

# *The* Montana Conservationist

**April 28, 2021**

Vol 15, Issue 1

***News from Montana's Conservation Community***



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Montana Association  
of  
Conservation Districts





# Milk River Watershed Alliance

**Sarah Hitchcock**

*Coordinator for the Milk River Watershed Alliance (MRWA)*

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You would be hard-pressed to find someone in Montana that is unaware of the St. Mary's Diversion and what is happening on the Milk River. Without that diversion system near Babb, Montana, all infrastructure downstream becomes almost irrelevant; millions of tax-payer dollars down the drain, with the economic impact on local communities insurmountable. For decades, groups have been warning of failure should the system go unchecked. Last May those warnings became a stark reality: complete failure of a major drop-structure that carries water to the Milk. Some might not realize that the diversion at St. Mary's prevents the Milk River from running dry every six of ten years; it is understandable why one system would cause such a great concern among residents in North and Northeast Montana.

**Beneficiaries of the Milk River span not only counties, but nations. Into Canada and through Tribal Nations, from irrigators, ranchers, cities and communities, and recreationists, the Milk River's impact is incalculable.**

The water from the Milk River sustains approximately 693 farms and entire municipalities that total more than 18,000 people. With so many beneficiaries, who is responsible for maintenance? The United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation ultimately retains ownership of the irrigation infrastructure on the Milk River. However, the financial responsibility falls almost all on irrigators. Since the Project was



**Top:** Project completion on the Milk River Watershed

**Bottom:** An example of the crumbling infrastructure that MRWA is seeking to address with new funding.



developed, the Milk River Irrigators have had to pay 73.96% of all repairs made, and the USBR (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation) pays the rest. This cost-share is critical because the entire diversion needs to be repaired and comes with a price tag of nearly \$200 million. It doesn't take much to realize that those irrigators don't have \$50 million ready to break ground.

Efforts at the federal level have been pushed for years to see an amended cost-share allocation to allow for repairs to be made. Though repairs would be a tremendous investment, the economic loss should the Milk River infrastructure fail would be far more expensive. In a 2006 study, it was concluded that the economy could suffer up to a \$2 billion loss should that happen. Though repairs to the drop-structure last year were accomplished through an emergency arrangement and hefty financing, waiting for another failure for another fix is not a wise solution. House Joint Resolution No. 7 was introduced by Rep. Casey Knudsen of Malta in February and soared through the Montana Legislature. This Resolution calls on the Federal Government to adjust the current funding allocation to ensure affordability, and ultimately infrastructure rehabilitation. With strong support from conservation districts, sportsmen and wildlife advocates, bankers,

farmers and numerous governmental agencies, H.J. No. 7 is just one collaborative effort between stakeholders to make change and its passage was considered a huge success.

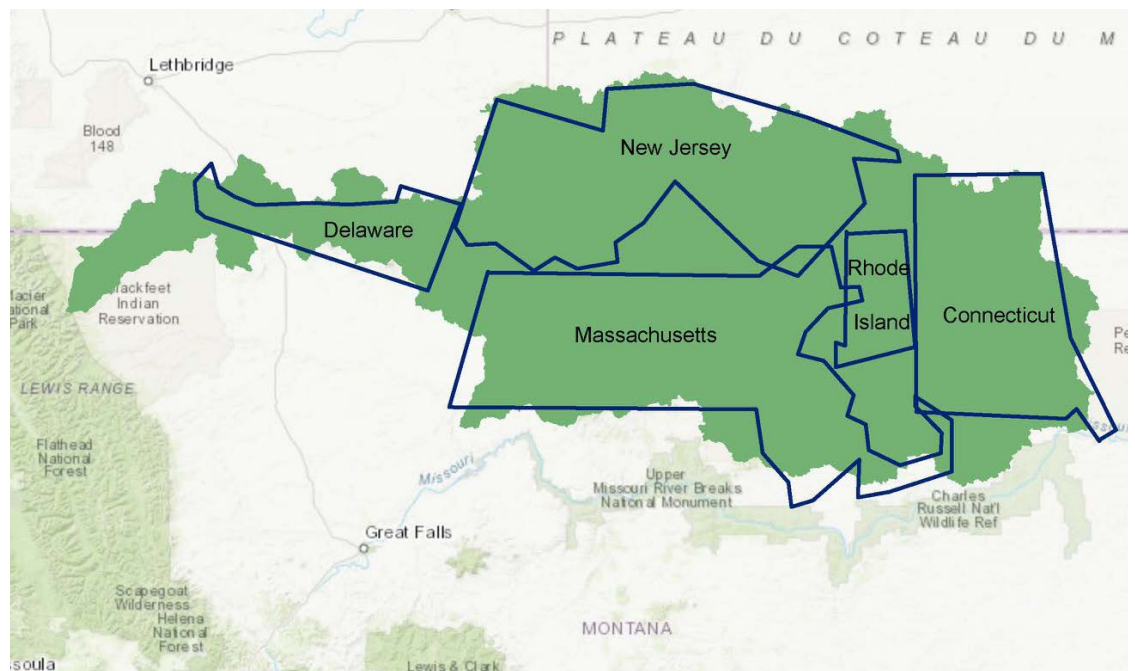
You can find the passed Resolution language on our website: [milkrivermt.org](http://milkrivermt.org)

