

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

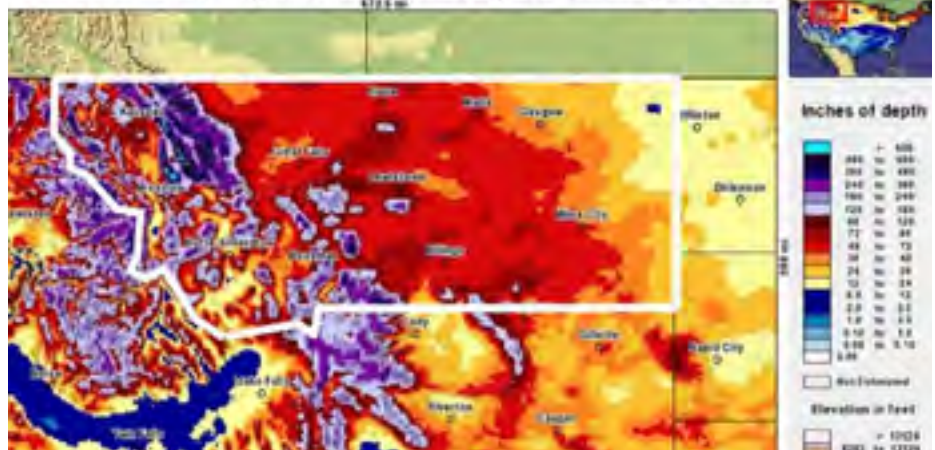
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Seasonal accumulation of Interpolated Observed Snowfall Analysis for 2018 February 16, 12:00 UTC



Active storm track puts Montana at winter's epicenter

Weather.com: Montana has been in the cross-hairs of active storm tracks through much of this winter, and several cities in the Treasure State have gotten record-setting snowfall during this extreme winter. Some parts of the Montana Rockies have seen more than 40 feet of snow this season so far.

Billings, Helena and Havre, Montana, have all had an extreme winter, according to the Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index (AWSSI). Glasgow, Montana, has had a severe winter season according to the AWSSI.

The AWSSI aggregates how bad temperature, snowfall and snow depth is daily into a single score at 52 locations in the continental United States, and it is maintained by the Midwestern Regional Climate Center. Of the stations in the Lower 48, eight stations are currently in the "extreme" or highest category of severity. Three of those stations are in Montana: Havre, Helena and Billings. [READ MORE](#)



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Stream gaging workshop provides timely discussion on future, importance of gages

By Samantha Tappenbeck, SWCDM:

In early 2018, the Flathead River Commission and SWCDM hosted a two-day workshop in Kalispell on stream gaging in the Flathead River Basin. The event was attended by 32 participants representing 20 different agencies and organizations.

The workshop was moderated by Samantha Tappenbeck, resource specialist with SWCDM working in northwest Montana.

Day one of the workshop included presentations by the USGS and DNRC on the federal and state gaging programs, and by local agencies and organizations about stream gages they operate in the basin.

Participants developed a better understanding how stream gages work and are funded, operated, and maintained. Participants also learned about resources that are available for accessing data generated by stream gages, and were guided through tours of the Surface Water Assessment and Monitoring Program (SWAMP) and the National Water Information System (NWIS) websites.

Day two of the workshop included presentations that highlighted specific applications of stream gage data to programs such as the Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service by the National Weather Service and the Flathead Flood Inundation Mapping Project from the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Participants then took part in a roundtable discussion about how each use and apply stream gage data in their own work. The group used a ranking exercise to discuss and identify the relative importance of stream gage data longevity (having a data record that spans a great length of time), continuity (having an unbroken data record), and spatial extent (having a wide geographic distribution of gages). Overall, the group ranked data longevity as most important, continuity as somewhat important, and spatial extent as least important, although ranking by importance was a difficult task for many participants.

The exercise demonstrated how critical each of these components is to success of the diverse programs and projects managed by professionals in attendance at the workshop.

The workshop was a great opportunity for participants to learn from each other and identify priorities and opportunities for collaboration.

