

# THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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## Rangelands Intern researches ranching in Montana

*Roundup Web:* Abby Northrup had not planned to be where she is today when she started MSU Bozeman. She grew up in Helena, Montana. She had participated in 4H, but not with large animals. Her grandfather had bred horses but she had had no part in it and, in fact, had no agricultural background at all.

Now, she's at the ranch of Dick and Connie Iversen south of Culbertson, Montana. She's up with the couple helping out, asking questions and learning the unique challenges having to do with ranching in Eastern Montana. While attending MSU, Abby noticed a person from the Montana Rangelands Internship Rangeland Education Program, who was looking for an intern. Abby was interested. "It just seemed like a once in a lifetime opportunity," she said.

Abby started this in May of this year but has not been with the Iversens all summer. The Montana Rangelands Internship Rangeland Education Program provides interns the opportunity to gain experience and hands-on training from seasoned landowners on a working agricultural operation. They are provided a stipend during their time in the program. The program also provides a venue for networking opportunities in which the interns are exposed to various individuals within the land management field. [READ MORE](#)



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## Feds must reconsider endangered status for Arctic grayling in Montana

*Missoula Current:* The Ninth Circuit ruled Friday the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service incorrectly denied endangered listing to a cold-water fish living in the Upper Missouri River Basin in Montana.

A three-judge panel found Fish and Wildlife failed to supply evidence of increased population of the Arctic grayling in Montana rivers, and didn't properly account for climate change when it declined to list the species as endangered in 2014.

"FWS clearly stated in the 2014 finding that the number of breeding arctic grayling increased in the Big Hole River, and omitted the DeHaan study's evidence to the contrary," U.S. Circuit Judge Richard Paez wrote for the unanimous panel. "We conclude that in ignoring available data FWS acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner."

The panel ordered the agency to reconsider the listing with a fuller account of the scientific record on hand.

Plaintiffs Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds Project, Butte resident Pat Munday and former Montana fishing guide George Wuerthner called the ruling a major victory.

"Montana's dwindling Arctic grayling populations will need all of the help we can give them to survive in the face of a warming climate," said Earthjustice attorney Jenny Harbine, who argued the case. "The court's decision offers hope for these magnificent fish, and now it's up to the Fish and Wildlife Service to translate that hope into action to protect the grayling under the Endangered Species Act."

The Arctic grayling is a salmonid fish that prefers cold-water rivers – some subspecies live and spawn in lakes – and historically roamed throughout the Upper Missouri River watershed, Montana, Wyoming and as far afield as Michigan.

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## Faucet snail confirmed in Lake Frances

A Fish, Wildlife & Parks aquatic invasive species monitoring crew has confirmed that invasive faucet snails have been discovered in Lake Frances near Valier. The small aquatic snail, also known as a mud bithynia or *Bithynia tentaculata*, is native to Europe and likely arrived in North America in ship-ballast water in the late 1800s. Faucet snails were first observed in Montana in 1959.

Faucet snails can host several exotic parasites that cause waterfowl to die when ingested. These parasites have caused several die-offs of American coots on Georgetown Lake since 2006. Faucet snails have been detected in Smith Lake near Kalispell, Rattlesnake Reservoir near Billings, Upsata Lake, Flathead River and McWenegar Slough.

Lake Frances is privately owned by the Pondera County Canal & Reservoir Company (PCCRC) and is used to store and deliver irrigation water to its members from Dupuyer to Conrad. PCCRC provides recreational access to Lake Frances at no cost to the public. Recreators are reminded to always clean, drain and dry their watercraft and fishing gear to prevent the spread of AIS.

FWP first learned of the snail from a fisherman trolling on Lake Frances in May. He picked up two clams and a snail on some vegetation and submitted the samples to FWP for identification.

[READ MORE](#)

## Montana waters tainted by toxic algae blooms

*Great Falls Tribune:* NILAN RESERVOIR — At this reservoir west of Augusta, signs already warn anglers about the dangers of grizzly bears and “aquatic hitchhikers” such as mussels that attach to boats and spread like wildfire.

Now there’s a third sign warning of another potential threat.

“Toxic Algae may be present,” it says. “Water may be unsafe for people and pets.”

Last summer, a dog died after swimming in toxic-algae-infested waters at Delmoe Lake in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest outside of Butte.

