



The Explorer

The Official Newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District

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Winter 2019/20

Augusta Area Flood Recovery Workgroup

There were a couple of meetings at the Augusta Youth Center on January 29, 2020. The first meeting was for those landowners who met with Confluence Consulting as part of the Conservation District assessment on Elk, Ford and Smith Creeks back in September. The second meeting was a general open meeting where the County and the Conservation District had the assessment available for discussion and the county could update landowners and those who live in town as to the status of their efforts.

To review the assessment online, <https://lccd.mt.nacdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Post-Flooding-Hydrologic-Assessment-of-Elk-Ford-and-Smith-Creeks-1.15.2020-1small.pdf>

If you have any questions, please contact the CD office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5.



Reminders from the Past

Way back in 1948, the landowners in Lewis and Clark County were perusing the idea of starting a Conservation District. In response to ongoing drought and the “Dust Bowl” days, in 1937 President Roosevelt encouraged all states to adopt legislation that would enable the creation of local soil conservation districts. Once Montana adopted that legislation, Conservation Districts began to form across our state.

In doing some recent organizing of Conservation District Files we found some original meeting notes from two meetings in March 1948 where attendees learned about what Conservation Districts are and how they are to operate. There was some skepticism of a government program like Conservation Districts. But attendees learned that districts are run by the Supervisors who are elected to serve in those offices.

Ultimately, the Lewis & Clark Conservation District—originally the Lewis & Clark County Soil Conservation District—was officially approved in December 1948. The vote to form took place on June 14, 1948 with a vote of 163 for and 2 against. Our certificate of organization is dated June 25, 1948. And the first Supervisors were Adolph Burggraaf, Myrlin Donaldson, Gilman Mirehouse, George Diehl and Robert Mosher.

Just remember, that if you as a landowner is interested in the Conservation District doing something new or different, those ideas can be communicated either to the office, or to your regional Supervisor. For more information, contact the CD office at 406-449-5000 ext. 5 or via email at lccd@mt.net.

Those “blankety-blank” Permits

Jeff Ryan

Recently two things prompted me to do this piece. The first was my participation on the committee working on the new addition of “Montana Stream Permitting - A Guide for Conservation District Supervisors and Others”. Chris Evans and I worked on the first edition of it back in 2001 and obviously many things have changed since. The final edition will be available shortly and we will formally announce that in a future newsletter. Even if you aren't actively involved in stream permitting, I would urge you to take a look at it. It has numerous information on stream dynamics and the factors contributing to that with many other interesting details.

The second thing was on a more somber note. In a recent paper Ralph Boland’s obituary came up. Ralph was a pioneer in stream permitting in Montana. He was one of FWP’s first Stream Protection Act coordinators soon after the Stream Protection Act (124 permit) was enacted by the Legislature in 1963. (the first in the nation) That act gave permit authority to FWP for state/county government related stream projects. Most involved the then called Montana Department of Highways proposals to build the interstate system. The harsh reality in that era was that it costs a lot less to move streams or cut off stream channels than build bridges and that's what the highway engineers were suggesting in most cases. Fortunately, with FWP required permit involvement, designs were modified to at least accommodate the stream with major changes kept to a minimum. Back then the only permit authority for Highway projects, with any teeth, was FWP’s 124 permit and at times negotiations over permits could be a bit tense. I suspect many highway engineers had Ralph Boland

Today there are a aquatic permits Department of deals with and is another cost of business.

In 1975 the Land Preservation was enacted by The act gave

to Conservation Districts for perennial stream projects proposed by non-governmental/private individuals. Since enactment in 1975 many thousands of 310 permits have been issued statewide

At LCCD, we consider the 310 permitting process more than just issuing permits. It's more “value added” with the opportunity to share our experience and the experience of the FWP biologists collaboratively involved in the review process to result in better projects with less stream impacts.

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with few denials. Suggested project modifications are common but usually minor in scope. At LCCD we consider the 310 permitting process more than just issuing permits. It's more "value added" with the opportunity to share our experience and the experience of the FWP biologists collaboratively involved in the review process to result in better projects with less stream impacts.

There is a bit of historical trivia that, at least in part, prompted the Legislature to pass both of these acts. The following editorial is taken from the Lewistown Daily News - February 28, 1961:

THERE WENT SPRING CREEK

"Nothing is sacred any more.
Not even beloved Spring Creek!

This happy, bubbling little creek, known far and wide as one of the finest trout streams in the county, has been turned into an ugly irrigation ditch filled with sediment and muddy, angry water.

Drive out to this scene. Witness the most horrible, sickening and disgusting rapes ever perpetrated against nature.

