

GUIDELINES CONSERVATION DISTRICT GRANTS (HB223 GRANT PROGRAM)

Background

Since 1981, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation grants or loans funds appropriated by the legislature to conservation districts on the basis of need for any purpose that conservation districts are authorized to perform pursuant to MCA, Title 76, Chapter 15, Part 4. Conservation districts have used the Conservation District Grant program (commonly referred to the HB 223 grant program) for conservation related equipment purchases, saline seep and weed control projects, demonstration projects, river restoration, conservation education and information projects, soil survey, and various other water and soil conservation related projects.

The Resource Conservation Advisory Council (RCAC), a governor-appointed committee made up of conservation district representatives, reviews applications quarterly and makes funding recommendations to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

The grant limit for “on the ground” conservation projects is \$20,000. 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 (excluding demonstration and educational events) is \$10,000.

The 223 award for an educational event can only be used to pay for expenses that exceed revenues. A conservation district receiving a grant for an educational event must provide a detailed spreadsheet that itemizes expenditures made and revenues received (registration fees, sponsorships, donations) and submit it with the final report.

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.

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 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 cannot 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 sources 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 to applications that include money or in-kind services from other sources or that are for less than 100 percent of the total project costs.
 - a. 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, ditch company, or community garden host).
9. All previous grants received by applicant must be in current status (example: all reports filed) before new grant funds can be released.
10. Projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:
 - a. Promotes or results in conservation
 - b. Demonstrates a public benefit
 - c. Demonstrates cost effective outcome for the district
 - d. Fills an immediate need
 - e. Fits the district program’s needs
 - f. Produces matching funds or in-kind services
 - g. Impacts a large number of people or acres
 - h. Produces long-term benefits
 - i. Requires funding only for the duration of the project
11. 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.
12. A 223 award for an educational event can only be used to pay for expenses that exceed revenues. A financial report detailing revenues and expenses will be required

13. Any conservation district supervisor can 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 deadline.

14. Applications may be rejected if the application is incomplete.

Fiscal Year 2017 Deadlines

July 26, 2017
October 18, 2017
January 16, 2018
April 25, 2018