

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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## April is invasive plant pest and disease awareness month

This is the time of year when invasive species known as Hungry Pests start to emerge and threaten our nation's trees, plants and agriculture. Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Purdue, signed a national proclamation you can [see here](#).

The USDA website has a bunch of resources you can use to promote awraeness of "hungry pests." [View resources here](#)

### Moving households? Don't take invasive pests with you

Spring is a popular time to move, but unfortunately, people aren't the only ones on the move. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today signed a national proclamation (PDF, 579 KB) to declare April "Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month," during a critical time when damaging invasive species known as Hungry Pests emerge and can be easily spread in the things people pack and move, such as outdoor items like grills, gardening equipment, wading pools and bicycles or patio furniture.

Hungry Pests are a real problem. They attack trees, plants and agriculture, costing the United States about \$40 billion each year in damages and expensive eradication and control efforts. Household moves increase the risk for the spread of these invasive species, since people can potentially transport them to new areas. [READ MORE](#)



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## New effort focuses on restoration of Clark Fork River tributaries in central basin

*Missoula Current:* Clark Fork River restoration and habitat conservation organizations, along with residents of Missoula, Granite and Mineral counties, met on Tuesday night to discuss which tributaries should be prioritized for restoration in those counties.

The Clark Fork Kootenai River Basins Council hosted the event as part of an effort to create a watershed restoration plan for the central Clark Fork Basin, from Flint Creek to the Flathead River.

It is one of the only sections of the Clark Fork Basin without an approved restoration plan, said Vicki Watson, University of Montana environmental studies professor and a member of the Clark Fork Kootenai River Basins Council.

Funding has been the limiting factor.

But providing the Department of Environmental Quality with

a comprehensive watershed restoration plan is a major step toward 319 funds, restoration money available through the Clean Water Act.

"The Missoula Conservation District has provided funding for channel migration mapping, fish passage improvement projects and preparing for dam removal on the Rattlesnake Creek," Watson said. "We're already getting a lot of stuff done, but there is still a lot that remains to be done and usually the limiting factor is funding."

The plan will identify health goals for water bodies of interest, or those that are impaired or contaminated with pollutants, to achieve water quality standards. It will also outline financial assistance, education and outreach to encourage public participation, actions to improve water quality and provide a schedule for implementation.

[READ MORE](#)

## MISC assembles science advisory council on houndstongue weevil

*Press release:* Canada began releasing the biological control agent *Mogulones crucifer*, a weevil, in 1997 for the control of houndstongue, a highly invasive nonnative weed that is a serious nuisance for ranchers and outdoor enthusiasts. The weevil has had lasting and population level impacts on houndstongue in Alberta and British Columbia.

While these weevils have naturally moved into Montana from Canada, they are not an approved agent in the United States. It is currently illegal to facilitate their redistribution through non-natural means due to concerns that these weevils may feed on federally protected non-target plant species.