Another dog became ill after swimming in an algae bloom in Hauser Lake near Helena.

Deaths to livestock from drinking toxic blooms have been documented in Montana as well, according to a Harmful Algal Bloom Guidance Document produced in July by the state Department of Environmental Quality and state Department of Health and Human Services.

People also are at risk of exposure, said Hannah Riedl, a DEQ environmental science specialist.

“Typically, the toxin-producing blooms will have a blue color or the actual algae will look like latex paint or grass clippings,” Riedl said.

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## Climate change is increasing the number of toxic algae blooms, researchers say

*Salt Lake Tribune:* The words blasted to cellphones around Oregon’s capital city were ominous: “Civil emergency. Prepare for action.”

Within half an hour, a second official alert clarified the subject wasn’t impending violence but toxins from an algal bloom, detected in Salem’s water supply.

Across the U.S., reservoirs that supply drinking water and lakes used for recreation are experiencing similar events with growing frequency. The trend represents another impact of global warming and raises looming questions about the effects on human health, researchers say.

“When water bodies warm up earlier and stay warmer longer ... you increase the number of incidents,” said Wayne Carmichael, a retired Wright State University professor specializing in the organisms. “That’s just logical, and it’s being borne out.”

Technically called cyanobacteria, the ancient class of organisms that create the blooms are present

nearly everywhere water is found but thrive in warm, still bodies like lakes and ponds. They also create a unique class of toxins, the impact of which on humans is only partly understood.

Long linked to animal deaths, high doses of the toxins in humans can cause liver damage and attack the nervous system. In the largest outbreaks, hundreds have been sickened by blooms in reservoirs and lakes, and officials in some areas now routinely close water bodies used for recreation and post warnings when blooms occur.

But less is known about exposure at lower doses, especially over the long term.

Small studies have linked exposure to liver cancer — one toxin is classified as a carcinogen, and others have pointed to potential links to neurodegenerative disease. But definitively proving those links would require larger studies, said Carmichael, who helped the World Health Organization set the first safe exposure standards for the toxins. [READ MORE](#)



## Drought Management Planning helps with weed control

By John Marble for *On Pasture*: Let me admit this right up front: I'm not all that organized. I feel like I should have a big notebook with little plastic dividers, each section filled with specific guidance on some critical Ranch Management area. Grass Management. Custom Grazing. Marketing. Habitat Projects. Finance. And probably about ten more. Sorry, I just can't seem to get that done.

Still, I do have some scribbled reminders that wind up kicking me into action, and perhaps the most critical one is my Drought Plan. The "Plan" goes something like this:

When my anxiety level about soil moisture, weather patterns, sward conditions (and a few other, less identifiable issues) grows to the point of sleep-losing obsession, I make critical decisions about de-stocking. This is not as hard as it sounds, as I have designed a Stocking Plan that includes a minimum of 33% animals that are fairly easy to liquidate: yearlings, custom grazers, dry cows. This year, I began staring at the sky and mumbling to myself about half way through the heart of our growing season. Soon enough, my wife said: "Better get rid of some cows."

"Yes Ma'am."

The yearlings left two weeks ahead of schedule. I cancelled a load of summer-grazing custom cows. I weeded through the cow herd a bit, sending some pretty good cows to the butcher pen. It hasn't really rained in the mean time, but I'm sleeping pretty well.

This focus on drought might seem strange to some folks. After all, I

live in western Oregon, a region renowned for being wet and green. We get about 50 inches of rain each year. So what's the big deal about drought?

Technically speaking, a drought is an unexpected, extended period with little or no precipitation. In this part of the world, we typically have a long, wet winter, a transitional period in the spring and a long blistering summer with virtually no rain for at least 100 days.

The transitional period in the spring—only about 60 days, really—is when we grow the majority of our grass for the year. When rainfall slows to a crawl in April and May, as it did this year, I know it's going to be a very difficult summer ahead. Whether that qualifies as a drought, I don't know. But my response this year was classic Drought Management: Heavy de-stocking which led to leaving more residual grass in each paddock

as the herd moves through the grazing rotation.

The result of this strategy is the rapid accumulation of a large bank of moderate quality grass, which includes the last gasps of re-growth, mixed with some tough-looking summer grass. And that's where I sit right now: all of our properties are covered with a thick blanket of residual grass, grass that is protecting the soil from the worst of the summer sun.

