

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

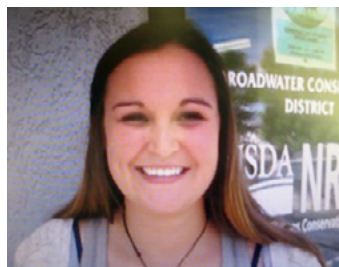
News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Big Sky Watershed Corps member honored by NRCS



Katie Mumford, a 2017 Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) member at Broadwater Conservation District, was recently recognized by NRCS as the 2017 Earth Team Individual Volunteer of the Year award winner for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana.

As part of her position as a BSWC member at Broadwater CD, Katie contributed 817 hours of volunteer service to the Townsend, Mont., NRCS field office in 2017 as an Earth Team Volunteer.

In total, there were 213 individual Earth Team volunteers in Montana in 2017 that donated 6,278 hours of their time. Earth Team volunteers dedicate their time and talents to various conservation activities, from helping farmers prevent soil erosion and protecting water resources and watersheds against flood damage to improving the condition of grazing land and enhancing wildlife habitat. The Points of Light calculates the value of these donated hours as nearly \$148,000.

Katie's generous service to the NRCS had an immediate and positive influence on her co-workers in the Townsend, Mont., field office as well as the clients they serve. She further distinguished herself by her strong work ethic, dedication, and passion for natural resource sciences. The recognition for Katie has helped staff members and partners remember why the spirit and value of volunteerism is contagious and impactful.

BSWC is offered through a partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana, Montana Conservation Corps, and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council. This is the second year in a row that a conservation district hosted BSWC member has been honored by this award. For more info about the BSWC program and what members around the state are doing, visit: <http://swcdm.org/programs/big-sky-watershed-corps/>.

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Mussel Walk teaches Flathead students about invasive aquatics

The Missoulian: POLSON — “Eww! It looks like a maggot. What is it?” seventh-grader Aryia Dentler said as she scooped a soldier fly larva out of a shallow bucket during a school field trip on aquatic invasive species.

Moments later, her squeamish reaction turned to pride.

“I was the first one to find it today,” she added. “It looks really cool, but it’s gross.”

Dentler was one of about 140 area students at the KwaTaqNuk conference center on Thursday who participated in a Mussel Walk field trip put on by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Another 140 students gathered at the Flathead Lake Biological Station for similar activities.

Germaine White, the information and education program manager for CSKT, said they brought the students out on the field trip for some hands-on learning about what’s in the water, especially invasive species — and in particular, the zebra mussels they hope to keep out of Flathead Lake.

“I could go to the classroom and lecture, but doing this in an experiential way is where they can hear and feel this,” White said. “It’s sensory stimulation, and that’s how we learn and remember.”

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Taking No-Till to the next level

From a story map by NRCS: Jason Brewer thought he was a no-till farmer until he learned he wasn’t.

In 2014, Brewer went with a group of Montana farmers to North Dakota with the Rosebud Conservation District to see what farmers had been doing there since the 1990s to improve soil health.

“It was a shock to think you were a no-till farmer for that long (23 years) and then have somebody tell you you really weren’t no-till farming,” said Brewer, who has farmed in Rosebud County, Mont., his whole life.

He had been using a hoe drill for 20 years and thought that he was a no-till farmer, but quickly learned that there was more to it than that. “When I came back, I bought a drill like they were using and started planting cover crops and continued no-till farming with a disc drill, which saves moisture and disturbs the soil less.”

Convinced by what he had seen in North Dakota, Brewer jumped in with both feet. He planted 750 acres with his new no-till disc drill, an acreage number that scared Rocky Schwagler, then district conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Forsyth, Mont. “When Jason told me he bought a no-till drill and was going to plant 750 acres of cover crops, I was afraid if it didn’t work, no one would try it for another 10 years.”

It’s a fear that Brewer understood as he said his father told him that no-till means no crop. But the changes he made were a success and he hasn’t looked back since.

Jason Brewer, farmer near Forsyth, Mont., grows corn with soybeans in between rows under irrigation in his no-till system. No-till will help build soil organic matter and protect the soil from intense rainfall, strong winds, and summer heat.

[View the full story map](#)

Spring flooding already taking its toll on Montana agriculture

As the flatland flooding around northcentral Montana begins to recede, counties, road departments and ag producers are assessing the toll.

At this point the basic assessment is that spring seeding is about a month behind where it should be at this point, and it could be two or three weeks before the ground dries out enough for full-scale planting to take place. That could have serious implications for the variety of crops put into the ground, and anticipated yields at the end of the 2018 growing season.

"We're basically a month behind where we'd expect to be at this time of year," said Tyler Lane, MSU extension agent for Chouteau County. "If we don't get spring wheat in by May 1, we lose about a bushel a day for every day it's not seeded."

That could mean millions of dollars in lost profitability for crops like spring wheat, lentils, field peas and barley. All are Montana staples that depend upon significant plant development before the summer heat arrives.

"Peas and lentils especially,," explained Jesse Fulbright, ag extension agent for Liberty County. "You can plant those things, but it's the heat that really does them in."

