



MONTANA ASSOCIATION *of* CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Ranching for Rivers

Ranching for Rivers is a cost-share program designed to assist landowners protecting riparian health through improved ranching practices. Through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Ranching for Rivers offers 50% cost-share for fencing material, off-site water infrastructure, and developing grazing management plans. Funding is also available for Conservation Districts and Watershed Groups to provide technical assistance on ranching management projects to local landowners in their area.

Program Eligibility and Priorities

Eligible Groups

- Conservation Districts and Watershed Groups with identified projects
- Individual landowners who are working with a local Conservation District or Watershed Group
- Riparian pasture projects must be located on water bodies listed by DEQ as impaired by sediment, nutrients, E-coli, or habitat alterations, or contributing such pollution to an impaired waterbody downstream. The list of impaired water bodies can be found on: [Montana 2020 Impaired Waters List Appendix A Final.pdf \(mt.gov\)](#)
- **Projects must be completed by October 31st, 2026**

Priority Projects

- Priority funding will be given to projects that fall within an area with a DEQ-approved Watershed Restoration Plan. A status list of Watershed Restoration Plans can be found on:
[Lakes, Streams & Wetlands | Montana DEQ \(mt.gov\) \(under Watershed Restoration Plans\)](#)

Cost-Share

The Ranching for Rivers program offers 50% cost-share for project implementation and/or the development of a Grazing Management Plan. The 50% cost-share will be provided in the form of reimbursement following a completed project. Upon application acceptance, landowners are required to complete a landowner agreement requiring maintenance of the installed practice(s) for the expected life of the practice(s) (typically 10years).



Eligible Costs:

- Fencing Material for complete exclusions or “riparian pastures”
- Livestock pipeline
- Materials for stream crossing
- Permanent drinking tanks & winter tanks with storage
- Contracted costs for the development of a Grazing Management Plan by a range specialist
- Conservation District and Watershed Group staff time for technical assistance and administrative/reporting assistance

Ineligible Costs:

- Time & labor costs associated with project installation
- Fencing/equipment maintenance or replacement

Match:

50% non federal match must be recorded and reported to MACD along with final project expenses and reporting. Match may include:

- Dollars provided by other non-federal grants used to complete the project
- Dollars provided directly by the landowner.
- Time & labor costs by associated with project installation Time & labor costs by associated with project installation (see [DEQ's Estimation the Value Of Volunteer Labor](#))
- Assistance & administrative time costs by a Conservation District, Watershed Group, or partner group not already being charged directly to the Ranching for Rivers program.

Conservation District/ Watershed Group Staff Time Reimbursement

The Ranching for Rivers Program also includes partial funding for reimbursing CD & Watershed Groups for staff time associated with the program. Timesheets will be provided to the designated affiliate upon application acceptance for tracking project time and accomplishments. Timesheets and request for reimbursement can be reported following project completion.

- Aiding landowners in developing an application
- Aiding in Scope of Work/Contract/ Operations & Maintenance forms, and obtaining signatures
- Project site visitation for pre- and post-project evaluation & photos
- Calculating Load Reduction Estimations

- Final project reporting

Application Process

- First call for applications closes January 11th. After that applications will be accepted on a rolling basis January 2024 – September, 2025
- Applications should be submitted to Brenna Rietmann, MACD, electronically to brenna@macdnet.org
- Applications will be reviewed by a panel consisting of MACD, DEQ, DNRC and MRCDC representatives.
- MACD will submit a letter of acceptance, rejection, or recommendations within 60 days of call close date or rolling application submission.
- If recommendations are presented to the applicant, the applicant must resubmit the application with suggested amendments for full consideration.
- If accepted, the landowner & associated Conservation District/Watershed Group will work with MACD to complete a Scope of Work, Operations & Maintenance Agreement, and Cost-Share Contract that must be completed and signed by all parties within 90 days of the acceptance

Reporting

- In order to receive the fully requested 50% cost-share, *all receipts and invoices* associated with project implementation must be reported to MACD.
- Completed and approved Scope of Work, Landowner Agreement, and Operations & Maintenance agreement.
- A Final Report using the provided reporting template, detailing final project outcomes and load reduction estimates (See “Reporting Load Reduction Estimates”).
- Before and After Photos

Reporting Load Reduction Estimates

Completed Projects must include estimate load reductions for Total Nitrogen (lbs./yr.), Total Phosphorus (lbs./yr.), And Total Sediment (ton/yr.).

- Common equations used for these calculations include the Mass Balance Equation: More details on the Mass Balance Equation can be found on page 33 of the [Montana DEQ Load Reduction Estimation Guide](#).
- Other methods used to calculate nutrient load reduction include the Agricultural (Livestock) Loading Estimate from [DEQ’s Lower Blackfoot Nutrients TMDLs and Water Quality Improvement Plan, Section 5.5.1.1.](#)

- Measurements and photos required for load reduction calculations should be taken prior to project implementation.
- Questions regarding load reduction should be directed to either Brenna Rietmann, MACD (brenna@macdnet.org) or to Meagan Gilmore, DEQ (Meagan.Gilmore@mt.gov).

Grazing Management Plans

Grazing Management Plans are eligible for cost-share funding and are highly encouraged in conjunction with a proposed structural project.

- NRCS has the capability to write GMPs free of cost, but focus on landowners enrolled in one of the conservation programs
- MSU County Extension Offices have resources/staff to develop GMPs
- Landowners can hire a consultant to write a GMP (pricing generally based on acreage)