent of the wardens' budget comes from federal dollars.

FWP receives no general fund money, instead generating its budget from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and federal tax dollars levied on hunters and anglers, which requires a 25 percent match. So using federal funds for enforcement does not save the state any money.

Last year Montana FWP collected about \$28 million in Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds along with state wildlife grants. [READ MORE](#)

Out-of-state bike fee stricken from invasive species bill

From the Helena IR: When Montana's House of Representatives takes up floor debate Tuesday on funding the state's fight against aquatic invasive species, the bill will not include an amendment that drew national attention for charging a fee on out-of-state bicycles.

Late Friday evening the House Natural Resources Committee amended and unanimously passed Senate Bill 363. [The bill aims to raise the more than \\$11 million needed to fund a bolstered aquatic invasive species program, which became a pressing issue following detection of invasive mussel larvae last year in two popular reservoirs.](#)

Before passing the Senate and after extensive changes via amendment, [Sen. Scott Sales, R-Bozeman, amended the bill to include a \\$25 fee paid per out-of-state bicycle.](#) The amendment came after Sales, during debate on a different bill, called cyclists "self-centered" and "rude" for the way they use roads shared with motor vehicles.

News of the comments and amendment drew attention from national cycling groups and spread via social media, bringing ire from those believing it alienated tourists by casting Montana as anti-bike.

[READ MORE](#)

NASA launches SnowEx project in Colorado

Study will help figure out how much water is in Earth's snow cover

From FiveThirtyEight: When kids dream of growing up to work for NASA, they generally imagine themselves piloting rocketships or [exploring Mars](#), not tromping around in the snow. But for three weeks this winter, you could find a bunch of NASA-funded scientists digging snow caves and measuring snowpack density on a frosty plateau in western Colorado. Although NASA may be best known for studying other worlds, its exploration of the universe begins with our home planet,¹ and NASA's satellites and other space-age technologies have proved vital to understanding Earth.

Launched this year with a \$4.5 million budget funded by NASA's Terrestrial Hydrology Program, the SnowEx project involves nearly 100 scientists from [two dozen organizations](#) and aims to answer a [basic question](#): How much water is stored in Earth's snow cover?

The answer has important economic implications. Water is the [lifeblood of the West](#), and managing it requires tracking and understanding snowpack dynamics because [more than half](#) of the water supply in the western U.S. comes from mountain snowmelt.

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Grants

223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2017 are as follows: **July 29**, 2016; **October 14**, 2016; **January 14**, 2017; and **April 26**, 2017. [Grant Info](#)

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

NRCS is asking potential conservation partners to submit project applications for federal funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Up to \$252 million is available to locally driven, public-private partnerships that improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat, and protect agricultural viability. Pre-proposals: April 21. [More Info](#)

Ranching for Rivers Project Funds

MRCDC & SWCDM are pleased to announce that another round of funding is available through the Ranching for Rivers program, which is a cost-share program to help ranchers with riparian pasture/fencing projects. Projects must be completed by September 30, 2017 to be eligible. The current funding will focus on Missouri & Yellowstone River Basins, but applications from other areas will be considered. [More Info](#)

Have something you'd like to see in TMC? Submissions are due every other Friday at 5:00 (visit our website for a calendar), and should be sent to tmc@macdnet.org.

Events

DNRC hosts webinars for permissive mill levies & admin grants

Montana DNRC CARDD is hosting webinars for CD administrators to learn more about permissive mill levies and submitting administration grants.

Admin Grants: wrapping up the Application

April 20 1:30 – 3:00 pm.
<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/727292861>

Please email Karl Christians for more info on these webinars.
kchristians@mt.gov

Applications for Armed to Farm Training

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) is now accepting applications from military veterans who want to attend our weeklong **Armed to Farm (ATF) Training**. ATF allows veterans and their spouses to experience *sustainable, profitable small-scale* farming enterprises and explore agriculture as a viable career. Training is June 12-16 in Arkansas. Applications due April 28. [More Info](#)

Yellowstone River Symposium

Join Montana Aquatic Resources Services (MARS) and the Trout Unlimited Montana Water Project for a two-day symposium discussing the state of the Yellowstone River and future threats to its vitality. April 27-28, Livingston. [More Info](#)

Jobs

Range Technicians

SWCDM is hiring for two positions for the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) program. These positions will be based out of Roundup and Malta, Montana, respectively. Closes April 14. [More Info](#)

Executive Director, Montana Audubon

The Director will be provided the opportunity to substantially shape the long-term future of a statewide conservation organization with a trusted reputation, dedicated staff, engaged Board of Directors and substantial financial resources. Specifically, he/she will be charged with enhancing organizational and program efforts across the organization. Closes July 1. [More Info](#)

Winnett ACES Coordinator

Petroleum Conservation District is hiring a coordinator for the Winnett Agricultural Community Enhancement and Sustainability (ACES) program. The coordinator will be tasked with completing a feasibility study for the group's vision, which is to purchase area ranchland that is for sale. This land would then be managed with best management practices for livestock grazing that would benefit both the land and the community. Closes April 24. [More Info](#)

Coming Up:

April

- 17-18** MWCC Watershed Restoration Plan Training, Bozeman
- 19-20** Clark Fork Basin Council Meeting, Missoula
- 22** Madison & Ruby Valley CDs Annual Banquet, Twin Bridges
- 24-25** Montana Envirothon
- 24** MACD Executive Committee Call
- 25** Streambank Revegetation & Bioengineering Workshop, White Sulphur Springs
- 26** 223 Grant Deadline

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

Districts should make a plan for supervisor & employee training

As part of a six-month series on district operations, NACD's Did You Know? monthly feature in eResource will highlight chapters of the NACD District Outlook Task Force report: "Blueprint for Locally-Led Conservation – A Strategy for District Success and Sustainability" ([available here](#) on our website). This month's chapter tackles training.

Conservation district supervisors are local public officials that provide leadership and direction to conservation districts within their state. They serve without significant compensation and are either elected or appointed to their position depending on the state's enabling legislation. Districts don't just represent rural communities – they have a broad membership representing rural, suburban, and urban conservation interests.

Conservation districts also employ a diverse array of folks with different skill sets and backgrounds. **To ensure and maintain uniformity and a level of competency in the conservation delivery system, it is important that all employees receive administrative, public outreach, legislative, and technical training.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS

Every conservation district needs to develop and implement a training plan. A successful training plan should utilize existing district official training programs and checklists to provide training on:

- State enabling legislation and the history of conservation districts
- The roles, responsibilities, and structure of federal, state, and local conservation partnerships, as well as an understanding of the programs and services they provide
- Legal and fiscal requirements and responsibilities of district supervisors and staff
- Hosting and/or leading open public meetings and appropriate parliamentary procedures
- Ethics and conflicts of interest
- Financial statements, budgets, audits, and reporting requirements
- Fundraising objectives and procedures
- Annual, long-range, and strategic plan development
- Leadership and management
- Communications and outreach
- Grant writing
- Educational programming
- Conducting reviews and evaluations

Montana DNRC has a website with training materials districts may find useful here: dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/conservation-district/training-and-information.