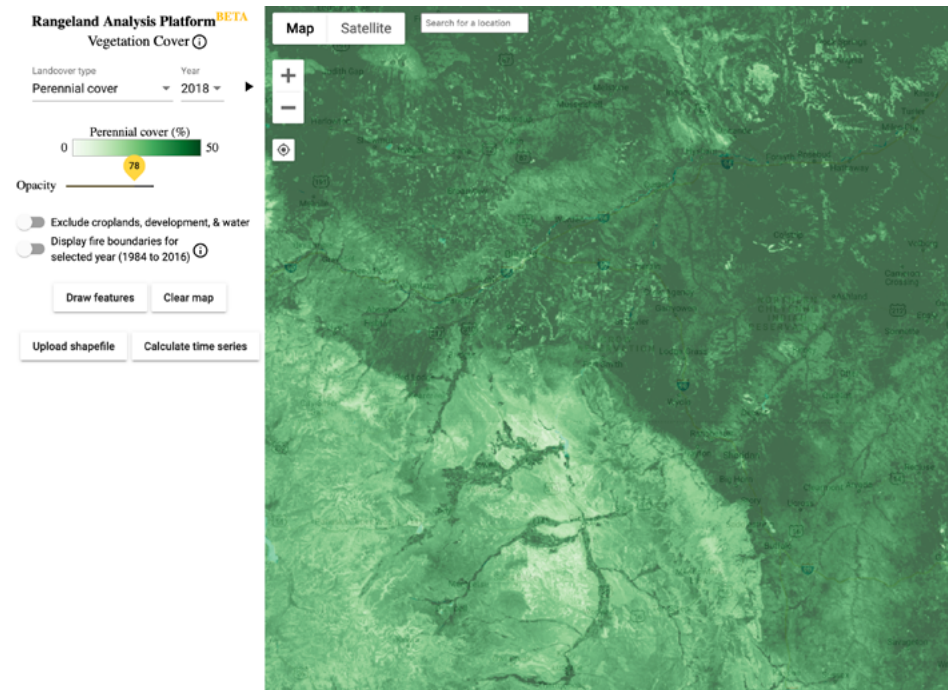
Considering the absence of other effective control methods for houndstongue, along with the lack of negative ecological impacts and positive management outcomes associated with the release of this agent in Canada, the Montana Invasive Species Council has enlisted assistance from the scientific community and formed a science advisory panel to evaluate the feasibility of approving and using *Mogulones crucifer* in the U.S. by reviewing new or additional information available since its approval and introduction in Canada.

[READ MORE](#)

## Smithfield Foods donates \$120,000 to Envirothon

*Press release:* Smithfield Foods, Inc., is pleased to announce a combined \$120,000 donation to support the 2019 National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon—North America's largest environmental education program and international competition that brings together teams from across the U.S., Canada, and China to compete for recognition and scholarships.

"Smithfield has offered strong support for the NCF-Envirothon and local event competitions over the last five years, providing students with quality experiences and a better understanding of sustainable practices," said Tim Reich, vice chair of the NCF Board of Trustees.



## Online tool provides overlook of historical vegetation changes in the West

*Wyoming Public Media:* There's a new online tool that provides a big picture view of vegetation change over the last 35 years in the West. The University of Montana, the USDA's National Resources Conservation Service and the Bureau of Land Management joined forces to develop Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP).

Matthew Jones, a University of Montana professor, helped develop the application. He said recent technology allowed him and his colleagues to visualize and estimate vegetation cover by putting all the data in one place.

Jones said it's important to understand how vegetation responds to human events like irrigation and grazing.

"It starts with the fact that plants really provide the foundation for sustainable wildlife habitat, profitable livestock production, clean water, and healthy soils. It's really that foundational principle," said Jones.

Jones said the app provides a new perspective for monitoring rangeland vegetation.

"It makes it easy to develop new strategies that can improve rangeland productivity and evaluate our current or past management practices, which is critical," said Jones. "And all these things are key for keeping these lands profitable and productive for future generations."

The app is free and available at [rangelands.app](http://rangelands.app).

More than 50,000 high school students compete in teams through hands-on and in-class activities to demonstrate their knowledge of soils and land use, aquatic ecology, forestry, wildlife, and current environmental issues during regional and statewide competitions leading into the international event. Winning teams will progress to the 2019 Envirothon Championship, which will take place July 28 through August 2 on the campus of North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Montana's Envirothon competition will be hosted by Fergus Conservation District in Lewistown next week.



### New Farmers.gov features enable USDA customers to manage loans online

Do you have farm loans through USDA? If so, USDA's Farm Service Agency has launched a new feature that enables you to login to view farm loan information, history, and payments through farmers.gov, USDA's new information and self-service website available to agricultural producers.

Using a desktop, tablet, or phone, the "My Financial Information" feature enables you to view:

- loan information.
- interest payments for the current calendar year (including year-to-date interest paid for the past five years).
- loan advance and payment

- history.
- paid-in-full and restructured loans.
- account alerts giving borrowers important notifications regarding their loans. For example, an account alert will be displayed if a loan is past due.

