

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Winnett ACES wins Spirit of Montana recognition

Congressman Greg Gianforte recognized Winnett ACES of Petroleum County with his Spirit of Montana commendation for the group's innovative approach to bolstering its community's future.

Launched in 2016, Winnett ACES aims to strengthen its community through inventive programs so that future generations will live, work, and raise their families there.

Gianforte's Spirit of Montana is a weekly recognition of Montanans for their accomplishments, dedication, or service. Gianforte highlights the recipient in the U.S. House of Representatives and personally contacts the honorees.

Gianforte's statement in the Congressional Record follows:

RECOGNIZING WINNETT ACES

Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the members of Winnett ACES for leading efforts to encourage economic growth, revitalize their community, and protect its future.

Concerned about the decreasing population of rural America, Winnett ACES (Agricultural and Community Enhancement and Sustainability) formed in 2016 to strengthen its community so that future generations will live, work, and raise their families there.

The group's first program to take off was Winnett Beef in the School, which serves locally-raised beef to the local K-12 school system. Led by local producer Charlie Ahlgren, area ranchers made a three-year commitment to donate beef, about four cows per year, to the program. Other volunteers helped cut and deliver the fresh product. Within three months, the program had successfully launched, saving money for the schools to use on other education priorities. [READ MORE](#)



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Belt Creek to get infusion of clean water after century of coal runoff

Great Falls Tribune: Coal killed Belt Creek where it flows through the community of Belt.

For decades, discharges from the abandoned Belt Anaconda Coal Mine flowed into the creek, making it so acidic few fish can survive in it, says Bill Snoddy, a project manager for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Abandoned Mine Lands Program.

"Right now, just for a comparison, the pH is about 2.7, and that's the same as battery acid," Snoddy says.

Today, coal is financing Belt Creek's comeback.

A \$7 million to \$9 million treatment plant is being designed that will capture and treat the polluted mine runoff before it reaches the creek.

Construction is expected to begin this fall. When it's completed, at the latest in early 2021, it will end a century of sickness for the stream

caused by toxic coal mine waste.

The water treatment project is being paid for with Montana's share of federal fees on coal production that will cease being collected in two years unless they are reauthorized by Congress.

Montana officials charged with cleaning up abandoned coal mines across the state — and there are dozens — argue that the rebirth of Belt Creek is another example of why the coal taxes should continue.

"We don't charge individuals or a town like Belt for services we can provide," Snoddy said. "It's all funded by active coal mines in the state, and we're very cognizant of their contribution and use the money well."

The hemorrhaging old coal mine in Belt is a cancer on 14 miles of Belt Creek, stretching from the town of Belt to the creek's confluence with the Missouri River. [READ MORE](#)

Feds propose management plan for National Bison Range

Missoula Current: The National Bison Range is finalizing its first conservation plan and wants an emphasis on the wildlife. But first, it needs to hear from the people.

On Tuesday evening, Missoulians can weigh in on how the National Bison Range should be managed for at least the next 15 years as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service takes public comment on its draft comprehensive conservation plan and related environmental study for the range.

The USFWS has narrowed future guidance for management down to three options, one of which is the "No action" alternative that keeps management the way it is. The other two options would change the status quo to emphasize either the public or the wildlife.

Right now, the 18,800-acre Bison Range includes a 19-mile loop that allows visitors to drive through the rolling hills that rise above the Jocko and Flathead rivers between St. Ignatius and Moiese so they can glimpse the many species that inhabit the refuge, including bison. With the exception of a few trails, people are required to stay in their vehicles so they don't damage the habitat or stress wildlife.

Access to the auto tour loop would continue in all cases, but under Alternative B, staff would add things to maximize public recreation and involvement.

[READ MORE](#)



Chronicles of the rings: what trees tell us about historic climate change

New York Times: TUCSON — From the early 1700s until the 1960s, the fast moving river of wind known as the North Atlantic Jet Stream, which drives weather extremes over Europe, was pretty steady on its course.

Then it became less predictable. But instrument data alone can't tell the jet stream's movements for comparison over the centuries, given that scientists began keeping records of weather events via instruments only in the late 19th century.

