

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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## October 17, 2018

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## Register Now for MACD's 77th Annual Convention

### November 13-15

Registration is open for the 2018 Convention, at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center. Register before October 31 to get early bird rates! Please visit our convention website at [convention.macdnet.org](http://convention.macdnet.org) for more information.



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### Convention Scholarships Available

The Resource Conservation Advisory Council agreed to fund up to \$15,000 in conservation district supervisor scholarships for the conservation district annual meeting. Conservation districts can request scholarships for mileage and motels for one supervisor. They can receive motel costs for two supervisors if they have an MACD director on their board that will be attending. Funds are first come, first serve and are for districts that have a financial need. Please contact Linda Brander at 444-0520 or [lbrander@mt.gov](mailto:lbrander@mt.gov) for more information.



Photo: Jeremy Roberts, Conservation Media

## Finding middle ground on the range

**New science shows grazing access to public lands in the western U.S. can be good for ranching and wildlife**

*The Current, UC Santa Barbara:* Cattle ranching and conservation may seem an unusual pair in the American West, but new research reveals a clear link between the economic health of ranches and the ability to maintain habitat for an iconic wild bird that for years has been at the center of public land policy debate: the greater sage grouse.

A study led by UC Santa Barbara's National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) shows that policies to restrict grazing access on public lands may have the unintended consequence of exacerbating sage grouse habitat loss. Such restrictions are likely to harm ranch profitability, which in turn could spur ranchers to sell their private lands for other uses — namely, crop cultivation or housing developments — that would

ultimately destroy critical grouse habitat.

The paper, "Unintended habitat loss on private land from grazing restrictions on public rangelands" is published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*.

"When it comes to a choice between ranching, farming or housing in the West, sustainable ranching is the most compatible with wildlife," said lead author Claire Runge, who was a postdoctoral researcher at NCEAS when the research was conducted and is now a research scientist at the University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway. "Implementing policy that makes it harder for ranchers to keep going could result in land conversions that are bad news for sage grouse and other sagebrush species."

Runge stressed that ranchers must still practice sustainable grazing to support habitat for grouse and to maintain forage availability for their cattle. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that public and private lands are inextricably linked.

Sage grouse rely on both public and private lands throughout their lifecycles. More than half of their total habitat is on public lands, which include the dry sagebrush uplands where they breed, nest and overwinter.

In fact, while sage grouse are not listed as an endangered species, they are considered the canary in the coal mine for sagebrush ecosystems, which are home to more than 350 other plant and animal species.

"If you have sage grouse, you have intact, healthy sagebrush habitat," said co-author David Naugle, a professor at the University of Montana and science advisor for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Working Lands for Wildlife.

In the summer, the grouse rely on productive, private ranchlands for 75 percent of the lower, wetter habitat they need for raising and feeding their chicks. Losing these private lands to crops or subdivisions would threaten chick survival, which can make or break many grouse populations.

As the saying goes — and as this study shows — what's good for the bird is also good for the herd. Ranchers also rely on public and private lands for forage, and curtailed grazing on public lands limits available forage. [READ MORE](#)

### MSU researcher ties butterfly population to mountain health

*Missoulia*: A Montana State University ecologist whose long-term research into butterfly populations in the Grand Teton mountains and their implications for mountain systems ecology has received a grant from the Disney Conservation Fund.

Diane Debinski, head of the Department of Ecology, has been studying *Parnassius clodius* butterflies for 30 years, dating back to when she was an MSU graduate student in the late 1980s.

"What we're doing is looking at how environmental variations like snowpack and the timing of snowmelt are affecting *Parnassius clodius* populations in Wyoming and Montana," Debinski said.

She explained that mountain meadows have high levels of plant diversity and plant productivity that are important to elk, deer and other herbivores, and butterflies and other pollinators also use these meadows, particularly if there are a lot of flowers.

"So, the question is: If the world gets warmer and drier, how are these mountain meadows going to change and how will those changes affect the pollinators?" Debinski said.

Debinski and her collaborators hope to answer that question through their seasonal count of *Parnassius clodius*, a white, medium-sized butterfly found primarily in high-elevation meadows in North America and Europe. [READ MORE](#)



### Congress approves massive water projects bill

AP: Congress has approved a sprawling bill to improve the nation's ports, dams and harbors, protect against floods, restore shorelines and support other water-related projects.

If signed by President Donald Trump, America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 would authorize more than \$6 billion in spending over 10 years for projects nationwide, including one to stem coastal erosion in Galveston, Texas, and restore wetlands damaged by Hurricane Harvey last year.

The bill also would help improve harbors in Seattle; Savannah, Georgia; and San Juan, Puerto Rico, and extend a federal program to improve drinking water quality in Flint, Michigan and other cities.

The bill also sets up a new framework for large water projects run by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The changes are intended to increase local input and improve transparency.

The Senate approved the bill, 99-

1, on October 10. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, cast the lone dissenting vote. The House approved the bill last month on a voice vote.

Lawmakers from both parties hailed the measure, which they said will create jobs and help communities across the country fix irrigation systems, maintain dams and reduce flooding.

"America needs comprehensive water infrastructure legislation that will cut Washington red tape, create jobs and keep communities safe," said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

The panel's top Democrat, Delaware Sen. Tom Carper, said the bill invests in critical infrastructure like dams and ports, expands federal efforts to prevent another water crisis similar to the one in Flint and helps coastal communities prepare for the growing risks of climate change.

[READ MORE](#)





photo: Prairie Populist

## Conserving open spaces and agriculture: Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance

*Lane Nordlund, Montana Ag Network:* The Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance (RVSA) was formed by ranchers and conservationists that recognize family ranches play an essential role in public land stewardship and conservation of open space. The alliance recently held a public tour near Twin Bridges to share how agriculture and conservation go hand in hand.