Trout lay dying yesterday in the stagnant pools in the old Spring Creek channel. Huge logs and refuse have been pushed into the stream bed by mechanical monsters.

Talk to the men from the State Fish and Game Department. Hear the rage of fisherman and nature lovers. Talk to the two little boys who walked sadly along the dried up fishing holes they loved so well.

If there ever were a time for a community to stand up and fight, certainly this is it!

Only an angry, fighting citizenry can right this horrible wrong which has been perpetrated against Spring Creek - Central Montana's number 1 outdoor attraction.

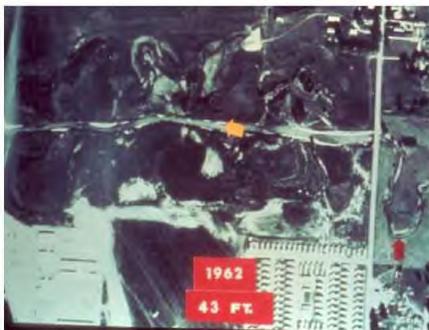
They have re-routed our highways! They want to uproot our trees!

For God's sake, don't let them get away with re-routing Spring Creek!"

The project involved channelizing/shortening Big Spring Creek near Lewistown by a landowner that just wanted to get the stream out of the way of prime valley farmland. That practice was common historically and there are examples of it all across Montana. Sevenmile Creek just west of Helena is a good example. However, in this case the thousands of feet of stream that were cut off and the ensuing increased energy prompted the spring creek to headcut miles of the stream releasing unbelievable tons of sediment and severe over widening of the stream. Basically, a world class trout fishery was destroyed. Refer to the linked FWP 1971 Montana Outdoors P.18 for details on the damage <https://archive.org/details/montanaoutdoors241971mont/page/18>, "A Bad Spring On A Big Creek" Also included (page 4) is a page from the previously mentioned document "Montana Stream Permitting - a Guide for Conservation District Supervisors and Others" "Case Study - Big Spring Creek" which shows historic aerial photos of the site and notes the recent partial restoration of the site. (Page 4) This site and others like it, in conjunction with proposed major highway construction involving streams, convinced a Legislature, possibly even more conservative than current ones, to enact nationally unique laws.

So, the next time you are applying for those “blankety-blank” permits or dipping a worm or fly in your favorite stream, just remember some of the processes that help protect those streams that allow you to enjoy some of the best fishing in the world.

CASE STUDY - BIG SPRING CREEK



Aerial imagery sequence of Big Spring Creek. Photo to the right is from 2017 following channel reconstruction.

Big Spring Creek is a meandering, Rosgen C type, channel that runs through Lewistown. A portion of the stream, west of highway 191 was straightened to increase agricultural production. Channelization reduced the length of this reach from 6,000 feet in 1938 to 2,000 feet in 1962. The loss in length resulted in an increase in slope. An understanding of Lane’s Balance could have predicted the fate of this reach. Increased slope resulted in channel degradation. As the channel continued to degrade, high flows could no longer access the floodplain and the streambanks eroded. Prior to straightening the erosion rate was estimated at 0.2 feet/year; after straightening it was 13.5 feet/year. This resulted in an overwidened channel, loss of quality fish habitat, excess sedimentation, and increase in downstream flooding impacts.

The time series photos to the left show the historic straightened and resulting increase in channel width; 25 feet in 1938 and 133 feet in 1967.

A project completed in 2016 increased overall length by 60%, still short of the original length. The project recreated floodplain, used natural bank stabilization features and grade controls to improve overall functions. The project required extensive permitting and proved costly in time and money.

While the final result of the 2016 project improved the resource for fish and the community of Lewistown, it serves as a lesson in resource protection and promoting natural stream function. It is easier to maintain a stream and its functions than to have to restore them. The [lesson from Big Spring Creek](#) was one of many that led to the creation of the nation’s [first stream protection bill of its kind](#) in 1963, the Montana Stream Protection Act (124 Permit), followed in 1975 by Montana Natural Streambed and Preservation Act (310 Permit).



SPONSOR DRIVE FOR 2020

If you or your business would like to be a sponsor for the Conservation District, please contact Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 5. Sponsor contributions run \$25, \$100, \$250 or \$500+ per year. Our Sponsors contribute to keep our quarterly newsletter and our education programs running. With the sponsorships come advertising in each of our newsletters as well as on our District Sponsors page on our Website: <https://lccd.mt.nacdn.net.org/index.php/district-sponsors/>.

Bob Bushnell

Former Conservation District Supervisor Bob Bushnell passed away in November. Bob served on the CD Board from 2000 to 2016 and was very much missed when he retired. Bob was passionate about the fight against invasive species and also served on the Lewis & Clark County Weed Board. As a member of the Ponderosa Snow Warriors, Bob organized weed spraying on all of their trails.