Additionally, Senator Tester, Senator Daines and Representative Rosendale have recently reintroduced federal legislation to not only provide \$52 million in



**Above:** Saint Mary's Diversion

**Right:** Milk River Watershed vs. Footprint of Eastern US States



contribution to repairs, but to also reassess the current cost-share between irrigators and USBR. While efforts like this have been tried before without success, the failure at St. Mary's has demonstrated that complete disaster is a reality for those along the Hi-Line, and therefore needs immediate consideration and action.

**We are hoping more and more people will join the call to repair and protect the St. Mary's Diversion and the Milk River Project.** The Milk River Watershed Alliance is proud to share a video that highlights the challenges and champions of the Milk River, available on our website at [milkrivermt.org](http://milkrivermt.org). Please consider sharing this video with friends, family and community leadership. A call to our Montana Congressional Delegation will also go a long way; don't let them forget how important this issue is. We cannot let this momentum run out.

### About MRWA

*The Milk River Watershed Alliance is a locally lead organization of conservation districts working together to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources within the Milk River Watershed, while maintaining the quality of life.*

### In The News

#### **Lake Helena homeowner teams up with conservation district to fight erosion**

(Independent Record) "When Tim Olds with the help of the Lewis and Clark Conservation District, recently planted nearly 8,000 willows along 300 feet of his property just off Lincoln Road..."

[Read the Article](#)

## Happy Birthday NRCS!

### MACD and Montana's Conservation Districts

MACD would like to wish the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) a Happy Birthday! The agency was founded on April 27th, 1935 and two years later, the first conservation district was formed to link federal agency resources with the local farmers. To this day NRCS has been an essential partner for conservation districts.



Thank you NRCS for all of your support!

# Unity of Message

## Open Letter to Montana's Conservation Districts

**Mark Bostrom**

*Conservation & Resource Development Division  
Administrator*

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The 2021 Legislature is drawing to a close and it is appropriate for me to say *THANK YOU* to conservation districts for showing up, calling in, writing in and helping us navigate one of the most challenging financial situations we have faced. We will be re-telling tales from this Legislature for years to come, COVID, Zoom, new leadership and Coal Severance Tax. For me, the motto of this session will forever be **unity of message**.

DNRC and particularly CARDD began the session with a skeleton of a staff and facing a \$1.9 million-dollar short fall due to revenue declines from coal production and coal company bankruptcies. We immediately turned to our partners with MACD, conservation districts, Montana Salinity Control Association, and the River Councils for help. In MACD's weekly Legislative Ad Hoc meetings we hammered out our message and talking points, we met and asked hard questions and had hard discussions but showed up with unity in the Legislature and in discussions with the new Governor's staff with the theme; conservation districts are critical to preserving Montana's environment and economy. The Legislature and Governor Gianforte endorsed this by introducing and passing House Bill 374 and the DNRC CARDD budget in House Bill 2. This was a group lift; we needed each voice and letter, and conservation districts delivered on their end of the bargain.

We are far from safe, reliance on Coal Severance Tax to fund CDs is unsustainable and House Bill 374 only serves as a leveling mechanism and sunsets at the end

of the next biennium. I look forward to working with conservation districts and MACD on the upcoming Interim Study on funding options for Montana's conservation districts (HJ27), an idea borne during one of our many MACD/DNRC coordination meetings.

Here at DNRC we are about to embark on Strategic Planning for our division. Fiscal solvency for Conservation District funding is a top priority. At the direction of Director Kaster, we will look at ways to streamline services for our customers to ensure that DNRC delivers on its mission as well our statutory obligations to conservation districts. We will again be looking to our partners, MACD, the conservation districts, the Employee Organization, Montana Salinity Control Association and River Councils for your help. We must make thoughtful decisions on staffing, resetting our financial priorities to align with Conservation District needs and best use of technology.

