

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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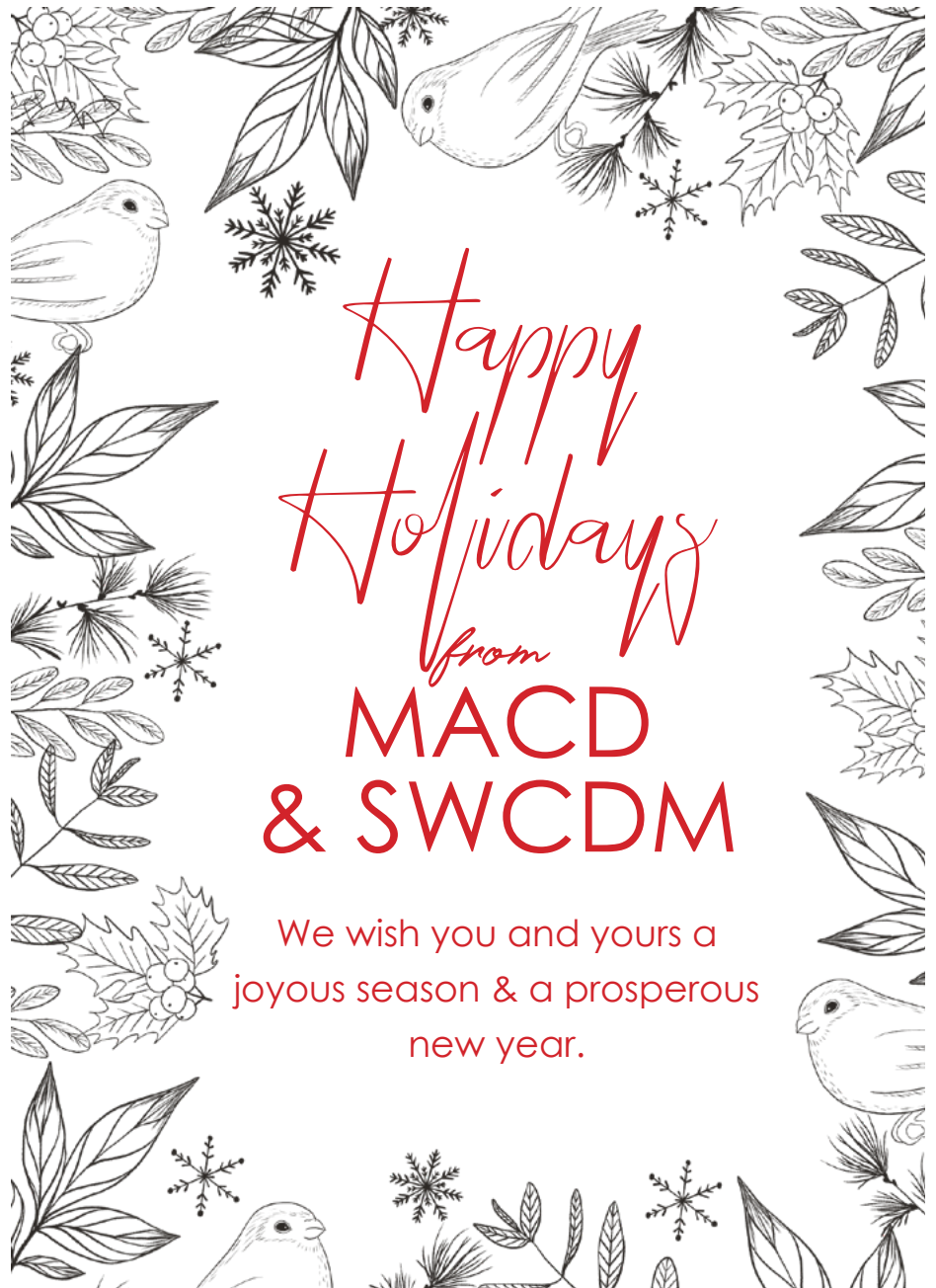
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Holidays
from
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& SWCDM

