

GUIDELINES CONSERVATION DISTRICT GRANTS (HB223 GRANT PROGRAM)

Background

The 47th Legislature provided to the conservation districts one half of one percent of the coal severance tax monies. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation distributes these funds on the basis of need to conservation districts for any purpose that they are authorized to perform pursuant to MCA, Title 76, Chapter 15, Part 4. Since 1981, conservation districts have used these funds for conservation related equipment purchases, saline seep and weed control projects, conservation education and information projects, soil survey, and various other water and soil conservation related projects.

The Resource Conservation Advisory Council (RCAC) reviews applications four times a year, depending on funding availability, and makes funding recommendations to the Conservation Districts Bureau, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Applications will not be denied because of race, color, religious creed, political ideas, sex, age, marital status, physical or mental handicap, natural origin or ancestry.

The grant limit for “on the ground” conservation projects is \$20,000 with no match required. Conservation districts may request more than \$20,000, but 50:50 cash match is required for the entire amount. The grant limit for education projects (not including demonstration projects) is \$10,000 with no match required.

Conservation districts are also eligible to receive loans from this program.

Guidelines

1. In order to be eligible to receive a grant or loan, a conservation district must: a) have levied the maximum county mills allowed for the current fiscal year; b) have or are in the process of developing a special mills project as authorized in Montana Codes Annotated, Title 76, Chapter 15; and c) have need for additional funds above the maximum statutory authority.
2. Conservation districts participating in the program must submit an annual budget to the Conservation Districts Bureau, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Applications for administrative grants may serve this purpose, however, conservation districts that do not receive administrative grants must submit an annual budget prior to receiving grant funds.
3. Funds may be used for any project a conservation district is authorized to carry out, including, but not limited to: **planning, education, feasibility studies, demonstration projects, farm experiments, equipment, or construction of projects.** Conservation districts may receive funds as grants or loans as long as funding requested advances the purpose of conservation district programs.
4. Funds may not be used to purchase food, common items that can be easily borrowed, equipment for contractors, or items not considered essential to conducting a project or meeting project goal.

5. Projects must demonstrate a public and conservation benefit. No monies will be given to a project, which is strictly for private benefit. All projects must be part of a conservation district plan.
6. Applications for the purchase of equipment shall be accompanied by a maintenance plan that includes rental fees, repair and maintenance costs, deposits (if applicable), and long-term leases (if applicable). Reasonable rental fees must be charged to cover maintenance and replacement costs.
7. Applications must include a plan to monitor the effectiveness of the project. Public information and education efforts also must be included as part of the application. All grantees must write and disseminate a press release to the local newspapers. The "Conservation District and DNRC's Conservation District Grant Program" must be credited as a source of funding. Conservation districts are also encouraged to publish articles in their newsletters, if available, but this may not take the place of a newspaper article.
8. Preferential consideration may be given applications that include money or in-kind services from other sources or that are for less than 100 percent of the total project costs.
9. Irrigation construction or design projects, including sprinklers and drip systems, must have a 50:50 cash match from the landowner(s) or other beneficiary (such as an irrigation district or ditch company).
10. All previous grants received by the conservation district requesting funds, must be in current status (example: all reports filed) before new grant funds can be released.
11. Projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:
 - Promotes or results in conservation
 - Demonstrates a public benefit
 - Demonstrates cost effective outcome for the district
 - Fills an immediate need
 - Fits the district program's needs
 - Produces matching funds or in-kind services
 - Impacts a large number of people or acres
 - Produces long-term benefits
 - Requires funding only for a short-term to complete the project
12. Applications for weed projects must first demonstrate that funding was sought through the Noxious Weed Trust Fund at the Department of Agriculture. All weed projects must be coordinated with the local weed districts—especially for the purchase and application of chemicals.
13. The chair of the conservation district must sign the application form. A signed hard copy must be mailed and an electronic copy of the application must be submitted to the Conservation District Bureau by the posted deadlines.
14. Applications may be rejected if the application is incomplete.