My vision: Montana's conservation districts will be the most powerful conservation organization in Montana. I want to work with conservation districts to focus on big, long term goals, beyond just getting to the next legislative session. What are our shared goals and how do we get there together?

Thank you all,  
Mark

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## Pollinator Week

**Jillian Henrichon**

*Big Sky Watershed Corps Member*

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Lake County Conservation District held its first ever Pollinator Week April 5-11th. The district started its Pollinator Initiative in Spring 2017 with the goal of increasing habitat for pollinator species and educating the community about the importance of pollinators.



Pollinators are species such as bees and butterflies that transport pollen on their bodies and help plants reproduce. They are essential to food production (they are responsible for 1 in every 3 bites of food you eat) but have been declining due to habitat loss and degradation.

To help combat this loss, LCCD has given out free wildflower seed mixes to interested community members each year, along with technical assistance on planting and site preparation methods. The county has even helped several other conservation districts to start their own pollinator initiatives and provided them with seed to distribute in their own counties. This year, LCCD has given away nearly three acres total of seed to about 100 local landowners!

This year, LCCD ramped up its pollinator initiative to include a week full of educational activities surrounding pollinators. The week kicked off with a site prep workshop to give landowners the tools they need to better ensure success of their planting. An online scavenger hunt provided participants with a fun way to learn more about pollinators and the chance to win a free pollinator plot installation. Pollinator themed trivia takeovers at two of the county's local breweries were a huge success, as was LCCD's partnership with the Polson Theaters to provide daily free public showings of "The Pollinators," a film directed by Peter Nelson about honeybee pollination across the US. Nelson himself even called into Zoom on the big screen at Saturday's showing to provide a Q & A session. The week was a success for the Lake County community and likely for its pollinators as well!



**Top:** To learn more about LCCD's Pollinator Initiative, visit the pollinator initiative website:



**Bottom:** LCCD gave out free wildflower seed mixes to community members

To learn more about LCCD's Pollinator Initiative, visit the pollinator initiative website:

<https://lakecountyconservationdistrict.org/pollinator-initiative>



### ***After 64 years, Bill French resigns from role at Phillips CD.***

Bill French, long time Phillips Conservation District supervisor, has resigned after serving the county for 64 years! Bill is described as passionate for land, agriculture and conservation, a dedicated individual. We recognize and thank Bill for his service to Phillips County!

# Septic Reimbursement Program

**Jillian Henrichon**

*Big Sky Watershed Corps Member*

**SEPTIC MAINTENANCE IS KEY TO KEEPING LOCAL WATERS CLEAN!**  
 HELP US AND SAVE MONEY! APPLY FOR THE FLATHEAD BASIN SEPTIC REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM TODAY!

 <p><b>Your Septic System is linked to Water Quality!</b></p> <p>After treatment, water can still be carrying pollutants like nutrients and pathogens that can enter streams and groundwater. This water is known as <b>septic leachate</b>.</p> <p><i>Did you know 50% of the nitrogen in Spring Creek (Kalispell) is attributed to septic systems?</i></p>	 <p><b>Why it's important</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excess nutrients can cause harmful algal blooms (HABs)</li> <li>• HABs facilitate growth of nuisance aquatic plants (which in turn reduces oxygen in the water), harm wildlife, and make recreation difficult.</li> <li>• Disease causing pathogens such as E. coli can make their way into drinking water and harm community health</li> </ul>	 <p><b>For Proper Care and to protect water...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't flush pharmaceuticals, sanitary products or chemicals</li> <li>• Limit use of garbage disposal,</li> <li>• Clean effluent filters every 6 months</li> <li>• Pump your tank every 3-5 years</li> <li>• Replace your tank every 15-30 years, before it fails</li> </ul>
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**Septic Maintenance Assistance Opportunity!**

The new **Flathead Basin Septic Maintenance Reimbursement Program**, funded through a Department of Environmental Quality federal grant, is offering to **reimburse 50% (up to \$200)** of the cost of pumping for eligible residents of Lake and Flathead County!