Currently, access is only available for customers doing business as individuals. Entities – such as an LLC or Trust – can't access the portal at this time, but access is being planned.

#### How to Access

To access USDA farm loan

information, visit farmers.gov and sign in to the site's authenticated dashboard, available on the menu at the top right of the site. To access, you will need a Level 2 USDA eAuth account.

If you do not have a Level 2 USDA eAuth account, sign-up for one today. This account gets you access to your loan information and other self-service features available through the farmers.gov portal.

[READ MORE](#)

### Former State Hydrogeologist Reacts To Proposed Butte Superfund Cleanup Changes

*By MTPR's Nora Saks:* Last week the Environmental Protection Agency released the changes they want to make to the 2006 legal Record of Decision (ROD) which governs the Superfund cleanup of the Butte Hill and Upper Silver Bow Creek corridor.

This "proposed plan" is the framework of the final, larger Superfund deal currently being negotiated by EPA, the state of Montana, Butte-Silver Bow County, and Atlantic Richfield, the company on the hook for most of the cleanup.

Central to the plan is the proposal to waive some state water quality standards and replace them with federal ones. To understand what this means for Butte's creeks, I

sat down with hydrogeologist Joe Griffin. He was the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's project manager for this Superfund site for over a decade, a technical adviser on the Anaconda Superfund cleanup, and a consultant for Atlantic Richfield before that. He retired in 2015 and now volunteers with the local Citizens Technical Environmental Committee.

**Joe Griffin:** It's hard for the public to understand why you would ever waive standards. But the critical piece here, the part that is critical for ARCO, really, is if they don't think they can meet a standard, they don't have much incentive to keep pushing forward on good remedy measures. And I think this proposed plan kind of skins that

cat. It's not just the waiving of standards here — which are truly necessary — but it is finding the rest of what is legitimate remedy here and getting that written down. That is the real critical piece here. It is what allowed this to finally move forward after over 30 years, right?

**Nora Saks:** Can you explain what the difference is between the state and federal standards?

**Griffin:** In most simplistic terms there's two kinds of samples that they have to collect. One is an unfiltered sample and that's referred to as "total recoverable metals", so total recoverable copper for instance.

[READ MORE](#)

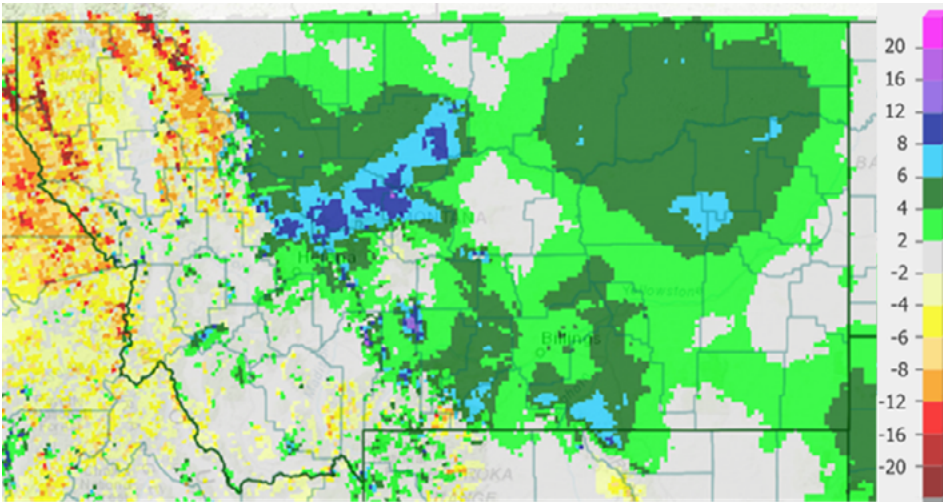


Figure 1. Departure from normal Montana precipitation from mid-September 2018, to mid-March 2019, in inches. Map generated by the National Weather Service.

