

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

March 26, 2020

Volume 14 Issue 3

In This Issue

- 1 Ducks Unlimited awards Partners of the Year
- 2 Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group completes Crow Creek restoration
- 3 Lincoln CD completes Tobacco River restoration
- 4 Wildfire season is almost here, and Coronavirus is making us less prepared
- 4 The COVID-19 virus and U.S. Agriculture's supply chain
- 5 As COVID-19 spreads, how do you ethically get outdoors
- 5 Finding creative ways to get food to consumers as farmers markets close
- 6 OPPORTUNITIES



Ducks Unlimited awards Partners of the Year

Editor's Note: Martin Townsend is an SWCDM employee based in Malta, as part of our Sage Grouse Initiative partnership program. You can learn more about the program on our website: <https://swcdm.org/programs/sji-mt>

Hunter VanDonsel (Pheasants Forever), Martin Townsend (Sage Grouse Initiative) and Adam McDaniel (Ducks Unlimited) were awarded partners of the year at the Montana Ducks Unlimited state convention in Bozeman in February.

This award recognizes the conservation efforts these three individuals have brought to Montana's Hi-line and highlights the importance partner organizations can have when working as a team. They have taken the partnership model to heart and have worked to collectively put their organization's mission on the ground.

Together, they have worked to conserve wildlife habitat and working lands for generations to come. Congratulations Hunter, Martin and Adam on all your hard work and accomplishments.

SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
of MONTANA



MONTANA ASSOCIATION of
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
We're growing Montana's future.

1101 11th Ave • Helena, MT 59601
(406) 443-5711 • www.swcdm.org

This newsletter is made possible
by a grant from DNRC.



Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group completes Crow Creek restoration

More than a decade ago, several agency partners rehabilitated a section of Crow Creek that had been impacted by the proximity of Bonneville Power Administration power lines.

"If you look at that stretch now, you would think it's a totally different place," said Jason Blakney, fisheries biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park. "It just looks like a totally different stream."

Low growing shrubs have come back to provide bank stability, and the channel was reconstructed using natural materials to provide complex habitat for native fish and riparian species.

NorthWestern Energy, along with Montana FWP, Avista, Lolo National Forest and the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group, recently completed another rehabilitation project along an adjoining 600-foot section of Crow Creek. The

partners are optimistic that the outcome will be as significant as the 2007 project.

A NorthWestern Energy power line, built in the 1940s, crosses Crow Creek just downstream of the BPA line and the previous stream restoration project that was completed in 2007. The first step of this restoration project was working with the Lolo National Forest, to remove a power pole that was previously located in the flood plain of the creek. NorthWestern installed taller poles, allowing for a longer span over the creek, making the pole in the flood plain unnecessary. That allowed a service road through the flood plain to also be removed. And vegetation can grow taller without interfering with the power line. As part of this power pole replacement work NorthWestern can better maintain reliable transmission service and facilitate important environmental

improvements.

Prior to the restoration, a lot of vegetation had been removed along the creek, causing the bank to be unstable, said NorthWestern Energy biologist Jon Hanson. The creek had eroded into a wide, shallow stream channel, lacking suitable fish habitat. Crow Creek runs through a confined glaciated valley, and the creek should be narrow, following the natural grade.

To restore the creek to its natural channel, the entire base of the channel was regraded to be in line with the valley floor. Trees were utilized to help stabilize the bank and channel, create complex habitat and return the stream reach to a naturally functioning channel. The stream now flows over logs and rocks, creating deep pools of slow moving water. The bank was stabilized, and willow cuttings were transplanted to increase vegetation, which will shade the creek. By spring, those willows and other vegetation should take hold.

Crow Creek is home to native sculpin, westslope cutthroat trout and also the threatened bull trout. It is a unique area because of the lack of non-native fish which can impact the survival of these three key native fish species. It is a priority tributary for restoration and natural resource protection because of these unique characteristics.

Since the adjacent 2007 restoration project on Crow Creek, there has been a steady increase in the number of westslope cutthroat trout in the stream.

[READ MORE](#)

Lincoln CD completes Tobacco River restoration

After six years, landowners Karl Kassler and Jim Bushfield have seen the completed restoration of a one-mile reach of the Tobacco River, near Eureka. The project began in 2013 by the Kassler family commissioning a conceptual design to address the health and condition of the river as it flows through their property, the Tobacco Valley Ranch.

Over the years, the Tobacco River has seen many factors impacting its natural flow. In the early 1900's the coming of the railroad straightened many of the natural meanders upstream of the project site causing an increase in water velocity, which accelerated streambank erosion. The timber industry in the early to mid-1900's also impacted this section of the river through a "downstream effect" of erosion caused by splash dams and log drives. Millions of board feet of timber floated downstream from upper tributaries into the Tobacco River and continued on to the Eureka Mill.

