

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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### Farm Bill expires as negotiators remain divided on new bill

The 2014 farm bill expired Sunday, ending dozens of programs and putting others in a holding pattern until four key lawmakers either produce a replacement bill or seek some form of extension of the now defunct law.

The four principal negotiators working on a 2018 farm bill say they hope to resolve differences between House and Senate farm bills and have a conference report ready in October for a vote in the lame-duck session in November or December.

"All of us regret where we are," Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts said after a meeting last week with the top negotiators from the two chambers. "I know farmers and ranchers and growers out there say, 'What on earth are you guys doing?' Well, if you look at what's in the bills you see stark differences of opinion."



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*We're growing Montana's future.*

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### Congress stops short of LWCF reauthorization

*Flathead Beacon:* Amid the din of a headline-blaring news cycle, a program that has been protecting and conserving the nation's public lands for more than a half-century quietly expired Sept. 30 when Congress failed to take action.

But proponents of the Land and Water Conservation Fund continue to rattle the cage of a Republican-controlled Congress, encouraging lawmakers to fund the popular public lands program in perpetuity.

Established in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund skims a small percentage of royalties from private offshore oil and gas leasing and makes the funds available in the form of grants to state and local governments without using taxpayer money.

Montana's entire congressional delegation has been calling for permanent reauthorization of LWCF and introduced bills in both the House and Senate to push funding across the finish line on Sunday.

That didn't happen, and while LWCF still has enough funding to continue to pay for projects, it can't collect new money unless Congress takes action, which lawmakers on both sides of the aisle pledged to make happen, saying there were plenty of legislative opportunities.

"LWCF is so important to Montana, and the benefits extend from coast to coast, all across our nation. It costs the taxpayers nothing," U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, said. [READ MORE](#)

### Is glyphosate killings bees?

#### **Widely used herbicide may harm beneficial bacteria in bee guts**

*On Pasture:* The world's most widely used weed killer may also be indirectly killing bees. New research from The University of Texas at Austin shows that honey bees exposed to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, lose some of the beneficial bacteria in their guts and are more susceptible to infection and death from harmful bacteria.

Scientists believe this is evidence that glyphosate might be contributing to the decline of honey bees and native bees around the world.

"We need better guidelines for glyphosate use, especially regarding bee exposure, because right now the guidelines assume bees are not harmed by the herbicide," said Erick Motta, the graduate student who led the research, along with professor Nancy Moran. "Our study shows that's not true."

The findings are published this week in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Because glyphosate interferes with an important enzyme found in plants and microorganisms, but not in animals, it has long been assumed to be nontoxic to animals, including humans and bees. But this latest study shows that by altering a bee's gut microbiome — the ecosystem of bacteria living in the bee's digestive tract, including those that protect it from harmful bacteria — glyphosate compromises its ability to fight infection.

The researchers exposed honey bees to glyphosate at levels known to occur in crop fields, yards and roadsides. The researchers painted the bees' backs with colored dots so they could be tracked and later recaptured.

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### Governor Bullock updates forest partnership plan

*The Missoulian:* Taking a step in tandem with the U.S. Forest Service, Gov. Steve Bullock announced an update of his Forests in Focus Initiative to get more work done in the Montana woods.

"Insects and disease, wildfire, smoke and drought don't recognize ownership boundaries," Bullock said in a conference call with reporters on Monday. "There's a saying among wildfire managers: Nobody cares what color the engine is. This is a way to encourage cooperation at all levels of government to protect lives and property at risk and respond to the urgent challenges that face our forests."

Bullock credited the initial Forests In Focus program with treating more than 300,000 acres of forest land, producing almost 190 million board-feet of timber and retaining 3,000 jobs since it started in 2014. The new version will mesh with the Forest Service's national "Shared Stewardship" strategy announced last month. The goal of both the state and federal efforts is to speed up and increase timber harvest, hazardous fuels reduction, and landscape restoration work.

"By the end of 2018, we intend to create an action council and a 10-year plan of work to address the highest needs of forest health and wildfire," said Montana State Forester Sonya Germann. "That has not been done before."

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### New Technology for land managers makes rangeland monitoring easier

*IWJV:* Rangeland covers about 1.1 million square miles in the United States – about a third of the country. These iconic grazing lands help feed the nation; act as recreational hubs that provide important revenue to local communities; supply water, mineral and wood resources; and are critical wildlife habitat. Rangeland managers and landowners continuously battle conservation challenges from invasive weeds to megafires to ensure both healthy land and livelihoods, but it can be tricky to track how vegetation has fared over time across these large swaths of wide-open spaces. Researchers at the University of Montana, in collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Bureau of Land Management, developed a new app to make that task a little simpler.

Blending old-school data collection with cutting-edge technology, the Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) is an interactive web app designed to assist in monitoring and

managing America's rangeland. RAP is powered by Google Earth Engine and merges machine learning, cloud-based computing, remote sensing and field data to provide the first-ever annual vegetation cover maps to help improve America's rangeland.