## Popular Press Short: Spring N, S, and Cl fertilizer adjustments for wet and cold

Submitted by Dr. Clain Jones, MSU Extension

Spring soil water content and temperatures need to be considered when calculating spring fertilizer rates. Many Montana regions east of the Continental Divide received several more inches of precipitation than average over the last 6 months (Figure 1) with a very cold February and early March, making fields cold and wet, with delayed planting.

Cool temperatures slow decomposition of plant residue and conversion of urea or ammonium fertilizer to plant available nitrogen for early spring growth. Higher than normal precipitation can also lead to nitrogen, sulfur and chloride leaching. Water-logged soils also increase nitrogen loss as gas and the occurrence of disease, and decrease plant nutrient uptake due to poor root growth.

Delayed seeding and cold soil may lower yield potentials, thus total nutrients needed, yet

wetter than normal soils could increase yield potentials. Either way, providing small amounts of nitrogen, sulfur and chloride at seeding can give the plants a boost. Since these nutrients move easily with soil water, they can be either broadcast or applied with the seed. Broadcast application speeds up seeding and reduces the risk of seedling damage from high rates of seed-placed fertilizer. Side banding or double shooting is also an option to provide early fertilizer with low risk to germination.

Salt or ammonia injury to seedlings increases with warmer, drier, and coarser soils. Use the South Dakota State University/International Plant Institute Seed Damage Calculator for guidelines based on crop and seed bed conditions (<http://seed-damage-calculator.herokuapp.com>). For example, 7 pounds nitrogen per acre (units of nitrogen) as urea when seed-placed with canola in a fine textured moist soil with a 2-inch opener and 12-inch row spacing could cause 10% stand loss. With the same opening and row spacing, but in moist coarse soil, only 3 unit of nitrogen

would cause same stand loss. Cereals are more tolerant.

To determine if nitrogen has been lost from a field, spring soil test for available nitrate in the top 6-inches and in the 6-inch to 2 foot depth (3 foot, if possible). If nitrogen leaches only a few inches, then young roots will soon reach the nitrogen if they are healthy. Nitrogen leached lower in the root zone is not necessarily a total loss. If the roots reach deep nitrogen sources near the time of flowering, the nitrogen boost can increase grain protein. However, in coarse or shallow soils, leached nitrogen may be beyond the depth of even mature roots.

Soil testing is not reliable to determine sulfur availability. Visual symptoms (upper yellow leaves) along with soil type and location in the landscape can help determine plant sulfur deficiency. Loam or more coarse-textured soils, especially on eroded ridgetops, are more susceptible to sulfur deficiency. If a comparison of fall and spring soil nitrate test indicates that nitrogen leached, then it is highly likely sulfate and chloride also leached. Target 30 pounds available chloride (soil plus fertilizer) per acre in the top 2 feet on small grains.

Patience may be the best approach if nutrients did not leach out of reach, or if poor uptake is temporary because of water-saturated soils.

[READ MORE](#)

### Watercraft inspection stations open ing across state

*Press release:* Montana's watercraft inspection stations are opening across the state for the 2019 boating season. Persons transporting motorized and non-motorized watercraft are required to stop for inspection as directed by signage. Anyone bringing a boat into Montana must seek out a watercraft inspection before launching.

To better serve the boating public and improve efficiency, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has made several changes to the program. Station operation hours have been extended, and some stations have been relocated or closed to better address AIS movement on

watercraft.

FWP is expanding partnerships with local groups to assist with inspection station operation this season, including the Blackfeet Nation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Missoula County, Garfield Conservation District and McCone Conservation District. Inspection stations will continue opening through May at strategic locations throughout the state.

To find a watercraft inspection station call the FWP Aquatic Invasive Species Bureau at 406-444-2440 or go to [CleanDrainDryMT.com](http://CleanDrainDryMT.com).