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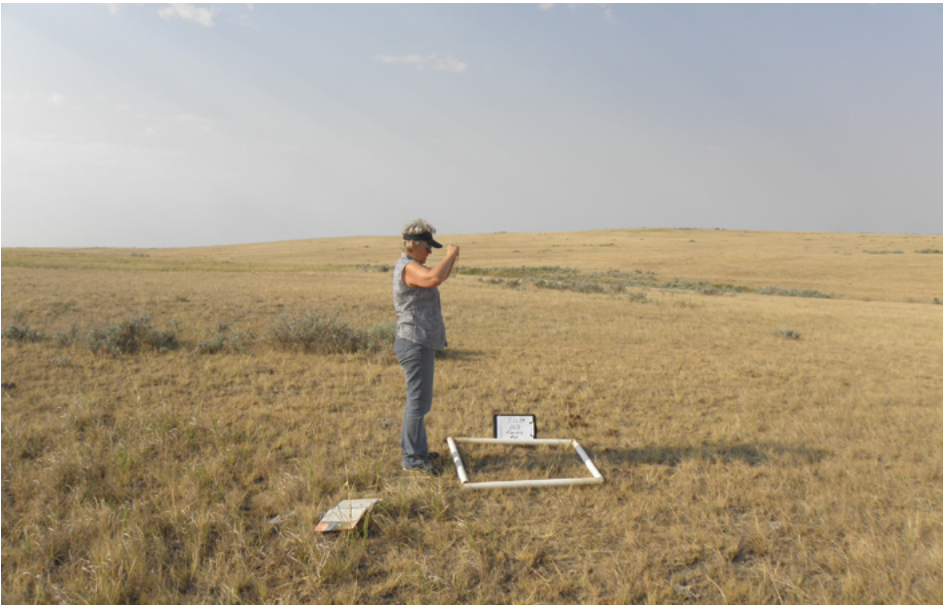
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Montana Rangelands Partnership

Stewardship Spotlight: Franko Ranch in Prairie County

Our featured landowner for the fall Stewardship Spotlight is the Franko Ranch in Prairie County. Read more about how Rich and Ellen have made range improvements over the years to benefit their cows, their grass bank and meet their production goals.

Rich and Ellen Franko live on Cherry Creek north of Terry. When you drive into the yard the sign above the gate says “Howdy” and that is exactly how you feel at Franko’s—welcomed. They moved from Melrose in western MT about 16 years ago to transition away from an irrigated haying operation, which necessitated them to lease about 40% of their pasture each year, to an operation that is mostly grass based and Mother Nature provides the moisture.

Some of the major changes that they've made include purchasing additional land that they were

leasing, water development, water storage, BLM fishing and recreational opportunities and a tree planting with FWP to enhance bird habitat.

Water Development & Storage

Balanced utilization is the primary goal of their grazing philosophy/management so that means GRASS is their number one priority on the ranch! Rich explained that balanced utilization is achieved through deferred grazing, water development and storage—“Water development and storage has been key to proper forage utilization.”

Since the climate can vary so much from pasture to pasture the reservoirs have not been a reliable source for water in terms of quantity and/or quality. Ellen summed up this year's spring runoff as “spotty as heck,” with parts of

the creek running and parts dry this spring. Many of the reservoirs were completely dry after last year's drought so even those that caught water in 2018 were not filled.

They have focused on replacing windmills with solar powered pumps. Another water source they have capitalized on is installing winter tanks which have greatly reduced time and labor required to chop ice, a task that either Rich or Ellen miss! Having a variety of water sources guarantees their cows will have water available throughout the year.

Electric Cross Fencing

Another key factor to balanced utilization is the cross fencing that they have done—in many cases they have split a single pasture into three, which also meant tripling the water sources. The cross fencing and water development didn't happen overnight but they kept developing both simultaneously until they reached their goal of positively impacting selected pastures. Using electric fence has been a key component to their cross fencing success. When they first began cross fencing a single electric wire was used; when they started getting involved with NRCS projects they began using two wires. Both have been equally effective and their cows are electric fence trained.

Managing Stocking Rates

In keeping with their grazing management philosophy they had to sell some cows last year and they chose not to keep any yearling replacements due to drought conditions. When the dust settled they had reduced their AUM's by 30%.

[READ MORE](#)



Mackenzie, left, and Madison Wiegand, both seniors at Simms High School, are finalist in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow STEM contest.

Lewistown, Simms students tackle solutions to real world problems in science contest

Great Falls Tribune: SIMMS — In middle school, Mackenzie and Madison Wiegand set a goal for themselves and their science fair project: Cure cancer.

They scaled that back. Sort of. Now they're seniors and working on a filtration system to inexpensively and efficiently clean water around the world.