This free tool empowers landowners and managers to track vegetation changes over time from the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast at any scale from whole regions to individual ranches by instantly producing an interactive map that estimates and shows ground cover including annual and perennial grasses and forbs, shrubs, trees and bare ground – all with the click of a mouse. Pair it with site-specific local knowledge, and this free tool can help people easily access information to guide land management decisions – from visualizing the impacts of drought in the Southwest to designing conifer-encroachment treatments in the heart of sage grouse country.

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## Adding More Forage and Reducing Hay Feeding: How a Montana Rancher Did It

*Originally from NRCS Montana:* When the Wessel family bought their ranch north of Lavina, Montana in 2008 they started by assessing what improvements were needed.

"It was obvious from the start that we were going to need more water," said Scott Wessel, rancher. "We called NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) to see what type of help we could get."

NRCS did an inventory of the ranch, developing a grazing management plan with the Wessels that included a system for rotational grazing and stockwater tanks to support cattle in every unit. Wessel said the plan laid the ground work for everything that followed. "NRCS helped me map out everywhere water tanks would go and how the cattle would rotate," he said.

In what Wessel referred to as phase one, he installed 12 water tanks and electric fence to

divide pastures. After the first year under his new system, Wessel was pleased with the results. "Our goal is to have more grass and feed less hay." Mission accomplished. "We produced 30 percent of the hay we normally do because of the drought, but because we had enough grass to graze year round, we did not run short on hay," Wessel said.

He credits the rotational grazing system. "Our grass looks nearly as good when we leave a pasture as when we go into one."

Converting marginal cropland to grazing land is another part of Wessel's plan. Not only does that provide more grazing acres for his cattle, it also provides a benefit to wildlife in the area, particularly sage grouse.

According to Austin Shero, NRCS district conservationist in Roundup, cropland conversion is the number one detriment to sage grouse habitat in Montana. "Converting cropland to grassland helps with

brood rearing, which is the most critical component to increasing sage grouse success rates," he said.

In addition to cropland conversion, the Wessels also added wildlife friendly ramps in stockwater tanks to allow wildlife to escape, virtually eliminating wildlife mortality in stockwater tanks. The electric fence used to divide pastures also has a wildlife purpose – allowing wildlife to easily travel under or over the fence. As Shero explains it, it's about working lands for agriculture and working lands for wildlife.

That's why, in 2010 when the Wessels applied for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, their project was a perfect match for NRCS's Sage Grouse Initiative, an effort to conserve sage-grouse and sustain the working rangelands that support ranching economies.

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## What the expiring farm bill means for conservation programs

*From National Association of Conservation Districts:* As the 2014 Farm Bill expiration quickly approaches, NACD has ramped up communication efforts with policymakers to determine the next steps. Based on the conversations with congressional staff and House and Senate Agriculture Committees leaders' statements, it is likely the Sept. 30, 2018, expiration date will come and go without a new farm bill or extension of the previous bill. As conservation districts interact with landowners in their communities and continue to work with USDA agencies, NACD wanted to provide an update on what to expect.

NACD received word the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) anticipates without a full-year extension, most new enrollments for farm bill programs will be put on hold. These programs are authorized on a year-to-year basis. With an expiration or short-term extension, USDA will not have the authority to process new applications. Based on the current versions of the House and Senate Farm Bills, Congress intends to change USDA programs to the point that processing new program applications will not be in line with congressional intent.

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## Seeing signs of conservation

*Editor's Note:* We saw this article in the NACD news roundup, and thought the idea was pretty cool. Maybe it will spark a project for one of our districts!

FRANKLIN COUNTY, Vt. — When Wayne Fiske heard about the movement last month, he saw the signs — literally — and now motorists are seeing them on his farm — again, literally.

Fiske and his wife, Nancy, are among dozens of farmers in northwestern Vermont who have started posting roadside signs to inform the public of their on-farm efforts to improve water quality.

The signs, which have started peppering farm fields throughout Franklin County, all share the tag line, "For my land, for our water," and, in five different designs, they describe clean water practices deployed on individual farms.

For example, the Fiske farm, located on four picturesque corners in the Lake Carmi watershed has posted two signs that say, "No-Till Planting" and "Cover Crops."

To date, 400 signs have been printed, and about 150 have been distributed to landowners and agricultural organizations statewide. The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District has spearheaded the project, and somewhere between 30 and 50 signs are already featured on farms in that area.

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## Steer donations needed for MSU's Steer-A-Year program

*From MSU:* Montana ranchers are encouraged to donate a steer for the benefit of the learning and development of next generation agricultural producers. Montana State University's College of Agriculture is seeking donations of steers for its Steer-A-Year program. The program accepts donated steers, monetary support and feed.

