

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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## Helena High wins Montana Envirothon

The team from Helena High won first place overall at the Montana Envirothon in Lewistown this week. This is the second year in a row that Helena has had the winning team.

There will be a complete list of winners and more pictures from the event in the next edition of The Montana Conservationist, and on our facebook page at [www.facebook.com/MontanaAssociationofConservationDistricts](http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAssociationofConservationDistricts)

## Lolo National Forest's Fire Manager named no.1 in nation

*By the Missoula Current:* Laura Ward, the Lolo National Forest's Fire Management Officer, was recently named Forest Service Fire Management Officer of the Year by a national committee and was honored in a ceremony here in Missoula on April 19.

The National Forest Fire Management Officer (FMO) of the Year Committee selected Ward from a field of nominees from across the nation, representing all other Forest Service regions and national forests.

Ward, who has worked in western Montana for 18 years, is responsible for managing and implementing the fire operations across the five Ranger Districts and approximately two million acres of the Lolo National Forest.

She helped develop and implement several regional and national programs in 2016 as well as providing oversight and leadership for the Lolo National Forest's Critical Incident Management Plan, an organizational framework that identifies roles, responsibilities and required actions for responding to critical incidents.

Ward was recognized in the award for her professional skills and leadership in working closely with multiple partners and agencies to manage a complex program. [READ MORE](#)



## Perdue Confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture

*From USA Today:* WASHINGTON – After months without a secretary of agriculture, the Senate voted Monday evening to confirm former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue to the post.

The vote was 87 to 11 with Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, Cory Booker, D-N.J., Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., Edward Markey, D-Mass, Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Jack Reed, D-R.I., Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I, Robert Menendez, D-N.J., Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Kamala Harris, D-Calif., voting against the nomination. Perdue's cousin, Sen David Perdue, R-Ga., presided over the Senate for the vote.

The much-delayed appointment — the last announced Trump cabinet post, announced just a day before the Jan. 20 inauguration — has prompted some to express concern that President Donald Trump has made a low priority of the rural and farm interests credited with his victory in November.

In part to address that concern, the president is expected to sign an executive order on Tuesday

promoting agriculture and “rural prosperity,” and will hold a roundtable discussion with some farmers at the White House. The names and hometowns of the farmer participants were not released Monday by the White House. Perdue is expected to be sworn in as the 31st secretary of agriculture on Tuesday.

“I’m pleased that the U.S. Senate was able to work in a bipartisan fashion to confirm Governor Perdue,” said Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts, R-Kansas, after the vote. “I have faith that Governor Perdue will put the needs of farmers and ranchers first, and I know that rural America is thankful to have such a qualified Agriculture Secretary on their side.”

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana, said in his floor remarks Monday that he hoped, once confirmed, that Perdue would “fight against these damaging cuts” proposed by the White House, which he said would put a “nail in the coffin” of rural America.

[READ MORE](#)

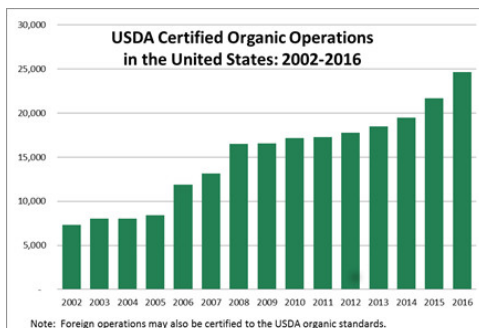
## Count of certified organic operations continues growth

From USDA: WASHINGTON, April 19, 2017--The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced new data indicating the organic industry continues to grow domestically and globally, with 24,650 certified organic operations in the United States, and 37,032 around the world.

The 2016 count of U.S. certified organic farms and businesses reflects a 13 percent increase between the end of 2015 and 2016, continuing the trend of double digit growth in the organic sector. The number of certified operations has increased since the count began in 2002 and this is the highest growth rate since 2008.

Organic certification is an "opt-in" voluntary standard that is managed through a public-private partnership. The USDA accredits and oversees approximately 80 businesses and State governments that directly certify organic farms and businesses. USDA provides a number of [educational resources](#) to help organic producers access this growing market.