They've seen other high schoolers' interest in science projects wane. Maybe they're discouraged when they don't win or are intimidated by the scope of the problems of the world.

"They don't think they can change the world, but heck we're doing it," Mackenzie said.

Simms High School is among the five Montana finalists in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Contest. The others are Lewistown Junior High School, Sentinel High School in Missoula, Red Lodge High School and Corvallis High School.

Lewistown middle schoolers are addressing the problem of light pollution. Suzie Flentie, eighth-grade science teacher, and her students have been the state winners three of the last four years.

While working with Montana State University physics professor Paul Rugheimer during the summer, Flentie learned about the problems associated with light pollution, the brightening of the night sky with man-made light sources.

"I threw it out to the students, and they started doing research and getting excited," she said. "We're looking at, in a nutshell, how to use inexpensive solar energy and LED lights to produce good light and develop a casing to the light goes where it's needed without polluting the night sky."

Flentie's students will use software to design the street light casing that will house a solar panel and LED light. The casing will direct the light where it's needed and not into the sky. [READ MORE](#)

Oregon district uses technical assistance funds for administrative support

Editor's note: This article showcases one way conservation districts could use NACD's Technical Assistance grants to increase capacity.

NACD: While many conservation districts are using NACD technical assistance (TA) grant funding to grow capacity in the field, Oregon's Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is using TA funding to help behind the scenes.

In April, Tiffany Schademan was hired as a full-time administrative assistant to support the SWCD and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices.

"With NRCS' current capacity, our huge service area and the amount of workload we have, a lot of our day to day is doing (field) work and getting done what needs to get done," Umatilla County SWCD District Manager Kyle Waggoner said. "Having additional support has greatly freed up staff to do more technical and large-scale planning work."

Schademan has already made significant strides in re-organizing the field office files. She is helping producers with record-keeping and file management, which has greatly assisted Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract participants and NRCS staff. [READ MORE](#)

Fewer streams to be covered under new WOTUS rule

AgriPulse: Many areas covered by the Obama administration's "waters of the U.S." rule would be removed from federal oversight under a proposal released today by the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers.

EPA and the Corps propose to remove ephemeral streams – those that flow when the rain falls – from federal jurisdiction. In a change sure to be welcomed by the ag industry, the proposal also would exclude ditches from regulation unless they contribute flow to a perennial or intermittent stream.

Intermittent streams, according to archived information on EPA's website, "flow during certain times of the year when smaller upstream waters are flowing and when groundwater provides enough water for stream flow."

"Ditches that operate like a traditional navigable water, like the Erie Canal, things like that, they're regulated," EPA Assistant Administrator for Water David Ross said told reporters ahead of the proposal's release. Ditches draining "adjacent wetlands" – those next to a covered water – "will also be in, so long as they provide perennial or intermittent flow to a traditional navigable water (TNW). All other ditches will be out."

EPA Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler said the proposal is designed to clear up confusion over which areas are under federal jurisdiction and which are not, noting that because of litigation around the country, the WOTUS

rule is in effect in 22 states while pre-WOTUS regs are in effect in the other 28.

Wheeler also went after the 2015 rule. Echoing leaked agency talking points obtained by the Daily Caller, he said it was not about water quality but about "power – power in the hands of the federal government over landowners" and that it put land-use decisions "in the hands of distant unelected bureaucrats."

The proposal comes with a 60-day comment period, which environmental groups are certain to attack as insufficient for a proposal of this scope. The WOTUS proposed rule had a comment period of 207 days.

In rejecting jurisdiction for ephemeral streams, the proposal parts ways significantly with the 2015 rule, which relied on an extensive scientific analysis on water connectivity that found "ample evidence" to demonstrate "many wetlands and open waters located outside of riparian areas and floodplains, even when lacking surface water connections, provide physical, chemical, and biological functions that could affect the integrity of downstream waters."

EPA prepared no similar report this time around, Ross said, emphasizing instead the administration's desire to come up with legally defensible regulations "informed by science."

[READ MORE](#) (Must log in to view but registration is free)

How Ryan Zinke shifted Interior department policy

PBS News Hour: Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's resignation Saturday ended months of speculation about whether he could hold onto his job amid several ethics investigations.

Zinke's policy decisions at the Interior Department were overshadowed in recent months by several investigations into his business deals and connections to powerful players in the energy industry.