In the 1980's the project area was extensively modified by a gravel mining operation. The extraction of gravel and sand, bulldozing along the river corridor and the removal of natural riparian vegetation degraded the river. In addition to the gravel mining operation, past improper land management practices negatively affected the streambanks causing streambank and terrace erosion overtime.

The Tobacco River is listed as "impaired" in the MDEQ 2011 TMDL and water quality restoration plan



Opening the upper meander, summer 2019

in 2011 and in 2015, the Kootenai River Network identified the Tobacco River as a high priority for restoration in its Kootenai River Basin Watershed Restoration Plan. The Tobacco River serves as a migratory corridor to spawning and rearing tributaries for bull trout, and ESA listed species, and westlope cutthroat trout, a Montana Species of Special Concern.

In addition to the restoration of the streambed and streambanks bringing natural meanders, point bars, side channels and low terrace features, the size of the riparian floodplain was increased. It is the intent of the floodplain restoration to create a floodplain that is hydrologically connected to the stream channel and supports a mosaic of riparian and wetland plant communities. A variety of native streambed, streambank and floodplain plants including black cottonwood, water birch, thin leaf alders, red-osier dogwood, drummond willow, englemann spruce, serviceberry, rocky mountain maple, black current and 30,000 willows were planted

to support the river and wetland plant communities. These plants will stabilize the banks and filter nutrients and sediment.

In addition to the ecological and natural resource benefits, this project river corridor is utilized by the residents of the local community and visitors for a host of recreational opportunities including floating, fishing and kayaking. The project is parallel to the Eureka Rails to Trails bike and pedestrian path system that connects the Historical Village in downtown Eureka with Lake Koocanusa.

The Lincoln Conservation District would like to extend their appreciation to the landowners for their commitment to natural resource stewardship, River Design Group for their project engineering and management, Glacier Excavating, Inc. for construction, the stakeholders and our funding partners, for without their financial assistance this project could not have been completed.

[READ MORE](#)

Wildfire season is almost here, and Coronavirus is making us less prepared

Training is cancelled, controlled burns on hold, and fire camps are "the opposite of social distancing." Officials are scrambling to "transform" firefighting amid a pandemic and running out of time.

VICE: The immense disruption of coronavirus has made it easy to forget the more regular disruptions that the Western U.S. faces: wildfire season. After a winter of little rain, much of the west is gearing up for another raging fire season this summer. As with many other endeavours, the virus presents a set of serious obstacles to preparing for wildfires and fighting them.

For starters, the push for "social distancing," or limiting contact to 6 feet away, is nearly impossible when fighting fires, when the standard procedure is to fight fires in groups. Depending on the size of the fire, hundreds or even thousands of firefighters from across the nation may also be deployed to quell a blaze, presenting an enormous risk of spreading the disease.

The 2019 fire season was unusually calm compared to the destruction of 2017 and 2018, though still devastating. It's likely that a long, hot summer could kick up more historic blazes. It's hard to say how the coronavirus pandemic will look by peak fire season, but it's already interrupting normal preparations such as training and forest management.

Spring is when vital forest management happens, as crews set prescribed burns and thin forests in order to reduce the fuel

for spreading fires. In much of the West, including California, all prescribed burns on national forest land is postponed until further notice. Without being able to properly manage lands to prevent fires, we'll have to rely heavily on early suppression of fires.

"We're ultimately going to fail if we keep pouring all of our resources into the initial attack strategy," said Collins. "We're always going to be in a shortage during wildfire season."

The U.S. Forest Service has postponed all in-person training of firefighters until at least April 3, spokesperson Jonathan Groveman said in an email. Instead, they are exploring options such as virtual training, smaller groups, or waiving requirements until training can be completed. The Forest Service is also working to update plans regarding infectious diseases and wildland fire.

For its part, the Bureau of Land Management has released social distance and hygiene tips for firefighters. When responding to fires, the BLM is advocating for using more vehicles to better maintain social distancing and advising all firefighters to carry hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes. The guidelines also recommend that group trainings be kept to a minimum and be held outside.

[READ MORE](#)

The COVID-19 virus and U.S. Agriculture's supply chain

Successful Farming: DES MOINES, Iowa --If they said it once, they said it 20 times during a one-hour webinar, "The U.S. food supply chain is the biggest concern, right now, in this fight against the COVID-19 virus."

Agricultural economists at the University of Illinois, repeated that phrase Friday, during a webinar outlining the COVID-19 virus and its impacts on agriculture.

It just so happens to be the same message coming from USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue.

