

YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

FY26 ANNUAL WORK PLAN

Conservation Districts are:

- Locally elected volunteers whose role is to oversee and positively affect natural resource management.
- The conduit for accessing federal dollars and technical assistance to make state dollars go farther.
- The voice for private lands that benefit our environment and our economy.
- Educate our state's youth in understanding plant, animal, soil, and water resources and their relationships with each other and our communities.

This annual work plan was developed to provide financial, technical, and educational assistance to land users in the district and promote the proper management of soil and water resources. It is structured to bring resource allocation and decision-making to the local level thus ensuring solutions are tailored to specific needs. It is for helping the Yellowstone Conservation District meet its obligations promptly and will serve as a major guide through fiscal year 2026.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY AREAS:

EDUCATION

NATURAL RESOURCES

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- CHAD SEDGWICK, CHAIR, ELECTED SUPERVISOR
- BRAD KRAFT, VICE-CHAIR, URBAN SUPERVISOR – LAUREL/BROADVIEW
- LEROY GABEL, ELECTED SUPERVISOR
- JACKIE HAALAND, ELECTED SUPERVISOR
- BRYAN MOTHERSHEAD, ELECTED SUPERVISOR
- STACEY ROBINSON, URBAN SUPERVISOR - BILLINGS

EMPLOYEES:

- LAVERNE IVIE, ADMINISTRATOR
- CRYSTAL WHITE – TECHNICIAN, YCD/PHEASANTS FOREVER PARTNERSHIP
- RAY BECK, PUBLIC POLICY SPECIALIST

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURE IN MONTANA (Schools and General Public)

- Plan an agricultural public awareness campaign as issues arise by printing articles in the area media outlets, posting them on the YCD website and social media accounts – Priority work item for YCD/PF partnership
- Make a financial contribution to Agriculture in MT Schools supporting the state bumper sticker contest. Work with AMS leadership team to resurrect ag education in Yellowstone County

EDUCATION PROGRAMS at the NILE

- Coordinate and aid with partner agencies on station presentations which may include YCD's stream table, NRCS soil tunnel, and weed education sessions

CONSERVATION CORPS DAY(S)

- Partner with Conservation Corps senior crews to provide maintenance of YCD's Living Snow Fence site
- If a natural disaster happens in Yellowstone County, YCD will act as the liaison between landowners and government entities by providing educational materials and/or sponsoring grants to hire senior CC crews to rehabilitate lost natural resources.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER/YELLOWSTONE RIVER PARKS ASSOCIATION

- Support the mission Audubon Conservation Education Center and look for ways to cooperate on projects
- Work with YRPA Coordinator on potential projects and grants at Dover Park and develop future projects

CONSERVATION AT THE ZOO

- Promote viewing of the 223-grant-funded stream bank stabilization project by 310 applicants at Zoo MT – Cooperate with Zoo officials on conservation projects
- Have the YCD program technician contact the Zoo and discuss creating a pheasant habitat education area meet with the new Zoo Director to provide information on past projects YCD has funded

POLLINATOR FAIR & CONSERVATION EDUCATION EVENT

- Sponsor the 2nd annual Pollinator Fair in cooperation with partner agencies and develop a sustainable program.
- Evaluate the feasibility of an added conservation day in the spring possibly at Zoo Montana – possibly combining with the Pollinator Fair.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Provide presentations to City, County, and Home schools with resource programs when requested
- Develop a conservation education request form on the YCD website to determine school needs/requests for conservation in Yellowstone Co. area schools/organizations
- Develop/enhance/increase Conservation Education programming utilizing PF Coop employee
 - Stream table/rolling river trailer – contact schools and set schedule
 - Noxious Weeds – engaging students in habitat conservation
 - Aquatic invasive Species Education/cleaning station demonstrations
- Continue encouraging and helping sponsor conservation education scholarships to natural resource camps as considered worthy
- Promote the Montana Envirothon program at the county level and continue to offer sponsorship of one team per county high school
- Continue sponsoring DNRC mini-grants
- Cooperate with city and county schools, and surrounding counties' conservation field days by providing stream table and NRCS soil activities
- Offer natural resource scholarships as the budget allows
- Partner with Rocky Mountain College, MSU-B, MBMG, and Yellowstone County Weed District to provide stream table training, presentations at schools, and YCD outreach events
- Evaluate the feasibility of adding a conservation day in the spring possibly combining with the Pollinator Fair