Bob's loss will be deeply felt, especially in the community of Lincoln. Our condolences to his family and friends.

Wildflower Seed

The Conservation District has wildflower seed available to landowners. It is a mixture of native and non-native seed and costs \$29 per pound. This mix is put together by Treasure State Seed in Fairfield and the CD sells it at our cost. For more information, contact the District office at 449-5000 ext. 5.



The Leopold Conservation Award

Our Congratulations go out to the Milton Ranch in Roundup Montana after they received the first Leopold Conservation Award in the State of Montana. This award, named for Aldo Leopold, recognizes agricultural landowners who are actively committed to a land ethic. The Sand County Foundation presents this honor working with prominent state conservation partners.

If you would like to know more about the award, see all of the winners at <https://sandcountyfoundation.org/our-work/leopold-conservation-award-program/award-recipients>

If you would be interested in applying for the award, <https://sandcountyfoundation.org/uploads/Montana-2020-CFN.pdf>

District Report

The 4th quarter of 2019 was a busy one for the Conservation District. District Supervisors and staff attended the MACD Area 6 meeting as well as the MACD convention in 2019, reviewing proposed resolutions and more.

We wrapped up 2019 with not a record in 310 permits and emergencies, but it was a big year again. Forty-six 310 permits, 15 Emergencies and 3 complaints were the totals for 2019. Our work with the Elk Creek area flood group continues. We recently received the draft Assessment that Confluence Consulting undertook for us in September. A meeting to discuss that assessment with the landowners who participated will be happening in late January, along with a general meeting to look at progress and needs to-date. Representatives from Confluence Consulting will be at the morning meeting and the Conservation District and Lewis & Clark County will be represented at the afternoon meeting.

For the next quarter, the Conservation District Board will be reviewing workload in the office with the idea of hiring part time. We are likely going to be seeking someone to do data entry to the 310 database as well as helping out with projects in the office and with our education efforts.

With high snowpack again in the Sun/Teton/Marias watershed, we are anticipating another high-water year in the Augusta area, though we hope that it won't be another flood year. Time will tell.

NEW WEBSITE FOR LANDOWNERS

Recently, a new website was launched for landowners who live near rivers and streams, or for those who are considering buying property with rivers and streams.

Living on the Bank has been a collaborative project with a number of Conservation Districts, the Yellowstone and Missouri River Conservation District Councils and the DNRC. The site provides information to help landowners protect and enjoy their property and includes guidelines on:

- Buying land and selecting construction sites
- Floods, erosion and fire
- Property improvements
- Protecting the land investment
- Stream dynamics (not as scary as it sounds!)
- Invasive species
- Permitting
- And more!

For more information go to www.livingonthebank.org.

NRCS

Helena Field Office--The Helena Field Office currently has no permanent staff. There are a number of different NRCS employees who are assisting in coverage, but it appears that it's going to be a rather long-term situation. Diane Fitzgerald has moved to the Whitehall office as the District Conservationist for Jefferson County but will be in Helena a few days per week until permanent staff is hired.

If you have concerns/questions and need to talk to someone at NRCS, the two numbers below will get you to at least a voice mail. You can also call the Conservation District office at 406-449-5000 x5 and I can try to help you.

Contact points for the Helena field office will be:

Ryan Mar has been detailed for several months. His email is ryan.mar@usda.gov and his number is 406-449-5000 x3888

Diane Fitzgerald – diane.fitzgerald@usda.gov 406-449-5000 x3887 Helena; 406-287-3215 x3 Whitehall

Paula Gunderson – paula.gunderson@usda.gov , 406-466-5722 x 116

JOBS-In other NRCS news, the agency is hiring Soil Conservationists (one of whom should be in Helena). The position advertisements are open from January 13 to April 20, 2020 and you should be able to find them on USA Jobs.

Programs-NRCS takes applications year round. There will be upcoming opportunities for High Tunnels, Energy Implementation, Organics and Pollinators. There will also be an upcoming CSP sign-up, but the date has yet to be determined. Lots of new opportunities in the new Farm Bill.

More on CSP-the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. CSP pays participants for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment. For more information

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>

FSA Youth Loans

Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is \$5,000.

Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements:

- Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien
- Be 10 years to 20 years of age
- Comply with FSA's general eligibility requirements
- Be unable to get a loan from other sources
- Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above
- Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project supervisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

Contact the Farm Service Agency Office for assistance in preparing and processing the application forms.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.



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To update your mailing address, contact Chris Evans at 406-449-5000 ext. 5 or email lccd@mt.net. If you would rather receive this via email, let me know!