The rings of trees, however, offer a far more complete historical picture of climate variations. As they age, trees form new distinctive rings, outward from the center, and each year a new, distinct circle of dead wood is created around the trunk of most trees. In that ring, one can find information about precipitation, temperature and other data about that year.

A team led by Valerie Trouet, a dendrochronologist, sampled 400

trees from the Balkans and 200 in Scotland — including what might be the oldest known tree in Europe, a Bosnian pine in Greece named Adonis, which is 1,075 years old. The jet stream flows between these two regions, and trees revealed the range of temperatures in their rings and the frequency of fires over time, an expansive chronicling of jet stream behavior.

"More extreme positions create more extreme climate events, especially heat waves and storms," in Europe, Dr. Trouet said. And the tree rings show "big fires happen in the Balkans when the jet is in its southerly position."

The fact that the stream has become more variable only in recent decades suggests that the shift is the result of humans' effects on climate, Dr. Trouet said. "The recent rise in variance is unprecedented in 300 years," she said. More analysis is underway to look back to even earlier centuries.

[READ MORE](#)

Federal landscape conservation network winks out; scientists dismayed

Missoulian: A federal networking program that helped broker the international agreement to protect the transboundary Flathead River has quietly shut down, according to many non-governmental organizations that depended on its connections.

"It's the most stark example I've ever seen of an administration changing and something winked out of existence," said Erin Sexton of the Flathead Lake Biological Station, which worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. "I understand from the colleagues I worked with that they're being reassigned. It appears the money's gone. These things aren't going to happen anymore."

The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives set up 22 programs throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico in the early Obama administration. They grew out of the Department of Interior's strategy of landscape-scale conservation work started in the Bush administration. The Trump administration recommended eliminating the program's budget in its 2017 budget proposal and the two budgets since, although Congress appropriated about \$12 million for the LCCs each of the past two years.

[READ MORE](#)

Idaho governor says federal-state program may tame wildfires

Bozeman Daily Chronicle: BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Local, state and federal officials along with conservation groups and logging interests have to find common ground to reduce increasingly destructive wildfires in the U.S. West, Gov. Brad Little said Tuesday.

He told several hundred participants at an Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership meeting that they have the chance to make a new federal-state program called the "shared stewardship" agreement a success.

"We have got to get this done," the Republican said. "I think the

consensus from both ends of the scale is that we have to do this right."

Idaho signed the agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture late last year that allows state participation in federal timber sales and restoration work like prescribed burns and tree planting on private, state and federal lands.

The partnership is tasked with finding two areas in the state by July 1 for shared stewardship activities that could ultimately become templates for other states. The group, comprised of logging companies, conservation groups,

scientists, and state and federal officials, is meeting for a two-day workshop in Boise to discuss strategy.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jim Hubbard told the group public sentiment is behind collaborative, landscape-scale efforts.

"We're seeing (lightning strike) ignitions that produce large fires that we can't control," he said. "We're smoking out communities — enough that it's a human health issue."

[READ MORE](#)

Agriculture, natural resources groups support proposal to manage wild horses and burros

High Plains Journal: Several groups recently announced support for a proposal to reduce wild horse and burro populations on western rangelands. The proposal, titled "The Path Forward for Management of the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horses and Burros," is the result of several months of discussions among representatives from diverse stakeholder groups, including humane advocates, livestock producers, local governments, and rangeland management professionals. The proposal focuses on the congressional appropriations process and does not recommend any amendments to the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

"In the current political

environment, this proposal represents the best opportunity to address the growing wild horse and burro population crisis in the West by finally making substantial, year-over-year progress towards appropriate management level," said Ethan Lane, senior executive director for NCBA Federal Lands and executive director of PLC. "If Congress does not act immediately, the BLM will not have the necessary resources to carry out their statutory obligation to manage these animals."

"Each of the stakeholders involved in this proposal had to set aside some long-held positions in order to reach this agreement," said Ryan Yates, director of congressional relations for AFBF. "While it was difficult for us to cede some

tools authorized by the WFRHBA, including sale-without-restriction, we are hopeful that this good-faith effort will soon be rewarded with healthy populations range-wide."

Lia Biondo, DC liaison for SRM, added, "Western rangelands are at a critical tipping point, and our hope is that the common ground reached in this proposal will finally result in measurable outcomes on the range and a pathway toward recovery."