NATURAL RESOURCES

EROSION

➤ WATER

- Administer the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310 Law)
- Monitor incomplete permits, complaints, and repeated violators
- Post-project inspection by conducting a Yellowstone River tour
- Stream permitting mailing to landowners adjacent to perennial streams in Yellowstone County – do again spring '26?
- Support YCD playing an active role in conflict resolution between affected user groups and federal regulatory agencies

➤ WIND

- Address and work with parties concerned with erosion problems as needed

FOSSIL FUELS

- Support the coal industry in Colstrip and the State of Montana
- Encourage keeping current levels and/or increased production of Montana's fossil fuels

LOCAL WORK GROUP

- Continue to cooperate with the Local Work Group for NRCS cost/share programs. Take an active role in identifying priority resource concerns and look for projects in the targeted areas
- Cooperate with conservation agencies to reinstate the Russian Olive Initiative in the NRCS cost/share program and add Salt Cedar as a cost/share program

RANGE

- Inform cooperators of the Rangeland Resource Loan Program
- Inform cooperators through the Extension and NRCS offices and the YCD website of the following:
 - Total range acres in Yellowstone County, condition of the acres, and trend for range management
- Work with local virtual fencing vendors to sponsor a workshop for ranchers

SMALL TRACT LAND OWNERSHIP

➤ Land Management

- Identify and educate the public on the following: Yellowstone River Recommended Practices and available equipment
- Continue to look for opportunities to educate small landowners living in urban settings on how to manage their private working lands and care for their resources
- Inform cooperators through the Extension and NRCS offices of various levels of land management available

➤ Backyard and Urban Conservation

- Continue promoting the program through media outlets and public meetings
- Promote native landscape information by acting as a conduit/liaison for the public to access information with agencies and other entities on specific problems
- Help sponsor a Rain Garden demonstration site possibly in the Laurel or Broadview area

SPECIAL PROJECTS

1. YELLOWSTONE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS COUNCIL

- 100% involvement with Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Council
- Provide technical and related support within available capability and established priorities
- Continue to support Council activities with Russian Olive, Salt Cedar & Buckthorn eradication

2. URBAN CONSERVATION ISSUES

- o Look for sites to install urban conservation projects in Billings, Laurel, and Broadview
- o Take an active role in the City Reservoir conservation education component and assist the City of Billings with funding opportunities
- o Lake Elmo
 - AIS educational video – Look for venues to display

3. HUNTLEY PROJECT IRRIGATION DISTRICT FISH PASSAGE

- o Continue to monitor for fish species and fish usage
 - Work with FWP to provide accurate fish counts to the public; help facilitate clearing the fish passage of debris buildup in conjunction with FWP
- o Hector Portage Path
 - Check annually: sign condition in case of vandalism

4. LANDOWNER WORKSHOPS/MEETINGS

1. Identify and plan pertinent and timely workshops throughout the county
 - Pollinator workshop
 - CE credit workshops for realtors
 - Virtual fence workshop for ag producers

5. NRCS Emergency Watershed Program – If another flood event occurs host informational meetings with the County, NRCS & Landowners to begin the process of planning

6. WESTEND RESERVOIRS

- Administer DNRC grant to update the Master Plan Amenities and Conservation Layer
- Once a final design is approved, take to possible entities for funding

SOIL HEALTH

- Support and continue to provide soil health information to Yellowstone County landowners
- Plan and host Carbon Sequestration workshops as opportunities for landowners become available – still applicable?
- Work with and support the NRCS Soil Health program
 - o Sponsor one or more demonstration sites through DNRC grant funding