But in his nearly two-year stint as Interior secretary, Zinke, a former Montana congressman, played a leading role in the Trump administration's efforts to roll back Obama-era regulations on oil and gas drilling, and mining and wildlife protection, among other policies.

President Donald Trump, who announced Zinke's departure on Twitter, said he would pick a replacement this week.

In the meantime, here's a look at some of the major changes to energy and environmental policy under Zinke's leadership at the Interior Department.

Scrapping sage grouse protections

In June 2017, Zinke announced a plan to strip protections for the sage grouse, a North American bird that resides largely in Western United States. The decision to remove restrictions on the sage grouse's habitat effectively opened nine million acres of public land in the West to oil and gas drilling. [READ MORE](#)

15 questions and answers on the USDA trade retaliation mitigation payments

Successful Farming: The USDA's Trade Retaliation Mitigation package announced earlier this week will distribute \$4.7 billion in cash payments to producers through the new Market Facilitation Program (MFP). The goal of the program is to assist farmers in response to trade damage from unjustified retaliation by foreign nations.

"Early on, the president instructed me, as Secretary of Agriculture, to make sure our farmers did not bear the brunt of unfair retaliatory tariffs. After careful analysis by our team at USDA, we have formulated our strategy to mitigate the trade damages sustained by our farmers. Our farmers work hard, and are the most productive in the world, and we aim to protect them," said USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue.

The following are details on the MFP, including what payments will be, who is eligible, and where to apply as provided by the USDA.

1. WHAT COMMODITIES ARE INCLUDED? Soybeans, sorghum, corn, wheat, cotton, dairy, sweet cherries, almonds, and hogs.

2. HOW MANY PAYMENTS WILL THERE BE? On December 17, Perdue announced that there would be two payments.

3. WHAT WILL THE PAYMENTS BE? Producers need only sign-up once for the market facilitation program to be eligible for the first and second payments. The first payment will equal the MFP rate × 50% of 2018 actual production. For farmers who have already applied,

completed harvest, and certified their 2018 production, a second payment will be issued on the remaining 50% of the producer's total production.

4. HOW WILL ACTUAL PRODUCTION BE DETERMINED FOR CROPS? The MFP payment will be made after a producer harvests 100% of the crop and provides reliable production records to the Farm Service Agency (FSA). A reliable production record includes copies of receipts, ledgers of income, income statements of deposit slips, register tapes, invoices for custom harvesting, or contemporaneous diaries that are determined acceptable by the FSA county committee.

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Prairie strips slow water, soil movement

AgriView: While there's debate about what's causing more frequent severe-weather events, Wisconsinites would agree that excessive rainfall in 2018 caused serious flooding damage. Even in areas that weren't flooded, pounding rain resulted in sediment loss and nutrient runoff on many a farm field.

Seeing the detrimental effects of such rainstorms, more farmers are adding new tools to their "toolboxes." Prairie strips are among those tools. And 10 years' worth of on-farm research findings by Iowa State University researchers indicates prairie strips are working. The Iowa State testing program began in 2007 on 2- to 12-acre

parcels. The program has since been expanded to larger parcels.

Results from a decade of testing show that converting just 10 percent of a crop field to prairie strips could help farmers reduce runoff of water by 44 percent, sediment by 95 percent, phosphorus by 90 percent and nitrogen by 84 percent. The areas tested were all on corn and soybean farms.

Testing and monitoring have been conducted on 43 farms in Iowa and northern Missouri as of 2018. Fourteen of the farms are currently in the process of integrating prairie strips into their production programs, said Lisa

Schulte-Moore, a professor in the natural resource-ecology and management department at Iowa State University. Moore also is co-leader of the Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips project, known as STRIPS.

"We're working to understand the impacts of prairie strips on yield, soil, water, soil-microbe activity, birds, mammals, snakes and pollinators," she said.

