



Is a Wildlife Habitat Program part of Your Annual and Long-Range Plans?

Every conservation district varies in the type of programming that local boards of supervisors ultimately adopt and implement. If you haven't thought about **Wildlife Habitat as a primary conservation district program**, here are a few reasons for your Board and you to consider placing greater weight on this program:

- How representative is wildlife and wildlife habitat in your conservation district's work plan, your land owner and land manager's conservation planning?
- How many acres of private and public land in your conservation district jurisdiction have any 2018 Farm Bill funding (EQIP, ACEP, other)?
- How engaged is your conservation district with wild life and/or environmental groups in your local communities? Both wild life and environmental groups can be both common and uncommon allies when it comes to partnerships.
- Are your conservation projects limited on resources, funding and collaboration?

If you answered yes to any of the above bulleted questions, you owe it to your conservation district, local communities and landowners, land managers & natural resource partners to further explore the **inclusion of wild life and/or environmental group participation in conservation programming and implementation**.

The **2018 Farm Bill** delivers significant wins for wildlife, farmers and ranchers, hunters and anglers, and the public. The legislation includes strong levels of funding for wildlife and conservation programs and key policy improvements, including strengthened protections for grasslands, improvements to the federal crop insurance program and

watershed protections on forest lands.

Increased wildlife funding: Funding increases to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds dedicated to wildlife habitat practices from a minimum of 5 percent to a minimum of 10 percent of total EQIP funds. This will dramatically increase the amount of money available for farmers and ranchers to **create wildlife habitat for species** such as the greater sage grouse and monarch butterfly on working lands.

The contributions of environmental and wildlife group partnerships in Montana's conservation districts are significant. **A few highlights in today's information share include American Bird Conservancy, Pheasants Forever and Walleyes Unlimited; read below a few updates of recent wildlife habitat success stories.**

Shanna Talcott, USDA NRCS District Conservationist in Powder River County, said, "In Eastern Montana, American Bird Conservancy (ABC) works closely with NRCS and partners in the region to leverage funding, provide technical assistance, and conduct outreach emphasizing enhancing habitat for birds and wildlife while maintaining sustainable land use. We have an ABC Conservation Specialist working in the Broadus USDA service center and an ABC Conservation Coordinator working in the Miles City NRCS Area Office." In Montana, the Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist (biologists) positions are supported through partnerships with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP), Ducks Unlimited, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Audubon, local conservation districts, and local Pheasants Forever (PF) chapters.



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The biologists promote wildlife habitat enhancement and creation through existing federal and state programs. In addition, biologists provide technical assistance to landowners interested in wildlife habitat enhancements, provide outreach on existing cost-share programs, and provide wildlife habitat conservation education to landowners and others. In 2019, five PF biologists worked across Montana to protect and restore wildlife habitat. Farm Bill programs in 2019 included total biologist impacts through Farm Bill Programs, monitoring and CTA of 84,984 acres.

Walleyes Unlimited of Montana (WUM) is the largest sport fishing organization in Montana with over 4,000 members. It was formed and incorporated in 1983 to inform and educate the public about the importance of warm water sport fishing in Montana and to support building and maintaining suitable warm water fish hatcheries and develop a hatchery program which can accommodate the needs of warm water fishing. Walleyes Unlimited of Montana has active chapters across the state and working partnerships with Montana's conservation districts. Fishing tournaments is one of several recreational aspects. And, yes, the Walleyes Unlimited of Montana is active in a host of conservation practices including the Clean, Drain, Dry initiative with MT Fish & Wildlife Parks & the local conservation districts. Their commitment in helping with the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) fight against zebra mussels and other invasives is just one of several Walleyes Unlimited of Montana's outreach campaigns.

If you haven't surfed the web, there are countless conservation organizations and

sporting groups across the United States and several specific to Montana. Log on to <http://fwp.mt.gov/links/consporting.html> and even Montana Conservation Citizen Groups and Agencies link at <http://hs.umt.edu/evst/resources/conservation-directory.php> In addition to the most familiar wild life organizations with local chapters including Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited and Sheep Foundation, there are other entities worthy of your conservation district's consideration.

Sage Grouse Initiative <https://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com>

The Sage Grouse Initiative sustains rural economies and our way of life in the American West. Saving sage grouse benefits 350 other species, including people and a host of wild-life. To learn more about events and activities: <https://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/category/events/> There are a number of technical and funding resources available. For more information, log on to <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/>.

Conservation Calendar—Monitor Events and Activities in Your Communities

Your local conservation district can easily monitor the conservation and environmental calendars in your local communities and state-wide to keep your pulse on conservation programming, issues of concern and monthly activities. The **Conservation Calendar of Western Montana** is maintained by the University of Montana Environmental Studies program. <http://hs.umt.edu/evst/calendars/conservation-calendar.php>