TREES

- **LIVING SNOW FENCE**
 - o Ensure total maintenance of the Rehberg Living Snow Fence site and if needed, replace trees in spring, mechanically till the site, fence repair, and work with the Yellowstone County Weed Department on weed control.
 - o Schedule workday(s) for Conservation Corps if needed
- **TREE PLANTING PROGRAM**
 - o Work closely with the County Extension office for the expansion of tree plantings possibly through workshops, schools, and CRP
 - o Arbor Day Tree Give-a-Way program: Purchase trees and plan an event to provide trees to Yellowstone County residents including handouts with planting instructions and maintenance guidelines
 - o Consider adding Lockwood School FFA program as a second tree giveaway location

WATER QUALITY/ QUANTITY

- **NITRATES**
 - o Support and actively participate with NRCS and Big Horn CD on the Implementation Plan for the Fly Creek watershed 2023 funding
 - Address high nitrates and sulfates in the surface water
 - Look for ways to develop off-stream stock water
 - Offer agronomy practices upstream to treat water quality issues, and encourage use of RO systems
 - Water quality monitoring on a consistent basis and a central compiling spot for those sample results to then be analyzed
 - Co-sponsor early fall workshop and training session
- **SALINITY CONTROL**
 - o Continue support of the Montana Salinity Control Association
 - o Continue to address Fly Creek salinity issues
- **WATER QUANTITY**
 - o Promote irrigation water management in Yellowstone County through water measuring devices
 - o Aggressively promote off-stream storage in potential sites in the County (with an emphasis on the Westend Reservoir)

- Look for educational opportunities at the proposed West Billings Water Treatment Plant Water future Learning Center
- Lay groundwork as it relates to funding water quality opportunities in cooperation with developers

WATER RESERVATIONS

- Promote off-stream storage utilizing a portion of YCD reserved water right
- Continue to promote YCD's reserved water to eligible irrigation projects

WEED CONTROL

- Cooperate with the Yellowstone County Weed Board and personnel in the Weed District
- Develop education program with County Weed Board for Invasive Species. Provide link on website

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

BUDGET

- YCD budgets for the following programs as funds become available and at the discretion of the Board:
 - MT Range Days Tour, Rocky Mountain College YR cleanup, YR Salt Cedar infestation
 - Organization Dues: NACD; Soil & Water Conservation Society; Plant Materials Center; Beartooth RC&D; Billings Chamber of Commerce; Employees Association; NILE; Yellowstone River Parks Assoc.
- Legislative Session activities
 - Develop a strategic plan to use as a major guide for YCD lobbyist and Yellowstone Co. Legislators
- YCD administers the following pass thru or YCD project grants
 - DNRC - Mini Grants, 223. Renewable Resource Grants, Resource and Development Grants; AIS grant
 - Pheasants Forever Coop employee up to \$10,000 per year

COOPERATING AGENCIES and/or ORGANIZATIONS

- Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation
- National Association of Conservation Districts
- USDA Natural Resources & Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency
- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Yellowstone County Offices: Commissioners, Weed Board, Floodplain, City/County Planning, Extension
- MT Association of Conservation Districts
- Billings Chamber of Commerce
- Beartooth RC&D
- Bureau of Mines & Geology
- FFA, 4-H Chapters and County Schools
- Ag in Montana Schools
- US Forest Service
- Montana Salinity Control Association
- Rocky Mountain College
- Montana State University – Billings
- NILE
- Yellowstone River Parks Association
- Yellowstone River Basin Water Reservation Council
- Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Council
- Review MOUs with the above agencies when applicable and check on updating the status

PUBLIC AWARENESS

- Increase public relations efforts
 - Update website weekly
 - Post all Board meeting notices for public review
 - Annual Plan distributed to all cooperating agencies
 - Radio and television spots, news releases for special projects/tours, post on social media sites
 - YCD information posted on the YRCDC, City of Billings and Yellowstone County websites
 - YCD Stream Table available for educational training – promote/highlight public awareness

TRAVEL of SUPERVISORS and/or EMPLOYEES

Board members and employees attend County, State, Regional, and National meetings as budget allows