"Food supply chain is sound, it's stable & there's plenty of food available. To the folks working in grocery stores & driving trucks full of products: Y'all are the heroes in the food supply chain," Secretary Perdue tweeted on Friday.

AG SECTORS IMPACTED

Nick Paulson, University of Illinois director of graduate programs, says the run on groceries from the consumers is putting pressure on grocery supplies at the stores.

"Delivery of food is changing because consumers are coming into stores more often, making the effort to keep shelves stock difficult," Paulson says. "Between staff having to sanitize shelves, special hours for the at-risk population, this end of the food chain is changing." [READ MORE](#)

As COVID-19 spreads, how do you ethically get outdoors

High Country News: People have been trying to get outdoors during this COVID-19 pandemic, and I don't blame them. Without fresh air to breathe, clear sunlight or mist on our eyelids, I don't think we can remain sane. And we need a sane population. Especially now.

All over the country, beaches and parks are closed, warning tape is wrapped around playgrounds. People are trying to get out, but not finding any place to go to. Central Park remains open, and New York City has been asked by its mayor to close certain streets to vehicles so people can get out and walk. In the San Francisco Bay area, where shelter-in-place orders are in effect, residents are still being told that parks are open and to go enjoy them — with certain caveats: The restrooms aren't open, and neither are the trashcans, and don't hike in groups.

In the West, we've got plenty of space. But are we supposed to be using it? We're hearing different messages. There's been a pushback against recreating on public lands, mostly from gateway communities receiving visitors they don't want, even as people are being encouraged to enjoy parks and open spaces where they can keep a safe distance from others. Most national parks remain open, and entry fees have been waived.

So which is it? Stay indoors, or go outside? If you go out for a walk, you might hear someone shouting at you from a window, "What don't you understand about just stay home?"

Moab was overwhelmed by tourists — a madhouse, I'm told, which is significant when you hear it from a Moab local. Last week, it became too much, and all tourist services were closed down. Mayor Emily Niehaus announced, "Moab is asking people to please stay in their home community." The Southeast Utah Health Department halted visitor recreation, restaurants were closed or limited to curbside, camping and hotels across multiple counties were closed to non-locals, and visitors centers have shut down. Everybody, go home. Is home restricted to the indoors, or does it include the spaces around you?

I believe in the right to be outside, but at this moment it shouldn't be exercised through visitor centers and bottlenecks. Forget the parks; seek out the spaces in between, the backyards and alleys. It's a great time to explore an irrigation ditch or the woods at the edge of town — to see what's around you. Be as local as you can. If you're heading to Red Mountain Pass to ski between Silverton and Ouray, Colorado, and you have out-of-county plates, the San Juan County Sheriff's Office will place a yellow slip on your windshield reading, "San Juan County Colorado is enacting a LOCALS ONLY order until further notice due to the COVID-19 Virus crisis." Further down the slip, it notes, "Failure to comply with this order will result in charges with the potential of 1 year in prison, and a \$1,000 fine."

[READ MORE](#)

Finding creative ways to get food to consumers as farmers markets close

Modern Farmer: Kira Jarosz was watching the news unfold in mid-March when she realized she needed to be prepared for the arrival of COVID-19 in her community.

Jarosz, a farmer based in Livingston, Montana, relies on the consumers who attend their local farmers' market in Bozeman to buy her pasture-raised pork, poultry and eggs. Their purchases cover more than 50 percent of her farm's total revenue, she says. But as confirmed cases of COVID-19 started to pop up within her state, she thought it would just be a matter of time before farmers' markets in her area would be shut down.

In an attempt to get ahead, Jarosz and her husband decided they would create an online order form for their customers and implement free home deliveries the following week. They notified followers of their transition over social media and the Bozeman Winter Farmers' Market was cancelled the next day.

"As farmers, especially small farmers catering to a local market, we always need to be creative," Jarosz says. "When normal or established marketing routes disappear, you'd better be proactive or your sales will disappear, too."

[READ MORE](#)

Grants

223, Education, and District Development Grants

The deadlines for this year's 223, Education, and District Development grants from DNRC are as follows: **April 22, 2020**.