Eligibility depends on tank age, time since last pumping, and proximity to surface water

MACD, in partnership with the Flathead and Lake County Conservation District, Flathead Basin Commission, Flathead City-County Health Departments, the Flathead Lakers, and Friends of Lake Mary Ronan, is pleased to announce a brand new Septic Maintenance Reimbursement Program to assist landowners in Lake and Flathead County with the costs of septic system pumping and inspection.

This program is funded by a federal grant through the Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program under the Clean Water Act. The programs' goal is to reduce pollution from septic systems to Flathead Basin waters, and offers landowners 50% (up to \$200) reimbursement for pumping and inspection per system.

If you are interested in this program, please visit either the Flathead Conservation District website or the Lake County CD website for more information, resources and to apply!

## Website

<https://lakecountyconservationdistrict.org/septic-maint-reimbursement>

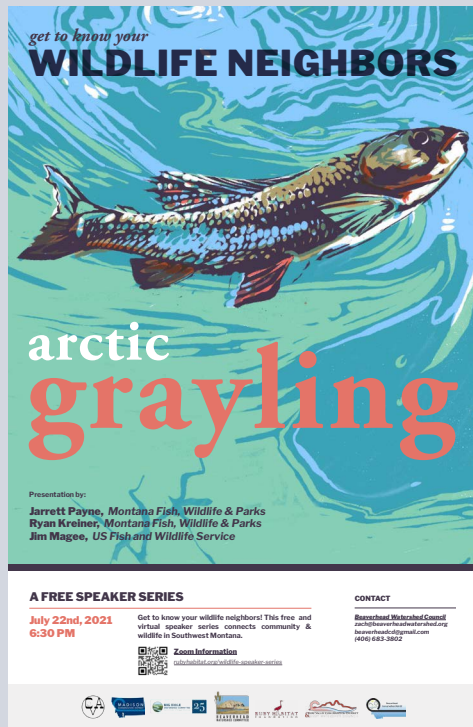
## Contact

Jillian Henrichon  
[flatheadsepticprogram@macdnet.org](mailto:flatheadsepticprogram@macdnet.org)  
 (406)-676-2811 x 108

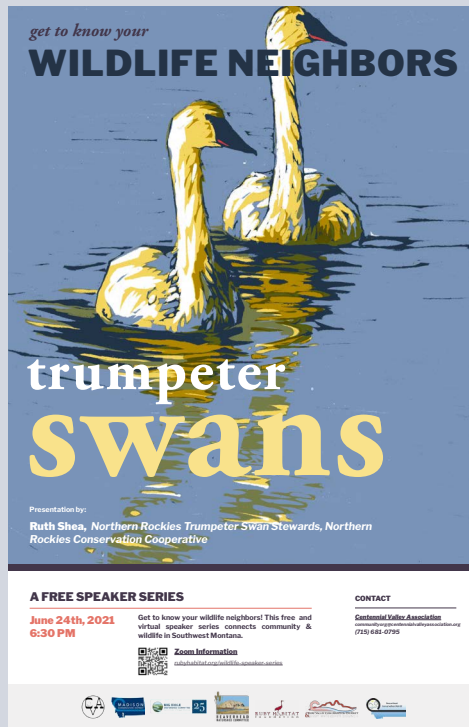
# Connecting Montana's Communities to their Wildlife Neighbors

Ruby Valley Conservation District

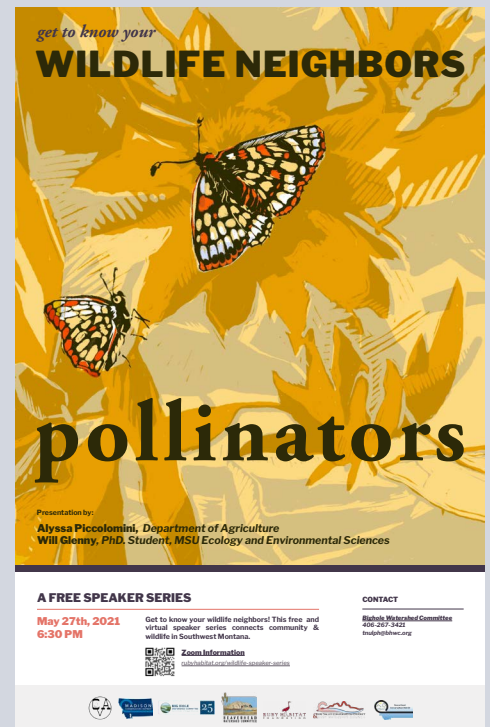
Posters: MACD, Communications Specialist Eric Rannestad



**Left:** May 27th event on Arctic Grayling. [Learn more](#)



**Center:** June 24th event on Trumpeter Swans | [Learn more](#)



**Right:** July 22nd event on Pollinators. [Learn more](#)

The Wildlife Speaker Series was launched in 2013 by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and local partners to bring Southwest Montana communities together for a series of wildlife education. This speaker series has been extremely successful with over 5,000 in attendance over the years! Each event in the series welcomes a wildlife expert to share their knowledge of wildlife and the connection between science and local conservation efforts.