[READ MORE](#)



## Momentum building for Young Farmer Success Act

From AgUpdate: The average age of the U.S. farmer continues to increase, and over 100 agricultural, business and nonprofit organizations have signed a letter urging Congress to support the Young Farmer Success Act (H.R.1060), a bipartisan measure that would address the growing issue of student loan debt among America's young farmers.

"The bill is fairly simple and straight forward," said Andrew Bahrenburg, National Policy Director for the National Young Farmers Coalition. "It adds farmers to an existing Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, which is administered by the Department of Education and intended to incentivize careers in public service."

The program currently applies to former students entering teaching, medical and nonprofit professions. It's the goal of the National Young Farmers Coalition to add farmers to the list based on the current national need to recruit and support the next generation of farmers as the current generation quickly approaches retirement age.

According to Bahrenburg, in order to be eligible for loan forgiveness under the Young Farmer Success Act, farmers must be committed to farming for 10 years and over the course of those 10 years they will make income-based student loan payments. At the end of those 10 years – or roughly 120 payments – the remaining balance of the

student loan debt can be forgiven.

"The important aspect there is this is not some kind of 'fly by night' loan forgiveness where someone would just have to farm for a couple years to receive this benefit," said Bahrenburg. "It's for a committed farmer that does so for 10 years. This also is an important element in keeping costs down for a program like this, because typically at the end of 120 payments, the remaining balance isn't that high."

Other written elements into the bill state benefits would only apply to fulltime farmers and their operation would have to earn, from the sale of agricultural products, gross revenue of at least \$35,000 per year, adjusted for inflation.

"We essentially drew that line to make sure we weren't making this available to hobby farmers or homesteaders, but to concerted businesses," he explained.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program was established under the Obama administration, and there has been some concern that the program could be adjusted, or even eliminated under the new administration.

"We are in a bit of a wait-and-see-mode," said Bahrenburg. "It's a congressionally-authorized program, so it will be subject to reauthorization from Congress."

[READ MORE](#)

## Paintbrush: The Prettiest Parasite on the Prairie?

*From Montana Public Radio's Field Notes section, produced by the Montana Natural History Center:*

Most people are familiar with the showy red or yellow flowers of the Indian paintbrushes. They can be found from the dry valley grasslands to lush alpine meadows. There are 21 species of the paintbrush just in Montana, including bristly paintbrush, the red-flowered species of dry slopes and scarlet paintbrush which is common in meadows and along streams.

During drought years you may be able to notice that while most of the plants on the hillside will look dry and withered by the early summer, paintbrushes remain healthy-looking. Do these delicate plants have a more efficient way of obtaining water than their neighbors?

The answer is yes. Paintbrushes and their close relatives, louseworts and owl clovers are hemiparasites; that is, they obtain part of their water and nutrients from neighboring plants. When a paintbrush root comes in contact with those of another plant, it forms a short side branch that then penetrates the neighbor's root. Paintbrushes lose water to the atmosphere more easily than other plants. This, as the sun and wind draw water from the paintbrush plant, a kind of suction is created that causes water and sap to be drawn from the roots of the host plant into the roots and foliage of the parasite.

Researchers have determined that paintbrushes and their relatives obtain water, mineral nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, and carbon compounds such as sugars and amino acids from their hosts. Paintbrushes are not host-specific, and a variety of plants, including other paintbrushes, may be used by the same species.

Paintbrushes and their relatives have green leaves and are able, to some extent, to synthesize their own carbon compounds and obtain their own water and nutrients. Although most species of paintbrush can flower and produce seed in the greenhouse, garden, or other benign

environment, a host is usually necessary for survival in the more stressful and competitive conditions occurring in native plant communities.

Although the effects on host plants have not been studied, dense colonies of paintbrush undoubtedly have an impact on the vegetation. Next time you see one of these beautiful plants, perhaps it will make you think of the complex interactions occurring underground.

[READ MORE](#), or [Listen to the story](#)



## New era of megafires calls for more prescribed burning, management

*From the Missoula Current:*

Paul Hessburg didn't come to Missoula to scare folks.

He came, Hessburg told his audience of several hundred local leaders, to make them feel more powerful as they learn to live in a changing landscape.