The discussion seemed timely and particularly relevant given the uncertainty of funding for stream gages in the future. More information about the workshop and additional resources including an audio recording of the event, presentations and informational handouts can be found on the SWCDM website or by contacting Samantha Tappenbeck (stappenbeck@macdnet.org).



USDA unveils interactive website for producers

February 1, 2018– U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today unveiled Farmers.gov, the new interactive one-stop website for producers maintained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Farmers.gov is now live but will have multiple features added over the coming months to allow agricultural producers to make appointments with USDA offices, file forms, and apply for USDA programs. The website, launched at a breakfast hosted by the Michigan Farm Bureau, gathers together the three agencies that comprise USDA's Farm Production and Conservation mission area: the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Risk Management Agency.

"Many farmers are out in their fields using equipment that is connected to satellite and GPS technology, yet when they need to interact with USDA, they have to stop, fill out a paper form, and fax or carry it to their local office. That is a real digital divide," Perdue said. "Our staff is friendly, and they love to see farmers in person, but they know that time is valuable. Producers are working hard to make their farms profitable, so these tools will help get the paperwork done without taking a big chunk out of the day to fill out forms." [READ MORE](#)

States sue EPA for WOTUS withdrawal

From NorthernAg: Attorneys general of 10 states and the District of Columbia sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday, alleging the agency's final rule suspending the 2015 waters of the United States, or WOTUS, rule is unlawful.

New York's Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman is leading a coalition of 10 states and the District of Columbia in challenging the EPA's action.

In recent weeks, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the appellate court level was not the proper venue for challenges to the 2015 WOTUS rule. The action essentially ended the nationwide stay on the rule. As a result, EPA issued a final rule last week to delay the WOTUS rule's implementation until 2020. The delay is designed to give EPA time to rewrite the rule to include a different definition of jurisdictional waters.

New York is joined by attorneys general from California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and the District of Columbia.

The states and District of Columbia claim in a lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York that the EPA's two-year delay fails to take science into consideration.

[READ MORE](#)



NACD responds to Trump budget

Today, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) released the following statement regarding President Donald Trump's budget for conservation programs in the 2019 fiscal year.

"Once again, this administration is calling on American producers to do more with less," NACD President Brent Van Dyke said. "The president's budget proposes cuts to almost every area of USDA's discretionary and mandatory budgets, including nearly \$15 billion in cuts to farm bill conservation programs and over a 20 percent reduction to Conservation Operations."

Within the conservation portfolio, the president's FY19 budget proposes a funding level of \$669 million for Conservation Operations, a \$200 million cut to the account that funds conservation planning and technical assistance. The budget also requests significant cuts to the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program within Conservation Operations.

"Conservation planning is the lifeblood of voluntary conservation and the building block on which all other conservation programs stand," Van Dyke said. "Proposing extreme cuts to technical assistance programs at a time

when the administration is asking for greater customer service just doesn't add up. The president's budget proposal is a reminder that we must continue educating our lawmakers about just how important locally-led conservation efforts are to this country now and for future generations."

The budget includes a legislative proposal to eliminate the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In addition to eliminating these USDA programs, the budget requests to completely eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Section 319 nonpoint source grant program, which helps address nonpoint pollution from agricultural as well as non-agricultural sources. The budget also proposes cutting state and private forestry funding by over 40 percent.

NACD applauds Congress' past efforts to support the conservation programs most vital to our nation's natural resources and calls on Congress to oppose President Trump's FY19 budget.

[The White House budget can be viewed here.](#)

Grants

223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2018 are as follows: **April 25, 2018**. [Grant Info](#)

Partners in Flight Implementation Grants

The intent of the NGPJV PIF Implementation Grants program is to accelerate delivery or improve the effectiveness of conservation program and practices, to support sustainable habitats and declining grassland bird populations within the boundaries of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture. Successful grants are meant to deliver projects contributing measurably to the protection, restoration or enhancement of prairie grassland and/or shrub-steppe habitats used by one or more of the following five species: Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Lark Bunting, McCown's Longspur, and Sprague's Pipit. [More Info](#)