Recently, the WCS has stepped away from this project and the local partners have taken over series coordination. The local partners include: Beaverhead Watershed Committee & Conservation District, Bighole Watershed

Committee, Centennial Valley Association, Madison Conservation District, Ruby Habitat Foundation, and Ruby Valley Conservation District.

Each summer, the Wildlife Speaker Series hosts six events in rural Montana communities which welcome the series as an avenue to connect with their neighbors, human and wildlife, over a delicious meal and an educational presentation! With the challenges we have faced over the last year, the partners decided to keep the event virtual for the year of 2021 with the hopes of returning to an in-person series in 2022!



## Upcoming Events

## Funding Opportunities

April 2021

May 2021

10am | May 5

### Review of the CDB website and programs

Contact Mary Hendrix with questions. mary.hendrix@mt.gov  
Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9294061278>  
Meeting ID: 929 406 1278 | Phone: +12532158782 or +13462487799

May 6

### 2021 Montana Drought Series

Presented by MSU Ranching Systems Team in Dillon, MT

[Event Details](#)

beginning | May 13

### Communicating for the Farm: Webinar Series

This webinar series will give producers the skills they need to effectively and professionally communicate with a non-agriculture public. It will cover both social media and in person communication. The webinar series will be hosted on Teams so participants can interact with each other between sessions. The series will go every Thursday evening through June 17.

Registration is available at [puext.in/comm4farm](http://puext.in/comm4farm) and is free of charge!

Contact: Adriane Good  
e: [adriane.good@montana.edu](mailto:adriane.good@montana.edu) | p: 406-271-4053 | cell: 406-505-0593

May 18

### Rural Resilience Webinars

Ranching for a resilient future: virtual fencing for land, livestock and landscape health.

[Event Details](#)

May 22-23

### Women in the Woods Workshop

The DRNC and Montana Tree Farm are hosting a Women in the Woods workshop, participants will spend the weekend connecting with other women landowners, learning about forests & the skills needed to care for them, while enjoying the courses taught by women for women.

[Registration](#) | [Agenda](#)

Apr 30

### NAISMA Call for Oral and Poster Presentations

The theme of the [2021 North American Invasive Species Management Association Conference](#), co-hosted with the [Montana Invasive Species Council](#), is transboundary cooperation and will be broad in geographic scope, covering challenges and successes that impact and can influence all of North America including aquatic and terrestrial plants, animals, insects, pests, and pathogens.

May 28

### USDA Agroforestry RFP Now Available

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [National Agroforestry Center](#) is requesting proposals to create regionally-applicable and practice-specific agroforestry educational materials based on producer production information, experiences and testimonies. Awards are anticipated to be up to \$100,000 with a minimum of \$35,000 for any one project. For-profit entities; State, local and tribal governments; not-for-profit organizations; and institutions of higher education are eligible entities for these agreements. Proposals must be submitted by May 28, 2021.

[Learn More](#)

May 28

### USDA Seeks Innovative Partner-led Projects Delivering Sustainable Agricultural Solutions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking proposals to fund up to \$75 million in new, unique projects under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program's (RCPP) Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) that take innovative and non-traditional approaches to conservation solutions at the local, regional and landscape scales. NRCS is accepting AFA project proposals now through May 28.

[Learn More](#)

**May 25-26 406 Rangeland & Livestock Forum**

The 406 R & L Forum will take be held in Billings, MT. The event has a great line up of topics relevant to Montana rangelands and livestock producers. Also on the agenda are research updates from Fort Keogh, the universities as well a couple of outstanding guest speakers. This a great opportunity to network and learn.

[Event Registration](#)

**May 25 Dan Scott Ranch Management Program Seminars**

Conservation Easements/ Grass banking and how these are helping keep ranches viable, presented by Brian Martin, TNC.

[Dan Scott Management Seminars](#)

**June 2021****June 9 Managing Profitable Pastures**

Managing Profitable Pasture will feature Dallas Mount, ranch management consultant.