MARS In-Lieu Fee Stream and Wetland Mitigation

Montana Aquatic Resources Services (MARS) runs a state-wide In-Lieu Fee Stream and Wetland Mitigation Program. We have funding for several wetland restoration projects in our **Marias, Milk and Lower Missouri** service areas (see [Service Area map](#)). Our funding covers site selection, design, construction, monitoring, landowner payments, and long-term stewardship; and can be used for stand-alone projects, or possibly in combination with another rangeland conservation project or program. To learn more about the ILF program, visit <http://montanaaquaticresources.org/>

Ranching for Rivers

The Ranching for Rivers program is accepting applicants on a rolling basis for 2020. Conservation Districts and watershed groups with identified projects, or individual landowners working with a local CD or watershed group may apply. The program offers 50% cost-share for project implementation and/or the development of a Grazing Management Plan. [More Info](#)

RDG Project & Planning Grants

The DNRC Reclamation and Development Grants Program (RDGP) is now accepting grant applications for both: RDG Planning Grants - up to \$50,000; and RDG Project Grants - up to \$500,000. Grants are available to any city, county, Tribe, conservation district, or other local government subdivision in Montana. Proposed grants must provide natural resource benefits in one of two categories: 1) Reclamation projects; 2) Crucial state need: must prevent or eliminate damage to natural resources or capture extraordinary public benefit that would otherwise be lost. **On Friday, 3/20/20, DNRC updated the RRGL Project Grant deadline to June 1, 2020 and the RRGL Planning Grant deadline to April 10, 2020. We understand the impacts COVID-19 is having on communities and organizations and are allowing additional time to prepare these applications.** [More Info](#)

Montana Grazing Lands Education Mini-Grants

The Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is accepting applications for mini-grants and demonstration projects. The mini-grants will provide funding for educational events throughout the year and support partners and organizations with an interest in the conservation, education, and awareness of grazing lands and natural resources in Montana. Mini-grant funding requests are limited to a minimum of \$50 and a maximum of \$1,000. There is no application deadline. [More Info](#)

Montana Grazing Lands Demonstration Grants

The Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is accepting applications for mini-grants and demonstration projects. Demonstration project applications are due **April 15, 2020**. The current focus is on emerging issues in grazingland management as well as topics that may assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service with delivering Montana Focused Conservation. Applications will be accepted from groups of individuals, non-governmental organizations, and state or local units of government. [More Info](#)

Sweet Grass Water Project Funding

Sweet Grass Conservation District is now accepting applications for a new round of water project funding. Applications are due to Sweet Grass Conservation District by **May 5, 2020**. Ranking and awarding will be done on May 11th. Projects must be able to be completed by November 30, 2020. Maximum amount to be awarded per project is \$12,225. Contact Guelda Halverson, guelda.halverson@mt.nacdnet.net for more info.

FY2021 CD Administration Grants

Applications for Conservation District administrative grants for FY2021 are due May 1. Contact Karl Christians kchristians@mt.gov for more info.

Coming Up

April

- 6 MACD Merger Study Committee Meeting
- 13 MACD Board Conference Call
- 22 223, Education, and District Development Grants due
- 27 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call

May

- 1 FY2021 Admin grants due
- 6 MACD Merger Study Committee Meeting
- 11 MACD Board Conference Call

Have a story, funding opportunity, or event to share?
Please email tmc@macdnet.org with details.

Events, etc

Many of the events that were previously posted in this section have been cancelled and/or postponed. We've done our best to remove those that we know are cancelled; please check with the organizer to confirm the event before making plans.

Upper Columbia Basin Monitoring Workshop

Presented by Whitefish Lake Institute and the Flathead Lake Biological Station on Friday, **May 29, 2020** from 10am – 3pm at the Flathead Lake Biological Station. This training is free and open to the public. Mileage reimbursement up to 100 miles is available and sampling equipment will be made available as needed as well. Please RSVP by MAY 1st to Cynthia Ingelfinger at cynthia@whitefishlake.org

Montana Envirothon

The Montana Envirothon will be held in Lewistown, **April 19-21**. Contact Shonny Nordland, fcd@midrivers.com for more info.

Montana Youth Range Camp

The annual Montana Youth Range Camp, hosted by the Lewis & Clark Conservation District, will be held August 3-6, 2020, at the C Bar N Ranch near Augusta, Montana. Visit <https://lccd.mt.nacdnet.org/> for more info.

Jobs

Assistant Fuels Reduction

Program Administrator

The Lower Musselshell Conservation District in Roundup, MT is looking to hire an assistant fuel reduction program administrator. The applicant will work directly with the Fuel Reduction Program Administrator and the USDA-NRCS office to further develop and administer the district's Fuels Reduction Program. Contact Wendy Jones, Wendy.Jones@MT.nacdnet.net for more info.

MISC

New Grant Resources Database Launched

The State of Montana just made many jobs easier by launching a searchable web-based database of over 130 state and federal grant/loan opportunities to fund community and economic development projects. Project categories represented in the database are wide-ranging and include agriculture and natural resources, arts and education, historic preservation, housing, and community and business development opportunities. [Main Street Montana](#). [More Info](#)

Free ONLINE Grant Writing Training

The MT DNRC is hosting an online grant writing workshop on April 9. Topics will include: Funding opportunities, writing purpose & need, project management plans and budget justification, grant ranking tips, environmental assessments, and writing tips for applicants. [More Info](#)