### June 30 is deadline to file on exempt water rights

*Press release:* The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) would like to remind water right owners that the deadline for filing a claim on their exempt water rights is June 30, 2019.

The 2017 Montana Legislature created the opportunity for owners of exempt water rights to file claims when it passed HB 110. Since the filing period began on May 7, 2017, DNRC Director John Tubbs said the Department has received more than 7,000 exempt claim filings.

An exempt water right is defined as a water right that was in existence before July 1 of 1973. Water rights in this time period were exempted from two previous mandatory filing periods that took place in 1982 and

1996. Exempt water rights are for livestock and individual domestic uses based upon instream flows or groundwater sources only. They do not include rights for irrigation, diverted stock water from ditches or reservoirs, or commercial and municipal wells.

Tubbs urged water right owners not to miss this opportunity to file their claims.

"If you don't file your claim, your water right will not be enforceable against any filed water rights, including water rights that are junior in priority," he said. "Filing ensures protection for your water right."

[READ MORE](#)

### NACD Comments on new WOTUS definition

*Press release:* On Monday, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) submitted comments to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps of Engineers' proposed rule redefining waters of the United States (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act (CWA).

Through the proposed rule, the agencies clarify the definition of jurisdictional waters designated under the CWA.

"NACD appreciates the certainty provided by this definition," NACD President Tim Palmer said. "America's farmers and ranchers are stewards of the land. This clarified definition reduces the complexity of the rule, enabling landowners and operators to responsibly manage their resources and prioritize production of the nation's food, fuel and fiber."

Consistent with comments submitted in previous rulemakings to define WOTUS, NACD's comments emphasize the need for the agencies to enhance coordination with local conservation districts when making local determinations for which waters may be jurisdictional. Conservation districts have worked for decades with landowners in their communities and can provide valuable insight during the development of maps and implementation of the proposed rule.

[Read the comments here](#)

### Grants

#### 223, Mini Education, and District Development Grants

The Fiscal Year 2019 deadlines for the 223, Mini-Education, and District Development grants are: **April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

#### Network for Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund

This fund specifically seeks to build critical capacity and forward momentum in landscape conservation partnerships by supporting the key building block activities and collaborative processes that move partnerships forward. Pre-proposals due **April 26**. [More Info](#)

#### Water Project Grant Opportunity

Sweet Grass Conservation is now accepting applications for a new round of water project funding. Conservation districts may apply for funds to be used for irrigation related projects, stream restoration, and other activities that result in improvements to water quality and quantity and to aquatic habitat. **Applications due May 1**. Projects must be completed by November 30, 2019. Contact Guelda Halverson, [Guelda.halverson@mt.nacdnet.net](mailto:Guelda.halverson@mt.nacdnet.net), for more info.

#### Future Fisheries Improvement Program

For almost two decades, FWP's Future Fisheries Improvement Program has worked to restore rivers, streams, and lakes to improve and restore Montana's wild fish habitats. Between \$350,000

and \$650,000 are available each year for projects that revitalize wild fish populations. Any entity proposing a project that would benefit wild fish will be considered for funding. Due **May 31**. [More Info](#)

#### Western Native Trout Initiative Small Grants

Projects considered for funding under the Small Grants Program include those with a strong element of or primary focus on community outreach, education and/or volunteer engagement; or design/planning/monitoring work. Approximately \$21,000 in funding is available for projects in the 12 western states that are WNTI's focus. Individual projects can be funded at a maximum of \$5,000. Due **June 18**. [More Info](#)

### Events, etc

#### Integrated predator Damage Management Workshop

WLA is hosting a workshop to provide information on the science and the practical applications of various non-lethal methods integrated into predator damage management strategies to protect livestock. **April 24**, Helena. Email [cole@westernlandowners.org](mailto:cole@westernlandowners.org) for more info.