Still, he didn't mince words.

"There is no future without wildfire, and no future without the smoke that comes with wildfire," the U.S. Forest Service researcher told the room filled with Missoula real estate and insurance agents, firefighters, public and

environmental health officers, politicians, climate activists, foresters, builders, university students, neighborhood organizers and more.

"It is critical that we as homeowners and community leaders recognize that it is our responsibility to influence the way we manage our fires and our forests," said Hessburg, who is touring western Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and British Columbia this spring with his 70-minute "Era of Megafires" presentation.

[READ MORE](#)

## EPA's Office of Water seeking feedback on reducing regulatory burden

Consistent with Executive Order 13777, EPA is seeking public input on existing regulations that could be repealed, replaced or modified to make them less burdensome.

As a part of this effort, [we] will be accepting written public comments through May 15, 2017, at docket EPA-HQ-OA-2017-0190. In addition, EPA's Office of Water (OW) will host a public listening session to obtain additional feedback on water regulatory actions on Tuesday, May 2, 2017, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. EDT.

### Background

On February 24, 2017, President Donald Trump issued Executive

Order (EO) 13777 on Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda. The EO establishes the, "policy of the United States to alleviate unnecessary regulatory burdens placed on the American people". Among other things, it requires each agency to create a Regulatory Reform Task Force to evaluate existing regulations and to identify regulations that could be repealed, replaced or modified to make them less burdensome.

As part of implementing the EO, OW will be hosting a public listening session to solicit proposals for OW regulations that could be repealed, replaced, or modified to make them less burdensome.

[READ MORE](#)

## Coordinating coalition for soil health meets in D.C.

*From the National Association of Conservation Districts:*

Because conservation districts play a key role in building and advocating for soil health across the U.S., NACD has been participating as a member of the Coordinating Coalition for Soil Health (CCSH) alongside other non-profit organizations sharing the same concern for and focus on soil health. Last week, the coalition met with five USDA agencies to introduce the group and its coordinated efforts to make soil health a mainstay in land and resource management.

NACD was represented by CEO Jeremy Peters and North Central Region Representative Beth Mason, who shared what NACD brings to the coalition by way of on-the-ground outreach efforts and the [Soil Health Champions Network](#).

The CCSH is made up by the following partner organizations: Conservation Technology Information Center, Field to Market, Global Soil Security, National Association of Conservation Districts, North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, Soil Health Institute, Soil Health Partnership, Soil and Water Conservation Society, The Fertilizer Institute, The Nature Conservancy, The American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America.

## Jobs

### Operations Manager, SWCDM

This position will take on the tasks of our previous administrative assistant (thanks April!) while also focusing more upon the financial management pieces. This is not a new position rather an increased focus on finances. Closes May 8.

[More Info](#)

### Executive Director, Montana Audubon

The Director will be provided the opportunity to substantially shape the long-term future of a statewide conservation organization with a trusted reputation, dedicated staff, engaged Board of Directors and substantial financial resources.

Closes July 1. [More Info](#)

### Assistant Coordinator, Beaverhead CD & Watershed Committee

The watershed assistant coordinator will be responsible for working on programs and grants with the Beaverhead Watershed Committee and Beaverhead Conservation District in an effort to improve water quality in the region. Part Time. Contact [beaverheadcd@gmail.com](mailto:beaverheadcd@gmail.com) for more info.

## Grants

### 223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2017 are as follows: **July 29, 2016**; **October 14, 2016**; **January 14, 2017**; and **April 26, 2017**. [Grant Info](#)

### Ranching for Rivers Project Funds

MRCDC & SWCDM are pleased to announce that another round of funding is available through the Ranching for Rivers program, which is a cost-share program to help ranchers with riparian pasture/fencing projects. Projects must be completed by September 30, 2017 to be eligible. The current funding will focus on Missouri & Yellowstone River Basins, but applications from other areas will be considered.