For many years, agriculture and conservation groups have not seen eye to eye. The goal of the RVSA is to provide positive dialogue on shared interests and common goals to enable the group to aim for better stewardship of the Ruby Valley.

"Ten years ago, these groups would not have been talking with ranchers," said rancher Rick Sandru a member of the Ruby Valley Stock Users Association and the RVSA. "The fact that they're not only talking with the ranchers, but we are actively looking for ways to work together makes me feel like all the time we've put into this

effort is very worthwhile."

The RVSA is made up of the following organizations: Ruby Valley Stock Users Association, Ruby Valley Conservation District and Watershed Council, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Ruby Habitat Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy, the Montana Wilderness Association and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and many more.

The alliance believes in the importance of understanding each other's perspectives and values and finding common ground to meet the goals of keeping open spaces open and agriculture viable.

"The first thing I would say to someone is, you don't know what you don't know," said Darcie Warden with the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. "I came into this work listening to the ranchers. I wanted to know and understand

from them what the realities are like and what their operations are like. What are the challenges that they face, how do they overcome those challenges and what ways can we work with them to help them meet those challenges."

Warden added that there is a lot of misinformation about private and public lands ranching. "I'm able to take information back to my organization and membership and share facts with them so we can dispel and eliminate that message of public ranching is a bad thing or that there's welfare ranching. That's not the reality out here. So I'm helping to get that message out, and the ranchers are helping us at the same time maintain conservation gains out here."

The group also shared with attendees the role that ranching plays in maintaining healthy wildlife populations.

[READ MORE](#)

## Larch Laboratory

### **An invaluable forestry resource quietly grows right in the Flathead Valley's backyard**

*Flathead Beacon:* In 1976, three Montana foresters published a handbook about the ecology and silviculture, or cultivation, of western larch forests. At the time, virtually zero scientifically based guidelines for growing the species existed, even though more than 1.5 million board feet of western larch was being harvested per year in the northern Rocky Mountains. Over 108 pages, the handbook laid out how private property owners, public land managers, and others could achieve various stand objectives related to tree growth and timber yield through certain seeding, planting, and cutting practices.

Today, silviculturalists — people who influence forest regeneration and composition — still call this handbook “the Bible.” It is the foundation for western larch management. Its principles drew on field research conducted over 30 years, partly in Idaho, but primarily on a 7,460-acre piece of Northwest Montana land, which the book calls “the heart of western larch country.” You’ve probably been there, if you’ve ever driven up the east side of the Hungry Horse Reservoir — a quiet portion of the Spotted Bear road crosses through the property, in the shadow of Desert Mountain near the Abbott Homestead, just outside Martin City. Maybe you’ve seen the sign for the Coram Experimental Forest and wondered.

In 1933, the U.S. Forest Service established this experimental forest on a chunk of quintessential western larch-mixed conifer forest

in the Hungry Horse Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest. It became one of 14 experimental forests administered by the Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS), and one of 63 experimental forests nationwide. These areas, set apart from other types of public land, are shielded from controlled thinning, prescribed burning, and other timber management practices. This stasis presents researchers with the unique opportunity to engage in long-term vegetation projects, including ongoing studies in Coram that have been sustained long enough to be an irreplaceable scientific resource within our lifetimes.

The first wave of research on the forest began in 1946, with the Forest Service silviculturalists who produced the handbook, Wyman C. Schmidt, Raymond C. Schearer, and Arthur L. Roe, along with colleagues like Tony Squillace.

“Once you start logging trees, you start wondering how you regenerate,” says Elaine Sutherland, a RMRS biologist and Coram’s scientist in charge. “The original focus [on the experimental forest] was on regenerating larch, and the best ways to grow it.”

These dedicated researchers installed study after study after study in the 60s and 70s. One of Schmidt’s hallmark projects came in 1961, involving differently thinned stands, spaced from as close as 8 feet apart to as far as 20 feet apart. [READ MORE](#)

## Conservation Districts Participating in Cycle Time - Workload Analysis Project

*From National Association of Conservation Districts:* This week, approximately 500 conservation district employees began working with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees on the second phase of the Workload Cycle Time Study. NRCS State Conservationists were provided with a sample of 844 office locations and worked with the respective districts and NRCS employees to identify potential participants performing work within the service coverage area of selected offices. The identified district participants are part of a national statistical sample and received an email welcoming them to the second phase of the Workload Cycle Time Study.

While this is a voluntary project, NACD encourages participation to generate more meaningful results. Most of the tasks measured are the usual conservation planning and implementation assistance for clients from farms and ranches in the sample areas. There are a few tasks for district employees to record that are related to district governance and operations. The full exercise will help identify nationally the contributions districts make to the delivery of conservation. This initial experience will be a four-week recording of time on the various daily tasks.

[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](#)

### 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](#)

## 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](#)

## Events, etc

### 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](#)

### Irrigator Workshop: How to prevent invasive mussels

John Curwin from Madison, WI and Larry Pennington, from Idaho will join us as invited guests to talk about invasive species issues, specifically mussels and other aquatic invasive species that are impacting irrigation in their regions. **October 25**, Great Falls. Contact Cascade CD for more info.

## Coming Up

### October

- 25     310 Workshop, Miles City
- Board Training, Glasgow
- Irrigator Workshop, Great Falls
- 29     **MACD Executive Committee Conference Call**
- 31     **Deadline for MACD 2018 Convention Early Bird Registrations**

### November

- 7       Soil Moisture Workshop
- 7-8    Noxious Weed Education Summit
- 9       Soil Moisture Workshop, Columbus
- 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](mailto:tmc@macdnet.org) with details.

### 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](#)

### 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](mailto:jreimer@mt.gov).

### 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](#)