[Event Details](#)

**June 7-9 Spring Board Meeting**

Meeting being held in-person in Helena, MT

**June 15-16 Enhancing Your Livestock Operation: Surviving in a World of Change**

Featuring: Fred Provenza, & Dr. Allen Williams. \$75 per person includes meals. Fallon County Fairgrounds, Baker, MT

[Event Details](#)

**June 21-23 Montana Range Days**

At Montana Range Days, youth and adults of all ages gather for three days to celebrate and learn more about our rangelands, including plant identification, soils, ecology, rangeland inventory, and management tools and techniques. Tours of local operations showcase natural resource management. Contests allow participants to test their knowledge and earn prizes and other awards including scholarships.

[Montana Range Days Website](#)

**June 28-30 406 Grazing Academy**

Location Ennis, MT

This 3-day, hands-on grazing workshop will include the opportunity for each ranch to create or update a ranch specific grazing plan with the assistance of leading experts.

[Learn More](#)

**June 6**  
11:49pm EST

**2021 Technical Assistance Grants**

Like previous Technical Assistance (TA) Grants the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has entered into an agreement with NACD to provide funding to further enhance conservation district technical assistance across the nation. The granted funds will be awarded directly to conservation districts to hire staff where additional capacity is needed to improve customer service and reduce workload pressure.

[Learn More](#)



## June 29 **Rural Resilience Meetings - Reducing costs by increasing resilience in Winnett, MT**

World renowned agroecologist Nicole Masters of New Zealand-based Integrity Soils will lead four similar day-long workshops across North-Central Montana on soil biology and carbon levels, nutrient cycling, grazing management, and the economic benefits of soil health.

[Event Details](#)

## Looking Forward

### July 26-29 **Montana Youth Range Camp 2021**

Lewis and Clark Conservation District is hosting Montana youth Range Camp July 26-29. This well organized, balanced, and educational program brings together range professionals and interested students to learn in the great outdoors. Evening programs and activities allow campers an opportunity to meet new friends and develop lasting friendships.

[Tickets](#) | [Facebook](#) | [All DNRC Youth Camps](#)

8:30am | **Sept 14**

### **Riparian Grazing Workshop**

Featuring Dr. Clayton Marlow and Allen McNeal (McNeal Resources), the day will begin with a classroom style presentation at the Augusta Youth Center, lunch from the Buckhorn Bar, and then a field portion on the Converse Ranch. Resource professionals are welcome to be there to talk to landowners.

[Event](#)

### Ongoing

### **Joint Funding by MACD Education Committee and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council**

If your CD is looking for funding assistance for trainings or other professional development opportunities, there are 2 good options for you! The Montana Watershed Coordination Council Watershed Fund has funding available for professional development opportunities that allow our watershed and conservation partners to acquire skills, knowledge, and resources relevant to watershed and natural resource health in their communities. The Lewis & Clark CD also has a grant from DNRC directed by the Education Committee to be used for a variety of things, one of which is training for CD employees and supervisors. Up to \$200 per person per CD can be applied for by filling out a simple request form. Funding is on a reimbursement basis.

[Learn More](#)

## Job Opportunities

### **Missouri River Conservation District Council Coordinator**

*Petroleum County Conservation District and Missouri River Conservation District Council*

The purpose of this position is to assist the Council in achieving its overall objective of local input and control in the management and conservation of the Missouri River.

[Position Details](#) | [Application](#)

### **MACD is seeking a Range Technician [Circle, MT]**

*Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD)*

This position will maintain and/or expand technical assistance capacity in key rangeland focal areas to strengthen working ranchlands management. Employees will work with private landowners in Montana to increase the sustainability and economic viability of ranches while improving the habitat for sage grouse and other rangeland dependent wildlife.

[Learn More](#)

## MACD Communications Update

**Eric Rannestad**

*MACD Communications Specialist*

Thank you for taking the time to read this first issue of the new TMC! I'm very appreciative of all those who contributed to this April issue of The Montana Conservationist. I am so excited by the quantity and quality of content about conservation districts and their partners. Going forward, this monthly publication will continue to center those stories, but to do that we need your help! MACD is accepting pitches for TMC stories on an ongoing basis. We prioritize content about conservation districts and their partner organizations.

### TMC Submissions

[eric@macdnet.org](mailto:eric@macdnet.org)

To submit your proposal, please email MACD Communications Specialist, Eric Rannestad.

#### Montana Association of Conservation Districts



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Helena, MT 59601  
(406) 443-5711