#### Webinar: Implementing the Permissive Mill Levy

Hosted by DNRC, this webinar will walk you thru the steps to implement the Levy. Remember, even if you have already implemented the Permissive Levy last year, you have to do it again this year.. along with the public meetings etc. **May 1** Email

[kchristians@mt.gov](mailto:kchristians@mt.gov) for more info.

#### Judith Basin Range School

Johann Zietsman, world renowned speaker, will be presenting at a 2-day seminar on Livestock Management and Grazing. Zietsman will be sharing proven concepts for selecting the best adapted genetics with ultra-high-density grazing. **May 29 & 30**, Hobson, MT. For info call 566-2311 x107.

#### Montana Youth Range Camp

The Montana Youth Range Camp (MYRC) is a 4-day program for youth ages 11–17. This year's camp will be held June 25-28 at Hyalite Reservoir south of Bozeman. Registration deadline is **June 11**. [More Info](#)

#### Composting Workshop

The Fallon County field office will be hosting Gerry Gillespie to teach us how to make a compost that is easy, low-odor and appropriate on a large or small scale. Plan on joining us for a hands-on workshop where you can take away the skills and inoculant needed for the process. **June 21**, Baker. Email [ann.fischer@usda.gov](mailto:ann.fischer@usda.gov) for more info.

#### Increasing Profit on Your Farm with Healthy Soil

A workshop with Nicole Masters of Integrity Soils, Inc. New Zealand. Sponsored by Valley County Conservation District **June 26**. For more information, call (406) 228-4321 ext.101 or email [vccdm20@gmail.com](mailto:vccdm20@gmail.com)

#### Save the Date: Montana



## Coming Up

### April

- 22 **MACD Executive Committee Conference Call**
- 24 Integrated Predator Management Workshop, Helena
- 25 223, Mini Education, and District Development Grants Deadline

### May

- 1 Webinar: Implementing the Permissive Mill Levy
- 13 **MACD Board Conference Call**
- 27 **MACD Executive Committee Conference Call**
- 29-30 Judith Basin Range School

**Have a story, funding opportunity, or event to share?**

Please email  
tmc@macdnet.org with  
details.

### Range Tour

The 2019 Montana Range Tour, will be held September 4th & 5th in Harlowton, MT.

### Jobs

#### Coordinator, Winnett ACES

Winnett ACES is seeking a part-time coordinator. The ideal candidate will have an understanding of rural communities in the west and a basic knowledge of the agriculture industry. The coordinator will focus on new grasslands conservation projects, the land project, and agriculture outreach efforts. **Closes April 22.** [More Info](#)

#### Stream Permitting Coordinator, DNRC

The Conservation and Resource Development Division is seeking a full time Stream Permitting Coordinator. This position is responsible for coordinating the 310 law with conservation districts, and provides education and outreach to districts and the general public on stream coordinating. **Closes April 23.** [More Info](#)

#### Private Lands Wildlife Biologist

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is seeking a private lands wildlife biologist based in Glendive. The position provides technical resources to landowners and other land managers to more fully incorporate wildlife conservation on their private lands. **Closes April 30.** [More Info](#)

### Executive Director, Blackfoot Challenge

The Blackfoot Challenge seeks an experienced, collaborative, and personable Executive Director (ED) to lead the fund development and strategic visioning of the organization while providing financial and administrative oversight and exceptional staff supervision. Application review begins **May 1.** [More Info](#)

### Misc

#### USDA Announces Sign-Up Period for Updated Conservation Stewardship Program

The next deadline for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications to be considered for funding in fiscal year 2019 is May 10, 2019. While applications are accepted throughout the year, interested producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by May 10, 2019, to ensure their applications are considered for 2019 funding.

#### Montana NRCS Announces 2019 Honey Bee Pollinator Initiative

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering additional funding through its EQIP to target honey bee pollinator resource concerns in Montana in 2019. While NRCS accepts EQIP applications on a continuous basis, NRCS has set a deadline of May 10, 2019, to apply for this 2019 initiative funding.