DNRC Landscape Scale Restoration Grants

The Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Program is delivered by a partnership between the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry and the Montana DNRC. The program is intended for implementation of watershed level, forest-based projects and activities which address the three State and Private Forestry national themes: 1) conserve and manage working forests, 2) protect forests from threats, 3) enhance public benefits from private forests. DNRC is calling for submissions of short

abstracts, which will be followed by a meeting between project leads and grant managers to develop ideas. Due April 2. [More Info](#)

Groundwater Investigation Program

The Ground-Water Steering Committee is currently accepting nominations for Ground-Water Investigation Program (GWIP) projects to be initiated during 2019. This is for watershed, communities and conservation districts to put forth a proposal for an existing or potential ground water issue, for quality and/or quantity. Nomination packages due April 16. [More Info](#)

Events, etc

Sustainable Farm Law Workshops, Missoula

CFAC is hosting Sustainable Farm Law 101 on February 24th, covering legal aspects of land lease and purchase, sales contracts, insurance, employment law, food safety, farm events, & value added production. Advanced Farm Law on February 25th will take an in-depth look at managing farm risks with insurance and employment law issues. [More Info](#)

Save the Date: Montana Water Summit

Join a diverse group of water users, community members, policy-makers, scientists, and natural resource managers for thought provoking sessions on managing and adapting to changing pressure's on Montana's water supply. March 6-7, 2018. [More Info](#)

Montana Storm Water Conference

Join us, May 1-3, 2018, in Bozeman, MT, for the 2018 Montana Storm Water Conference. This is a time to gather, share, learn and collaborate on storm water and water quality issues with your local, regional and national colleagues [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.

Jobs

Meagher CD District Technician

Meagher County CD is seeking a technician, who will work directly with landowners to initiate and implement conservation practices. The district technician will assist in completing land surveys, forest and range inventories and write conservation plans in accordance with NRCS specifications and assist in recommending and designing conservation practices. **Closes March 13**. Email Jennifer.paddock@mt.usda.gov for more info.

Coming Up

February

- 24 Sustainable Farm Law 101, Missoula
- 25 Advanced Farm Law Workshop, Missoula
- 26 Attaining & Maintaining Soil Health Workshop, Wibaux
- 26 MACD Exec. Committee Conference Call
- 27 CMR Community Working Group Mtg
- 27 Soil Acidity Workshop, Fort Benton

March

- 6-7 Montana Water Summit
- 12 MACD Board Conference Call
- 15 National Ag Day
- 26 MACD Executive Committee Conference Call

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

Bitterroot CD, Trout Unlimited working to keep fish out of ditches

From the Missoulian: Fish fans are trying anew to keep trout from going with the flow up irrigation ditches in the Bitterroot, then getting stranded when headgates are closed and the ditches dry up.

Trout Unlimited is working with the Bitterroot Conservation District, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Bitterroot National Forest to expand and improve bull trout and native fish populations, while maintaining or even improving irrigation infrastructure for agricultural producers in the Bitterroot Valley.

"We were contacted by the Bitterroot Conservation District to basically do an inventory of diversions in the Upper Bitterroot," said Christine Brissette, a restoration ecologist working with Trout Unlimited. "We were looking at the impacts to fish and the possible ways to reduce those impacts."

[READ MORE](#)

USDA Announces infrastructure improvements to forest system trails

Feb. 16, 2018 – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced the selection of 15 priority areas to help address the more than \$300 million trail maintenance backlog on national forests and grasslands.

Focused trail work in these areas, bolstered by partners and volunteers, is expected to help address needed infrastructure work so that trails managed by USDA Forest Service can be accessed and safely enjoyed by a wide variety of trails enthusiasts. About 25 percent of agency trails fit those standards while the condition of other trails lag behind.

"Our nation's trails are a vital part of the American landscape and rural economies, and these priority areas are a major first step in USDA's on-the-ground responsibility to make trails better and safer," Secretary Perdue said. "The trail maintenance backlog was years in the making with a combination of factors contributing to the problem, including an outdated funding mechanism that routinely borrows money from programs, such as trails, to combat ongoing wildfires.

"This borrowing from within the agency interferes with other vital work, including ensuring that our more than 158,000 miles of well-loved trails provide access to public lands, do not harm natural resources, and, most importantly, provide safe passage for our users." [READ MORE](#)