I began rationing this grass out in small portions, even though it was only early June. I have explained to our landowners that the pastures are going to look a little rough this summer, and I am praying against fire. This is high fuel load with low moisture and limited nutrition, but it will provide adequate feed for the rest of the summer and fall, even if we don't get any rain. Calf performance will be modest, but no one will starve. [READ MORE](#)



### Forest Service announces new strategy for improving forest conditions

Washington, D.C., August 16, 2018 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (USFS) announced today a new strategy for managing catastrophic wildfires and the impacts of invasive species, drought, and insect and disease epidemics.

Specifically, a new report titled *Toward Shared Stewardship across Landscapes: An Outcome-based Investment Strategy* (PDF, 3.7 MB) outlines the USFS's plans to work more closely with states to identify landscape-scale priorities for targeted treatments in areas with the highest payoffs.

"On my trip to California this week, I saw the devastation that these unprecedented wildfires are having on our neighbors, friends and families," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. "We

commit to work more closely with the states to reduce the frequency and severity of wildfires. We commit to strengthening the stewardship of public and private lands. This report outlines our strategy and intent to help one another prevent wildfire from reaching this level."

Both federal and private managers of forest land face a range of urgent challenges, among them catastrophic wildfires, invasive species, degraded watersheds, and epidemics of forest insects and disease. The conditions fueling these circumstances are not improving. Of particular concern are longer fire seasons, the rising size and severity of wildfires, and the expanding risk to communities, natural resources, and firefighters.

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### Judge overturns WOTUS suspension; rule once again in effect for 26 states

*Progressive Farmer:* The 2015 waters of the United States, or WOTUS, now is in effect in 26 states after a federal judge in South Carolina issued a nationwide injunction on a recent EPA rule that delayed the implementation of the Obama-era regulation.

The legal wrangling that has occurred since Obama's EPA finalized the 2015 rule still leaves the nation divided on the Clean Water Act rule, with the rule in effect in some states but not in others. The rule redefined which wetlands and small waterways

are covered by the Clean Water Act. Many farmers and ranchers feared the change would lead to increased government regulation of their land.

A federal judge in the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina ruled on Thursday that the EPA did not follow the Administrative Procedures Act in finalizing its rule to delay the 2015 WOTUS for two years. That action by EPA was designed to allow the agency to complete a rewrite of WOTUS. [READ MORE](#)

### Montana ranks sixth for AmeriCorps members

*Sidney Herald:* When it comes to enrolling in AmeriCorps, Montana residents rank sixth among states, according to new data released this week by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency that administers the AmeriCorps program and leads the nation's national service and volunteer programs.

In Montana, State AmeriCorps programs are implemented by the Governor's Office of Community Service. State AmeriCorps programs in Montana include Montana Conservation Corps, Montana Campus Compact, Montana State Parks AmeriCorps, Justice for Montanans AmeriCorps, Energy Corps, Big Sky Watershed, FoodCorps, 100 Fold Studio, and Community in Action Corps. Other AmeriCorps programs in the state include AmeriCorps VISTA, AmeriCorps National Direct in Montana, AmeriCorps NCCC Pacific Region, and Senior Corps.

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### Grants

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

The Fiscal Year 2019 deadlines for the 223, Mini-Education, and District Development grants are: **October 25, 2018, January 17, 2019, April 25, 2019** [Grant Application](#)

#### Water Quality Mini Grants

SWCDM is seeking to fund local education and outreach efforts in Montana to address water quality issues resulting from nonpoint source pollution. Funding for this mini-grant program is provided by the Montana DEQ via a grant with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act.

Please visit the [SWCDM website](#) for the Application, Call for Applications, and more program information.

Mini-grants of up to \$3,000 are available and SWCDM has approximately \$12,000 to award for this cycle. The deadline to apply is October 12, 2018 by 5 p.m.

Any conservation district, watershed group, NGO, school district, local or county agency, etc., able to manage federal funding is encouraged to apply. Submit questions or completed applications to Jessica Makus, [jessica@macdnet.org](mailto:jessica@macdnet.org).