The proposal, if fully implemented, would increase BLM's capacity to gather horses and burros in overpopulated areas and administer population-growth-suppressant to healthy animals at gather. [READ MORE](#)

Governor Bullock announces new award to recognize conservation leadership

Applications for the Montana Leopold Conservation Award are now being accepted

MONTANA - Governor Steve Bullock announced last week that Montana is seeking nominations for the Montana Leopold Conservation Award, a new award that recognizes the voluntary conservation work by farmers, ranchers and other landowners.

"Too often we take for granted the remarkable contributions our state's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners make to help sustain the landscapes and values we care deeply about as Montanans," said Governor Bullock. "I am delighted to partner with the Sand

County Foundation to bring the Leopold Award to Montana to recognize a few of our exceptional working lands leaders and I look forward to their stories inspiring neighbors and generations to come with an ethic of thoughtful management and environmental stewardship."

Presented by the Sand County Foundation of Madison, Wis., the award is given in honor of renowned conservationist and author Aldo Leopold, whose 1949 book, "A Sand County Almanac," became a touchstone for conservationists as it explored the ethical relationship between people and the land they own or manage. [READ MORE](#)

New free low-tech riparian restoration manual

The streams that thread through working lands in the American West sustain plants and animals, people and livestock. Unfortunately, thousands of miles of these precious waterways are degraded. This leaves rangelands in the arid West more sensitive to droughts, floods, and wildfire.

Traditional approaches for restoring streams often involve costly fixes that change the shape of the waterway using sophisticated designs and heavy construction machinery. While this "form-based restoration" is appropriate for certain areas, it's too expensive to re-work all of the streams in need.

Luckily, low-tech "process-

based restoration" is emerging as an efficient and effective way to expand upon existing restoration efforts and restore more watersheds. This approach includes using low-tech tools—simple hand-built structures made from natural materials that have short-term lifespans—to initiate processes that allow Mother Nature to heal itself.

"It's about letting the ecosystem do the work after a little jumpstart from us," explains Jeremy Maestas, an ecologist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For more information: <https://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/new-manual-for-low-tech-riparian-restoration/>

New market planned to pay farmers for soil, water conservation

Successful Farming: General Mills, ADM, Cargill, McDonald's, and The Nature Conservancy are among 10 companies and nonprofit organizations that are forming a national market by 2022 to incentivize the adoption of farming practices that build soil carbon and improve water conservation.

Talks for the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium were convened two years ago by the Noble Research Institute, which has committed over \$2 million to the endeavor with additional support from the General Mills Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and McKnight Foundations. The aim of the venture is to develop protocols and a market framework to issue greenhouse gas reduction credits to farmers who adopt conservation practices.

The market will work in two ways. First, farmers will receive credits for the amount of carbon they sequester in the soil or water quality they improve, giving farmers a new and potentially significant income stream; companies can then buy those credits to meet their climate or water goals. Secondly, the market will offer companies a way to account for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, water quality, and water use reduction to satisfy broader supply chain reporting requirements.

The new consortium is, arguably, the most ambitious market to reduce carbon emissions and improve water quality in the agricultural sector. [READ MORE](#)

Grants

Future Fisheries Improvement Program

For almost two decades, FWP's Future Fisheries Improvement Program has worked to restore rivers, streams, and lakes to improve and restore Montana's wild fish habitats. Between \$350,000 and \$650,000 are available each year for projects that revitalize wild fish populations. Any entity proposing a project that would benefit wild fish will be considered for funding. Due **May 31**. [More Info](#)

Western Native Trout Initiative Small Grants

Projects considered for funding under the Small Grants Program include those with a strong element of or primary focus on community outreach, education and/or volunteer engagement; or design/planning/monitoring work. Approximately \$21,000 in funding is available for projects in the 12 western states that are WNTI's focus. Individual projects can be funded at a maximum of \$5,000. Due **June 18**. [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Judith Basin Range School

Johann Zietsman, world renowned speaker, will be presenting at a 2-day seminar on Livestock Management and Grazing. Zietsman will be sharing proven concepts for selecting the best adapted genetics with ultra-high-density grazing. **May 29 & 30**, Hobson, MT. For info call 566-2311 x107.