[READ MORE](#)



Study: Varied landscape better for pollinators than flowering strips

Sowing strips of flowering plants has limited effect on pollination

Lund University: Many pollinating insects benefit from a small-scale agricultural landscape with pastures, meadows and other unploughed environments. In landscapes dominated by arable land, they lack both food and nesting places. Sown flower strips can increase the availability of food for pollinating insects, and are therefore assumed to benefit pollination. However, new research from Lund University in Sweden shows that the effect of the sown flower strips on pollination is limited and cannot compensate for the advantages of a varied landscape.

Researchers at the Centre for Environmental and Climate Research at Lund University have studied how pollination varies in different agricultural landscapes, by placing pots with either wild strawberry or field bean in field borders. Plants that were placed in a small-scale agricultural

landscape, with pastures and other unploughed environments, were better pollinated than plants in landscapes dominated by arable land.

The researchers also investigated how sown flower strips, i.e. flower plantings which farmers often create to benefit pollinators, affected pollination in the different landscape types. In landscapes dominated by arable fields, pollination increased adjacent to the flower strip. A few hundred metres further away, however, the sown flower strips had no effect on the pollination of wild strawberry and field bean. In more small-scale agricultural landscape, the sown flower strips instead reduced pollination of adjacent plants, likely because the increased amount of flowers resulted in competition among flowers for pollinating insects.

[READ MORE](#)

Boat with invasive mussels found at Anaconda check station

Seeley-Swam Pathfinder: The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Anaconda watercraft inspection station intercepted a boat carrying zebra mussels Friday. The cabin cruiser was being transported from Ohio to Puget Sound in Washington.

The inspection station reported that many mussels were found in the boat's gimbal area, the trim tabs and several crevices.

The boat was wrapped in shrink wrap, and inspectors hot-washed the exterior of the boat to the best of their ability. The inspectors were not able to flush the motors, bilge pump or any other part of the boat. The transporter of the boat was not the owner of the boat and he did not have keys to the boat.

[READ MORE](#)

Columbia Treaty watchers hope to right 50 years of wrongs

Fire up half a dozen bulldozers over a summer and Canada could turn the Kootenai River away from Libby Dam and pour its water into the Columbia River.

Nobody's planning to do that. But somebody thought it was significant enough to include in the 1964 Columbia River Treaty between the United States and Canada. Negotiators for both nations have started work rethinking that treaty, which otherwise automatically renews in 2024. In the process, they've stirred up much more than theoretical engineering projects.

"The original treaty had two purposes, hydro-power generation and flood-risk management," said Jon Osborn, a medical doctor who helped organize the "One River: Ethics Matter" conference in Missoula this week. "But that came at great cost to the river system, to the salmon and to the people of the basin. We have an opportunity

to seek justice and stewardship. We can add a third purpose, ecosystem function, as a primary purpose of the treaty."

The treaty affects a region the size of France. It takes in the Columbia River as it makes a huge north-south arc up through British Columbia and down through Washington and Oregon. Montana contributes the Kootenai, Flathead and Clark Fork river systems. Idaho's Snake River touches bits of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada as it makes its way from Yellowstone National Park to its confluence with the Columbia in Washington.

Those rivers pass 68 major hydropower and flood-control dams before they reach the Pacific Ocean. The treaty obligates Canada to hold back millions of acre-feet of water to prevent floods like a 1948 disaster that ruined neighborhoods from Bonner's Ferry, Idaho, to Portland, Oregon. [READ MORE](#)

NACD's take on the House Farm Bill

On Thursday, April 12, the House Ag Committee released its 2018 Farm Bill (H.R. 2) and the legislation passed out of Committee on Wednesday, April 18. NACD staff have been busy analyzing the bill to see how our priorities fared. Many of our requests were incorporated into the bill and we look forward to working with the Committee and Congress to make further improvements as this process moves forward.

Outlook

H.R. 2 passed out of committee on a straight party line vote. The two parties were not able to reach agreement on proposals regarding nutrition programs in this bill. While we feel there is more work to be done to improve the Conservation Title, it will be necessary for the two parties to reach agreement on the nutrition programs in order for a bipartisan bill to advance. Even with the tension over nutrition programs, the bill passed out of Committee.

Afterwards, it will be debated, amended, and voted on by the full House of Representatives, although there is concern that without bipartisan support, the bill may not pass the House of Representatives due to opposition by Democrats to nutrition provisions and general opposition to USDA farm programs by more conservative Members of the House. Concurrently, the Senate is also writing its own version of the Farm Bill, which we expect will be released in the coming weeks. The final bill that is passed into law will have to be a product of compromise between the two chambers. [READ MORE](#)

Grants

Ranching For Rivers Program Applications

SWCDM is seeking applications for Ranching for Rivers – a cost-share program to help rancher with riparian pasture fencing projects. In partnership with the MRCDC, SWCDM will offer up to 50% cost-share to landowners to voluntarily construct fences and/or other infrastructure that enable them to better manage the riparian resources on their land. Applications accepted on rolling basis, closes **June 15**. [More Info](#)