The project researchers have found that prairie strips have encouraged a 3.5-fold increase in pollinators and a 2.1-fold increase in bird species. The strips are composed of about 30 species. [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: **January 17, 2019, April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

GLCI Education & Demonstration Project Funding

The Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) mini-grants will provide funding for educational events and support partners and organizations with an interest in the conservation, education, and awareness of grazing lands and natural resources in Montana. \$50-\$1,000, applications accepted year-round. [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](#)

BoR Cooperative Watershed Management Grants

Qualified watershed groups may apply for up to \$300,000 for collaborative, on-the-ground watershed management projects related to ecological resilience,

water quality, and water supply. Deadline **January 30, 2019**. [More Info](#)

Montana Native Plant Society Small Grants Program

The purpose of the MNPS Small Grants Program is to stimulate research, conservation, and educational activities that help foster an appreciation for Montana's native plants and plant communities. These grants are intended to promote native plant conservation through better understanding of our native flora and the factors affecting their survival. Deadline **January 31**. [More Info](#)

Five Star & Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program

This program seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to diverse local partnerships focused on improving water quality, watersheds and the species and habitats they support. Full Proposal due **January 31**. [More Info](#)

Conservation Planning Boot Camp

NRCS Conservation Planning Boot Camp is a three-week, intensive training course for technical employees that covers current conservation planning policy, procedures and guideline. District participants are trained right alongside NRCS field staff in the skills necessary for developing and implementing comprehensive conservation plans. [More Info](#)

RDG Planning Grants

The DNRC Reclamation and Development Grants Program (RDGP) is accepting grant applications to fund planning and assessment for natural resource projects. Proposed projects must plan for projects that will provide benefits in one of two categories: Mineral development reclamation or crucial state need. Up to \$50,000 is available, deadline **February 28**. [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Crop and Pest Management School

Register now for the 2019 CROP AND PEST MANAGEMENT SCHOOL, which will be held on Monday, **January 14th through Wednesday, January 16th** at Montana State University in Bozeman. [More Info](#)

Western Montana Grazing & Agriculture Conference

The 3rd Annual Western Montana Grazing and Agriculture Conference will be held at the DoubleTree Edgewater in Missoula on Thursday and Friday, **January 17th and 18th**. 15 speakers including ranchers and farmers, researchers, resource professional and experts in agriculture. Sponsored by Lake County CD & partners. [More Info](#)

Planning For On-Farm Success Workshop Series

Geared toward beginning farmers and ranchers, this seven-part series will equip participants with the tools and the support network needed to manage a profitable business

Coming Up

January

14-16 Crop & Pest Management Workshop

14 Soil Health Workshop, Great Falls

15 Soil Health Workshop, Three Forks

16 Soil Health Workshop, Billings

MACD Board Conference Call

17 Soil Health Workshop, Forsyth

223, Mini Education, & District Development Grant Deadline

17-18 Western Montana Grazing & Agriculture Conference, Missoula

18 Soil Health Workshop, Sidney

Have an event to share?

Please email tmc@macdnet.org with details.

and turn a passion into a career. Wednesday evenings, 5:30-8:30PM. **January 16 - March 6.** Locations in Missoula, Bozeman, Hamilton, & Lewistown. [More Info](#)

Plan, Prepare, Pass it on: Ag Business strategies for the future

Presented by SWCS, this two day workshop will feature professionals in taxes, estate planning, law, and business. **February 5 & 6,** Northern Hotel Billings. [More Info](#)

Montana Lakes Conference

This conference will gather 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](#)

Montana Youth Range Camp

Mark your calendars! The annual Montana Youth Range Camp will be held **June 25—28, 2019** at Hyalite Lions Camp, Hyalite Reservoir, South of Bozeman.

Jobs

2019 New Agrarian Apprenticeships

The New Agrarian Program seeks applicants committed to lives in regenerative agriculture, enough experience to know what it takes to work on the land, and an excellent work ethic. Applicants must be motivated self-

starters, have the ability to work independently, be prepared to work long days outside in variable conditions; be solid problem solvers; and embrace diversity and teamwork. The selected applicants will be mature individuals, excited to engage in their own learning process. [Apprenticeships Deadline December 31](#)

DNRC Rangelands Program Working Lands Internships

This internship is designed to offer beginning agriculturalists, natural resource and range specialists the real-world and hands-on experience implementing the educational tools already gained to a ranching operation. Both students and hosts are sought. Application Deadline **February 1.** [More Info](#)

WLA Northern Rockies Field Coordinator

The Western Landowners Alliance Northern Rockies Field Coordinator will support landowners in keeping working lands intact by reducing and mitigating conflict with grizzlies, wolves, elk and other wildlife. This will be done in cooperation with a range of partners spanning the private, not-for-profit and governmental sectors through educational outreach, resource coordination and public policy engagement. Posted December 10, open until filled. [More Info](#)