



*Serving Montanans First through Natural Resource
Management*

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

Annual Plan

FY 2025

Updated, September 1, 2024

The **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation** is responsible for managing state trust land; protecting Montana's natural resources from wildfire; promoting stewardship of state water, soil, forest, and rangeland resources; aiding the conservation districts; providing natural resource conservation education; and providing support to the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation and other commissions and advisory councils. Our vision is to ensure Montana's land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations.

CENTRALIZED SERVICES DIVISION

Provides management and administrative services for the department. This includes activities such as legal, human resources, financial, information technology, records management, administrative hearings, safety, and communication services.

OIL AND GAS CONSERVATION DIVISION

Is responsible for programs operated for the prevention of resource waste through regulation of oil and gas exploration and production. This division supports the quasi-judicial Board of Oil and Gas that is charged with regulation of the industry.

CONSERVATION AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Provides administrative, legal, and technical assistance and financial grants to the conservation districts and manages natural resource conservation and development grant and loan programs for local governments, state agencies, and private individuals. The division also administers five attached councils and commissions and the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team.

WATER RESOURCES DIVISION

Is responsible for the administration of all water use within the state, including maintaining the database for all water rights, providing technical and legal support for implementation of approved water compacts for Indian tribes and federal agencies, managing state water projects, investigating water use act violations, ensuring dam safety compliance, and providing water adjudication support to the Water Court.

FORESTRY AND TRUST LAND DIVISION

Is responsible for planning and implementing forestry programs statewide. Division responsibilities include protecting natural resources from wildfire, regulating forest practices, providing a variety of services to private forest landowners, implementing cross boundary projects to build resilient forests, sustainable economies, and fire adapted communities, increasing forest restoration, management, and health on federal lands, and growing and selling seedlings for conservation and reforestation plantings on state and private lands in Montana.

The Division also manages state trust land resources to produce revenues for the trust beneficiaries while considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land. This work is done under the direction of the State Board of Land Commissioners (comprised of the Governor, State Auditor, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Secretary of State), who are constitutionally charged to oversee trust resources. The department director is the chief administrative officer of the board.



Strategic Outcome

#1

BETTER MANAGE OUR LANDS

Improve and expand forest management by utilizing all available tools across management ownerships and meet Trust Land Management Division Annual Sustainable Yield target.

Key Measures

Place an additional 40,000 acres under management by December 2025.

Work with partners to increase the use of prescribed fire on state and private lands.

Achieve the increased annual timber sales volume in 2027 Biennium of 60 million board feet per year.



Strategic Outcome

#2

STREAMLINE PERMITTING AND REGULATORY PROCESSES

Increase outreach with customers to better facilitate service in the water permitting process.

Plug and reclaim all orphaned wells under contract from Federal IJA Initial Grant.

Key Measures

Increase outreach to Montanans by conducting outreach campaigns, trainings, and listening sessions on water rights permitting. Increase our listserv participation by 30% to 2,600.

Work with stakeholders to pass and implement legislation to ensure a smooth transition from statewide water adjudication to long-term administration of water rights; and meet the state's new water demands while protecting existing water rights.

Have 95% of Orphan Wells plugged with federal funding that expires on September 30, 2025



Strategic Outcome

#3

IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Making accurate water right and public land access information easy to find and use.

Key Measures

Identify, with the Water Court, streamline water distribution projects that can be digitized in the 2027 Biennium for more efficient water management on the ground. Digitized information will be publicly available, benefitting water users and managers alike.

Start administrative rules project for recreational use of trust land to ensure readability and alignment with statutory changes from the legislature (will be ongoing through the 2027 Biennium).



Strategic Outcome

#4

MORE EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Streamline internal processes and adopt relevant technology.

Key Measures

Review Loan submission and servicing with Board of Investments to determine if they can more efficiently service DNRC loans.

Complete development on a new cloud-based financial management system by June 30, 2025, with go-live scheduled for the first part of FY 2026.

Obligate 100% of the HB 6 and HB 7 grants for Renewable Resource Grant and Resource Development Grant programs awarded in the 2025 Biennium.