

Local Common Sense Conservation

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Montana's conservation districts are political subdivisions of state government, created by the Montana legislature in 1939 in response to the devastation that occurred during the Dust Bowl years. The 58 districts in Montana are part of a national network of over 3,000 conservation districts similarly organized in all 50 states. A non-paid elected and appointed board of supervisors governs the activities of the conservation district.

The main function of the conservation district is to conduct local activities to promote conservation of natural resources, which includes education for all ages as well as on-the-ground conservation projects. Funding for conservation district operations comes from their authority to levy taxes on real property within their district. For conservation projects and educational activities, districts rely heavily on grants from state and federal governments.

Montana conservation districts also have a statutory obligation to implement and enforce the Montana Natural Streambed & Land Preservation Act of 1975, also known as the "310 law" from the senate bill that created it. Under this law, any private, non-governmental individual or entity proposing work in or near a stream on public

Source: Flathead Conservation District



Fall along the Flathead River

or private land, that physically alters or modifies the bed or immediate banks of a perennial-flowing stream, must first obtain an approved permit.

Flathead Conservation District was established in 1945 and includes all the areas of Flathead County with the exception of the land within the 1945 city limits of Kalispell and Columbia Falls. The current board includes five elected members plus one appointee from the City of Whitefish. Elected officials serve four year terms while the appointed positions serve three year terms. Board members participate on all local planning boards, as well as collaborate with many watershed groups, other non-governmental organizations and local, federal and state agencies.

There are more than 600 perennial streams in Flathead County that fall under the jurisdiction of the "310 law." Over the years, this has resulted in a total of over 3,000 stream permits that have

been issued. Each permit application receives a site visit from a team composed of a member of the board of supervisors, a representative from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the applicant. The application is then reviewed, modified if necessary, and approved or denied by the full board. After project completion, a follow-up visit is conducted by the board representative.

There are many outreach activities the Flathead Conservation District participates in. For adults there are workshops such as the Living by Water workshop & tour and Small Acreage Landowners workshop series. The conservation seedling project has helped landowners put over 10,000 native plant seedlings in the ground for shelterbelts and habitat in the last four years.

For K-12 children, the district has been in charge of Flathead Forestry Expo's riparian station every year, teaching area fifth graders how streamside vegetation helps keep water clean. Many of the education activities have a community service component. For example, in 2008 Kalispell Middle School sixth graders went on a series of trips to learn about streams, riparian areas, soils and vegetation. On the last trip to the

Source: Flathead Conservation District



FCD board member Pete Woll and staffer Larry Van Rinsum at work on a major restoration project on the Stillwater River

City of Kalispell's Begg Park the students planted native vegetation along Ashley Creek to help reduce erosion, improve water quality and beautify the park. The district sponsors individual students to area resource camps and teams for statewide competitions.

Flathead Conservation District manages many grants. For example, it coordinates the activities of the Haskill Basin Watershed Group.

The group has organized scientific data collection in the basin, encouraged positive land use changes and initiated restoration projects that have dramatically reduced erosion and sedimentation in Haskill Creek and its downstream receiving basins. Grant activity through the district has brought over two million dollars in the last three years in to the valley for education and activities that help protect our lands and water.

Source: Flathead Conservation District



Pete Woll installs willow stakes on Mill Creek Restoration site