The donated steers allow students in the program to engage in hands-on learning of the beef industry. Students participate in applied learning experiences and courses such as beef cattle management, professional development in beef production systems, livestock management, meat science and livestock evaluation.

Through Steer-A-Year, students care daily for steers that Montana ranchers have donated to the university. The steers live at MSU's Bozeman Agricultural Research and Teaching, or BART, Farm, and students are responsible for everything from feeding the animals to health checks and vaccinations. Students also provide steer production data — such as average daily weight gain, carcass information when the meat is harvested and even genetic testing to the ranchers who donated them.

Hannah DelCurto Wyffels, instructor in the Department of Animal and Range Sciences, said the program has grown from eight to 30 steers in the last few years. [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: **October 25, 2018, January 17, 2019, April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

### 2019 Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grants - Webinar

Up to \$1.2 million is available. Don't worry, you can finish your vacation. Proposals are due February 1, 2019. Join us for an information webinar on Wednesday, **October 24**, at 2 p.m. EST. The webinar will be recorded and posted to view at your convenience. [Webinar Info](#)

### Aquatic Invasive Species Grants

The Montana DNRC offers state-funded grants for the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species. The project must be critical and urgent and contribute to the protection of Montana's environment from severe and unacceptable damage to natural resources. Up to \$15,000 for most projects, deadline **December 3**. [More Info](#)

## Events, etc

### MWCC Watershed Symposium

The 2018 MWCC Watershed Symposium will focus on advancing conservation through effective communication. **October 10-12**, Whitefish. [More Info](#)

### Water Quality Mini Grants

SWCDM is seeking to fund local education and outreach efforts in Montana to address water quality issues resulting from nonpoint source pollution.

Mini-grants of up to \$3,000 are available and SWCDM has approximately \$12,000 to award for this cycle. The deadline to apply is October 12, 2018 by 5 p.m.

Please visit the [SWCDM website](#) for more information. Submit questions or completed applications to Jessica Makus, [jessica@macdnet.org](mailto:jessica@macdnet.org).

### New Supervisor Training

Mineral CD is hosting a training for supervisors with Karl Christians. Topics will include 310 Law, and Roles and Responsibilities of Conservation Districts. Superior, **October 16**. Please contact administrator Charlee Thompson at [mccd54@icloud.com](mailto:mccd54@icloud.com) for more info.

### Exempt Water Rights Workshop

MSU Extension is hosting a workshop on filing exempt water rights with Jim Beck. Townsend, **October 17**. Contact 406.266.9242 for more information and to reserve a spot.

### Dave Pratt Grazing Workshop

Please join WSE and Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers Association for a one-day workshop with Dave Pratt as he shares insights from two of his most popular short courses. **October 23**, Big Timber. [More Info](#)

### 310 Workshop

Hosted by Little Beaver and Custer County CDs, this workshop for supervisors and administrators will have Bob Flesher and Karl Christians presenting on 310 site inspections with a field visit to a stream to examine a sample project and things that supervisors should take note of during visits. Miles City, **October 25**. Contact Little Beaver CD for more info, [littlebeavercd@macdnet.org](mailto:littlebeavercd@macdnet.org).

### Dan Clark Board Training

In the Board Training, new and continuing members of boards will review basic governing information, such as: ethics and nepotism, meeting minutes, open meetings, parliamentary procedure, principles of good governance, the public's right to know and participate, rules of procedure, and more. Hosted by MWCA, **October 25** in Glasgow. [More Info](#)

### 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](#)



## Coming Up

### October

- 8 **MACD Board Conference Call**
- 10 Musselshell Soil Health Day, Ryegate
- 10-12 Montana Watershed Symposium
- 16 New Supervisor Training, Superior
- 17 Exempt Water Right Workshop, Townsend
- 22 **MACD Executive Committee Conference Call**
- 25 310 Workshop, Miles City  
Board Training, Glasgow
- 31 **Deadline for MACD 2018 Convention Early Bird Registrations**

### November

- 7 Soil Moisture Workshop
- 7-8 Noxious Weed Education Summit
- 8 **MACD Board Conference Call**

**Have an event to share?**

Please email [tmc@macdnet.org](mailto:tmc@macdnet.org) with details.

## Jobs

### District Administrator, Eastern Sanders County CD

The District Administrator is responsible for managing operational activities of the Eastern Sanders County Conservation District (ESCCD). The position is a part time position with an average of 20 hours of work required per week. The office location for this position is in Plains, Montana. Application deadline **Oct. 31** [More Info](#)

### Milk River Watershed Alliance Coordinator

The Phillips Conservation District is seeking a part-time Watershed Coordinator for the Milk River Watershed Alliance. Must have an associate degree or equivalent experience in natural resource, public administration, or related field, and at least three years experience working with diverse clientele, building consensus, managing multiple project goals and resolving complex problems. Location of position is flexible and may work out of home. Deadline **October 10**. [More Info](#)

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