[More Info](#)

### Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively – RFP to host workshop

Thanks to funding from the U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry division, [we] are happy to open an RFP for a new series of TELE workshops. If you are interested in hosting one of these workshops, please fill out the application by May 19. [Hosting Info](#) | [Application](#)

### Aquatic Invasive Species Grants

The Montana DNRC offers state-funded grants for the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species (AIS). The goal of the grants is to protect the natural resources of Montana from severe and unacceptable damage from aquatic invasive species. Closing June 1. [More Info](#)

## Events

### Bridger Plant Materials Center Field Day

Learn about the work the Bridge Plant Materials Center is doing during their annual field day.

June 14. RSVP for lunch count by calling 662-3579 x100.

### River Rendezvous

The Milk River Watershed Alliance(MRWA) along with the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC) would like to invite you to join us on a tour of the St. Mary's irrigation diversion system on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017. [More Info](#)

### Judith Basin Range County School

The Judith Basin Conservation District is hosting Joshua Dukart, Holistic Certified Educator, for a workshop on "Grazing with a purpose". May 25, Utica. For more info call 566-2311.

### Application of Advanced Genetic Technology in Beef Cattle

Msu Extension is partnering with the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management to offer its Application of Advanced Genetic Technology in Beef Cattle lectureship May 8-9, 2017, in Bozeman at the GranTree Inn. [More Info](#)

### Montana Ag Summit

The summit, co-sponsored by Daines, will take place in Great Falls on May 31 and June 1, 2017. The Montana Ag Summit will bring the nation's agricultural leaders to Montana's Golden Triangle. [More Info](#)

Have something you'd like to see in TMC? Submissions are due every other Friday at 5:00 (visit our website for a calendar), and should be sent to [tmc@macdnet.org](mailto:tmc@macdnet.org).

## Coming Up:

### May

8 MACD Board Conference Call

15 Aquatic Invasive Species Workshop, Lewistown

16 Aquatic Invasive Species Workshop, Malta

17 Aquatic Invasive Species Workshop, Fort Peck

18 Aquatic Invasive Species Workshop, Lewistown

22 MACD Executive Committee Conf. Call

24 Grazing with purpose by Joshua Dukart, Lewistown  
Prairie County Range Field Day  
Petroleum CD Range Workshop with Joshua Dukart, Winnett

25 Judith Basin County Range School, Utica

Have an event to share?  
Visit [macdnet.org/calendar](http://macdnet.org/calendar) to add your event to our list!

## As the 65th Montana Legislature winds down, a look at the big issues

by Michael Siebert, UM Community News Service

HELENA -- After nearly five months of rigorous debate, Montana's 65th Legislative session is coming to a close.

While lawmakers are only constitutionally required to draft and pass a two-year budget for the state's numerous offices and programs -- which they did last week -- legislators from all walks of life address the concerns of their constituents, as well as their own ideas in the other bills they bring.

Some of these bills were inspired by personal struggles, like Livingston Republican Rep. Alan Redfield's bill to establish eating disorder centers, brought in part because of a family member's struggle with the issue. Others sought to make big changes, like a failed bill from Kalispell Republican Rep. Derek Skees that would have put a ballot initiative before voters to amend the Montana constitution to outlaw abortions.

With 1,186 bills introduced it could prove difficult to keep track of everything. Here, then, are some of the session's most significant issues, divisive and otherwise.

### Funding Infrastructure Projects

Both parties have repeatedly said advancing an infrastructure plan is a top priority.

Rep. Jenny Eck, D-Helena, said the success of the session hinges on whether or these proposals make it to the governor's desk.

"It's frustrating to ... still not have an answer on that," Eck said. "If everyone could just come together, we could absolutely do it."

Perhaps the most significant infrastructure bill of the session, Kalispell Republican Frank Garner's [House Bill 473](#), which passed both houses. The bill initially increased the gas tax by \$0.08, but the amount was lowered to \$0.045 by the Senate. It will eventually raise to \$0.06 by 2023.

Another major bill, [House Bill 5](#), introduced by Rep. Jim Keane, D-Butte, authorizes special funding for a variety of infrastructure projects, including a veterans' home in Butte and university system projects like the renovation of Montana State University's Barnard Hall. The bill, with the Senate's amendments, passed the House 88-11 last week.

### Public Land and Water

Other bills focused on the administration of Montana's public lands.

"It wasn't just access but actual maintenance of the lands," said Rep. Adam Rosendale, R-Billings.

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