### Events, etc

#### Level 1 Noxious Weed Management Certification

This is the first workshop in a 3-part series that provides information on weed identification, biology, ecology, and integrated management. Bozeman, **September 11-13**. [More Info](#)

#### Montana Cattlewomen Ranch Run

This run was designed to introduce you to the beauty of Montana's farms and ranches as well as educate the running community about the importance of agriculture and land stewardship. **August 25**. [More Info](#)

#### Montana Range Tour

Please join us for the 2018 Montana Range Tour hosted by the Richland and Roosevelt Conservation Districts. This year's tour will not be one to miss, ranching in oil country, floods, fire, birds, and cover crops. **September 5 & 6**, Sidney [Registration](#). For more info contact Stacey Barta, [sbarta@mt.gov](mailto:sbarta@mt.gov).

#### Armed to Farm training, Glendive

This week-long sustainable agriculture training hosted by NCAT combines classroom sessions with farm tours and hands-on activities to give military veterans an opportunity to transition to a farming life. Applications due by **August 24**. [More Info](#)

#### MPDES SWPPP Administrator and SWPPP Preparer Course

Meet the requirements of the MPDES General Permit for Stormwater Discharges Associated with Construction Activity. Learn the permit requirements, New techniques and BMPs, Get hands on experience with BMPs in the field. **September 10 & 11**, Kalispell. [More Info](#)

### Jobs

#### Sustainable Ranching Initiative Program Associate

Since 2011, WWF's Sustainable Ranching Initiative (SRI) has been working to establish a productive dialogue between conservation interests and the ranching community. The Program Associate works to support program goals and objectives through conducting research and analysis, organizing information and materials, drafting reports, proposals and presentations, and assisting with project management, policy development and analysis. Bozeman. [More Info](#)

### Area Meetings

**Notice:** MACD's annual Area Meetings will be held on the following dates: 9/17 Area 4, Roundup; 9/18 Area 2, Terry; 9/19 Area 1, Plentywood; 9/20 Area 3, Havre; 9/25 Area 5, Helmville; 9/26 Area 6, Clyde Park. Visit <https://macdnet.org/programsevents/area-meetings/> for registration information.

## Coming Up

### August

- 25 Montana Cattlewomen Ranch Run
- 27 MACD Executive Committee Call

### September

- 1 Deadline for submitting proposed Resolutions or By-law changes.
- 5-6 Montana Range Tour, Sidney
- 10-11 MPDES SWPP Administrator and SWPP Preparator Course, Kalispell
- 11-13 Level 1 Noxious Weed Management Certification, Bozeman
- 17 Area 4 Meeting, Roundup
- 18 Area 2 Meeting, Terry
- 19 Area 1 Meeting, Plentywood
- 20 Area 3 Meeting, Havre
- 25 Area 5 Meeting, Helmville
- 26 Area 6 Meeting, Clyde Park

#### Have an event to share?

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

## NACD Service Award Nominations Open

Too often, the folks responsible for making conservation partnerships, practices, programs and projects successful go unnoted. That's why NACD's Annual Awards Program strives to recognize individuals and organizations for their outstanding work and leadership in soil and water conservation. Be sure to nominate your conservation leader by Friday, Aug. 31!

NACD offers two national awards categories for you to consider:

1) Friend of Conservation Award - recognizes an individual, business, organization or agency outside the association for outstanding contributions to the conservation of our nation's natural resources. Any individual, business, organization or agency that is not directly associated with conservation districts at the local, state or national level is eligible to receive this award.

2) Distinguished Service Award - recognizes an individual within the association, a conservation district or state association that has made significant contributions to the conservation and proper management of our nation's natural resources. Nominees can be involved with districts or the association at any level, including past NACD officers. Nominations can also be made posthumously for individuals.

Winners will be recognized at NACD's 73rd Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, Feb. 2-6, 2019. Every nominee will receive a certificate of honorable mention along with a copy of the nomination that was submitted on their behalf. [Nomination Forms & Info](#)

### NOTICE: MACD Resolutions and proposed bylaw changes due September 1

Per MACD bylaws, resolutions to be considered at the annual MACD convention in November must be passed by a local conservation district and submitted to the MACD office by **September 1**. This insures that all districts are able to consider the resolution at their regular monthly meeting before deciding how to vote on the resolution at Area Meetings and at Convention.

If your district is considering submitting a resolution or bylaw change this year, your July and August meetings are a great time to discuss wording and intent.

If you'd like to see what resolutions have passed in previous years, our new website has a great Resolutions Library. Head to [macdnet.org/resolutions-library](http://macdnet.org/resolutions-library) to check it out.