Montana Youth Range Camp

The Montana Youth Range Camp (MYRC) is a 4-day program for youth ages 11–17. This year's camp will be held June 25-28 at Hyalite Reservoir south of Bozeman. Registration deadline is **June 11**. [More Info](#)

Composting Workshop

The Fallon County field office will be hosting Gerry Gillespie to teach us how to make a compost that is easy, low-odor and appropriate on a large or small scale. Plan on joining us for a hands-on workshop where you can take away the skills and inoculant needed for the process. **June 21**, Baker. Email ann.fischer@usda.gov for more info.

Increasing Profit on Your Farm with Healthy Soil

A workshop with Nicole Masters of Integrity Soils, Inc. New Zealand. Sponsored by Valley County Conservation District **June 26**. For more information, call (406) 228-4321 ext.101 or email vccdm20@gmail.com

Save the Date: River Rendezvous

Please Plan to Spend July 26th on the Missouri River. You are invited to the 2019 River Rendezvous hosted by Valley County Conservation District, MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council. All activities will take place on July 26th, and the tour will leave from the Fort Peck Interpretive Center. This year's Rendezvous will highlight key features of the Missouri / Milk River confluence including:

Pallid sturgeon habitat, irrigation, proposed crossing sites for the Keystone XL pipeline, management efforts for aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, and more!

Save the Date: Montana Range Tour

The 2019 Montana Range Tour, will be held September 4th & 5th in Harlowton, MT.

Jobs

Range & Wildlife Conservationist

This position is located in the USDA field office in Yellowstone County, Montana and will provide conservation services for wildlife conservation in Yellowstone County, Montana and the surrounding counties. The incumbent will serve as a Range & Wildlife Conservationist providing biological/wildlife technical assistance for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Yellowstone Conservation District (YCD), Pheasants Forever Inc. and Quail Forever (PF/QF), Audubon Society and our other local partners. The successful applicant will deliver conservation programs to farmers, ranchers and other landowners primarily in the interest of rangeland sustainability for ranching and wildlife. Closes **May 6**. [More Info](#)

Coming Up

May

- 13 **MACD Board Conference Call**
- 16 CMR Community Working Group Meeting, Flatwillow Hall
- 27 **MACD Executive Committee Conference Call**
- 29-30 Judith Basin Range School

June

- 3-6 Statewide Administrator's Training, Arrowpeak Lodge
- 10 Don MacIntyre retirement party, Helena (at the Montana Club)
- 10-13 **MACD Spring Board Meeting**
- 17-19 Montana Range Days
- 21 Composting Workshop, Baker
- 25-28 Montana youth Range Camp

Have a story, funding opportunity, or event to share?

Please email
tmc@macdnet.org with details.



Why researchers are mapping the world's manure

As phosphorus supply and demand shift, Stevens Institute of Technology is leading the hunt for solutions to recapture this vital nutrient and sustain global agricultural production

(Hoboken, N.J. – April 17, 2019) – Farmers rely on phosphorus fertilizers to enrich the soil and ensure bountiful harvests, but the world's recoverable reserves of phosphate rocks, from which such fertilizers are produced, are finite and unevenly distributed. Stevens Institute of Technology is spearheading an international effort to map the global flow of phosphorus, much of which will be absorbed by crops, then eaten and excreted as waste by animals and people – and jump-start efforts to recapture and recycle the vital nutrient.

In the April 2019 issue of Earth's Future, David Vaccari, director of the Stevens department of civil, environmental and ocean engineering, and his team map that process globally for the

first time, and identify regional "hot spots" where there's both significant demand for fertilizers, and significant potential for recapturing phosphorus from animal and human waste.

The team not only shows there are significant untapped opportunities for recycling phosphorus but in a field where lack of well-integrated data has often impeded both local and regional planning, the work is a breakthrough in bridging the global to the local, actionable level.

"If we want to get serious about phosphorus recycling, these are the places where we're going to get the most bang for our buck," said Vaccari.

This year, the world's farmers will use over 45 million metric tons of phosphorus fertilizers, much of which will be absorbed by crops, then eaten and excreted as waste by animals and people.

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