Future Fisheries Grants

The goal of FWP's Future Fisheries Program is to restore rivers, streams and lakes to improve Montana's wild fish habitat. Entities can receive funding for qualifying projects that benefit Montana's wild fish. **May 31** [More Info](#)

Community Forest & Open Space Grant

This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forest land from a willing seller. **June 29** [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Montana Range Forum

Please join us for the 2018 Range Forum. This event has a great line up of topics relevant to Montana rangelands. Topics include Elk and ranching in Montana, Fire and Drought, and information on new mediation program from Montana Department of Agriculture. **May 9 & 10**. [More Info](#)

Harmful Algal Bloom Webinar

DEQ and DPHHS are hosting a free Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) webinar on **May 15th** at 2pm to unveil Montana's first HAB Guidance. Water managers, private landowners, and all those interested in learning more about HAB's are encouraged to attend. RSVP to Melissa Schaar at mschaar@mt.gov.

Bumble Bee Ecology and Conservation Webinar

This webinar will cover the basics of bumble bee ecology and conservation. Participants will learn the status of North America's nearly 50 species of bumble bees, the threats they face, and the role that important habitat features and land management play in supporting robust bumble bee communities. **May 22** [More Info](#)

Judith Basin Range School

Judith Basin CD is hosting a range workshop featuring Dr. Fred Provenza, discussing Soil, Plants, Herbivores, Humans: How are we linked? **May 24**, Geysers Community Hall, Geysers. For info call 566-2311 ext 107.

Connecting Soil Health with Productivity

Dr. Christine Jones will cover the basics of soil function; including the links between soil elements, structure and water at this workshop hosted by Little Beaver CD. **June 15**, Baker. Email littlebeavercd@macdnet.org for more info.

Wetland Rendezvous

The purpose of this gathering is to spend some quality time in the field exploring springs and wetlands with other wetland scientists and learn about new and innovative ways to inventory, monitor, and assess these ecosystems. Hosted by Montana Wetland Council. Lincoln, MT, **June 26-28**. [More Info](#)

Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp

The 32nd annual Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp will be held July 15-20. Students aged 14-18 will spend a week in rustic cabins at Lubrecht Experimental Forest east of Missoula, learning about our natural resources & their management, and make lasting friendships. Camp cost is \$300. Application & deposit of \$150 due **June 15**. www.mnryc.com for more info.

2018 River Rendezvous

Please join us on **July 11th and 12th** for the 2018 River Rendezvous hosted by the Cascade Conservation District and the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council. Contact Rachel Frost 406-454-0056, or Tenlee Atchison 406.727.3603 x125 for more information.

Coming Up

May

- 1-3 Montana Stormwater Conference, Bozeman
- 9-10 Montana Range Forum, Billings
- 14 MACD Board Conference Call
- 21 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call

June

- 3-6 NACD Northern Plains Regional Meeting, Charlo
- 6 Montana Association of State Grazing Districts Annual Meeting
- 11-13 MACD Spring Board Meeting, Helena
- 14 Digital Atlas & GIS Training for CD Employees, Helena
- 16 Mud Run for Conservation, Hamilton
- 18-20 Montana Range Days, Red Lodge

Have an event to share?
Visit macdnet.org/calendar to add your event to our list!

Jobs

Montana DEQ Wetland Field Tech

If you have a passion for wetland ecology and working outdoors, a position as a Wetland Field Technician may be for you. This position is temporary and expected to work from mid-May through early fall. The Technician travel extensively (at least 15 days per month) beginning June through mid-September. [More Info](#)

MWCC Watershed Programs Coordinator

This position will work collaboratively to enhance MWCC's service model in increasing watershed group capacity through connecting groups with human, technical, and financial resources. **Closes May 9.** [More Info](#)

FWP Riparian Ecologist

The primary responsibility will be managing the CCAA programs for Arctic grayling in Region 3. This duty involves coordinating with agency partners, private landowners and interest groups, developing site-specific management plans with private landowners, ensuring landowner compliance with site specific plans, and completing reporting and administrative obligations. **Closes June 1** [More Info](#)

Fisheries Biologist

Under the direction of the Leader of Hydro License Compliance, this position is primarily responsible for ensuring that the company complies with FERC license and other regulatory requirements related to water quality and associated resource management issues at NWE's hydroelectric projects. **Closes May 14** [More Info](#)

RIPARIAN GRAZING WORKSHOPS

FEATURING SANDY WYMAN

Sandy is a retired BLM Riparian & Rangeland Management Specialist, National Riparian Service Team 2002-2018 and NRCS for 15 years. She has worked throughout the west providing coaching and training in conflict management, facilitation, riparian assessment, restoration, monitoring, and adaptive grazing management.

Learn how to effectively manage riparian grazing areas. Workshops will include a morning session with speakers, catered lunch, and a field tour in the afternoon.

JUNE 26 THOMPSON FALLS

JUNE 27 HELENA

JUNE 28 DEER LODGE

\$15 pre-registration / \$20 at the door

Hosted by SWCDM, MRCDC, and DNRC Rangeland Resources Committee

➡ Visit www.swcdm.org for more information and to register. ⬅