

Montana's Conservation Districts

Locally Led, Voluntary Conservation

Conservation Districts (CDs) are Montana's legislatively mandated local soil and water conservation authority. Conservation districts are units of local government with broad responsibility to carry out programs that conserve soil, water, and other natural resources. To accomplish these objectives, districts work shoulder to shoulder with producers and communities to develop voluntary, tailored solutions through a variety of restoration projects, education, demonstration, and research that conserve Montana's natural resources.

- **Low cost, huge benefit:** Despite a relatively small statewide investment in conservation districts, they serve as hubs of local leadership and have a significant conservation impact across Montana.
- For more than 80 years the 58 conservation districts across Montana have put conservation on the ground. The value of donated hours exceeds **\$5,000,000** annually.

Statute and Funding

“MCA 76-15-102. Declaration of policy. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of soil and soil resources of this state, for the control and prevention of soil erosion, for the prevention of floodwater and sediment damages, and for furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state.” CDs receive funds through a combination of local mill dollars and state funding, primarily from the coal severance tax. CDs also seek additional project grants and funding from a variety of sources.

What we do...

1. 310 Stream permitting
2. Streambank restoration
3. Rangeland management
4. Water reservations
5. Noxious weed control
6. Aquifer management
7. Conservation education and the Envirothon
8. Forest fuel mitigation and fire restoration
9. Flood and fire restoration
10. Natural disasters (ex. 2022 flooding)
11. Irrigation efficiency
12. Aquatic Invasive Species boat check stations
13. Pollinator programs
14. Watershed planning
15. Equipment rentals
16. Voluntary soil conservation programs
17. River councils
18. Salinity control
19. Wildlife (ex. Sage Grouse)
20. Stream gauges
21. Coordination with state agencies - DNRC, DEQ, FWP, DES, MDT
22. Coordination with federal agencies - NRCS, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Forest Service, USGS, NPS, USFWS
- And more

Challenges Facing Conservation Districts

Finding an adequate, long term, stable funding source that will allow individual Districts to **(1)** fulfill their mandated duties and **(2)** address increasing local needs related to land use changes, increasing populations, development, and natural disasters (ex 2022 flooding, 2017 fires, etc).