

YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

FY24 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 to 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 in a timely manner and will serve as a major guide through fiscal year 2024.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY AREAS:

EDUCATION

NATURAL RESOURCES

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

YELLOWSTONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- **CHAD SEDGWICK, CHAIR, ELECTED SUPERVISOR**
- **CLINT PECK, VICE-CHAIR, URBAN SUPERVISOR - BILLINGS**
- **LEROY GABEL, ELECTED SUPERVISOR**
- **BRAD KRAFT, URBAN SUPERVISOR -- LAUREL/BROADVIEW**
- **STACEY ROBINSON, ELECTED SUPERVISOR**
- **BRIAN MOTHERSHEAD, ELECTED SUPERVISOR**

EMPLOYEES:

- **LaVERNE IVIE, ADMINISTRATOR**
- **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 on the YCD website and social media accounts
- Make financial contribution to Agriculture in MT Schools supporting the state bumper sticker contest

EDUCATION PROGRAMS at the NILE

- Coordinate and assist with partner agencies on station presentations which may include YCD's stream table, NRCS soil tunnel and weed education sessions
- Provide Conservation District recyclable bags to teachers filled with educational materials from each demonstration booth with emphasis on conservation/agriculture for 2200 4th graders during the 3-day event. Partial bussing sponsorship of the 4th grade Agriculture Education portion of the NILE program if budget allows

CONSERVATION CORPS DAY(S)

- Partner with Conservation Corps senior crews to accomplish:
 - Living Snow Fence maintenance
- 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

- "Adopt a Reach" -- Look for ways to develop a joint education program with Conservation Education Center, Josephine Crossing Subdivision and Grey Eagle Irrigation Ditch Company on a side channel of the Yellowstone River
- Support the mission of the Audubon Conservation Education Center

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

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Provide presentations to City, County, and Home schools with resource programs when requested
- Utilize web-site conservation education request form to determine schools needs/requests for conservation in Yellowstone Co. area schools/organizations
- Develop/enhance/increase Conservation Education programming including:
 - Stream table/rolling river trailer
 - Noxious Weeds – engaging students in habitat conservation
 - Aquatic invasive Species Education/cleaning station demonstrations
 - Stream table/rolling river trailer
- Continue encouraging and helping sponsor conservation education scholarships to natural resource camps as deemed 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, surrounding counties' conservation field days by providing stream table and NRCS soil activities
- Offer natural resource scholarships as 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 an additional conservation day in the spring possibly at Zoo Montana

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
- Mass educational stream permitting mailing to landowners adjacent to perennial stream in county ?
- 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 coal industry in Colstrip and the State of Montana
- Encourage maintaining 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
- Work on getting the Russian Olive Initiative reinstated in the NRCS cost/share program and adding Salt Cedar as a cost/share program

RANGE

- Inform cooperators of Rangeland Resource Loan Program
- Inform cooperators through the Extension and NRCS offices of the following:
 - Total range acres in Yellowstone County, condition of the acres and trend for range management

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 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, 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 Rain Garden demonstration site possibly in Laurel 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 eradication

2. HECTOR PORTAGE PATH

- Check annually: sign condition in case of vandalism

3. URBAN CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Look for sites to install urban conservation projects in Billings, Laurel, and Broadview
- Take an active role in the City Reservoir conservation education component and assist the City of Billings with funding opportunities
- Lake Elmo
 - Assist in the development of educational video as identified in AIS grant

NATURAL RESOURCES (continued)

4. HUNTLEY PROJECT IRRIGATION DISTRICT FISH PASSAGE

- Continue to monitor for fish species and fish usage
 - Work with FWP to provide accurate fish counts to public; help facilitate clearing the fish passage of debris buildup in conjunction with FWP

5. LANDOWNER WORKSHOPS/MEETINGS

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

6. HB632 & NRCS's Emergency Watershed Program – Appropriation of stimulus dollars to Montana entities (American Rescue Act)

- Assist Yellowstone County entities with eligibility criteria by being the liaison between the county and irrigation associations

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
- Work with and support NRCS Soil Health program
 - Sponsor one or more demonstration sites through 223 grant funding
 - Work with NRCS for summer/fall tour of crops in Yellowstone County via a harvest workshop in the Broadview area

TREES

- **LIVING SNOW FENCE**
 - Ensure total maintenance of the Rehberg Living Snow Fence site by replacing trees in spring, mechanically tilling site, needed fence repair, and working with Yellowstone County Weed Department on weed control.
 - Schedule workday(s) for Conservation Corps if needed
- **TREE PLANTING PROGRAM**
 - Work closely with the County Extension office for expansion of tree plantings possibly through workshops, schools, and CRP
 - 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

WATER QUALITY/ QUANTITY

- **NITRATES**
 - 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 sulphates in the surface water
 - Look for ways to develop off stream stock water
 - Offer agronomy practices upstream to treat water quality issues, 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**
 - Continue support of the Montana Salinity Control Association
 - Continue to address Fly Creek salinity issues
- **WATER QUANTITY**
 - Promote irrigation water management in Yellowstone County thru water measuring devices
 - 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 Learning Center
 - Lay groundwork as it relates to funding water quality opportunities in cooperation with developers
 - Actively pursue grants to augment funding

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
- Oversee monitoring project in cooperation with RMC and weed district

DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

BUDGET

- YCD budgets for the following programs as funds become available and at the discretion of the Board:
 - MT Range 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

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 MOU's with above agencies when applicable and check on updating status

STATE COMMITTEES

- Support Future Fisheries Panel appointee Clint Peck with special emphasis on Yellowstone County projects

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