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**Upcoming Events in April**

- 5 Board Meeting, Circle
- 16 Easter, Everywhere
- 22 Earth Day, Everywhere
- 24-25 MT Envirothon, Lewistown
- 28 Arbor Day, Montana
- 30-7 May NACD Stewardship Week

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It's been a little over three years since I came on board ...

In that time, we have been busy getting re-acquainted with the community, writing grants for projects, hosting meetings and events. Here’s some of our tax dollars at work in McCone County:

- Open House 2013 & 2014
- Range Management Workshop 2014
- Pollinator Booth McCone County Fair 2014
- Tree Program 2014-2017
- Charles M Russell Community Working Group Meetings 2014-2017
- Soil Health Workshop 2014, 2015


- Baseline Groundwater Sampling 2015
- Soil Health Bus Tour 2015
- Range Monitoring Day 2015
- No-till Gardening Workshop 2015
- NACD Poster Contest 2015
- Circle Ag Show 2015, 2016
- Local Working Group 2015, 2017
- Invasive Weed Workshop 2016

THANKS! It’s been fun ....

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Spring is sooner recognized by plants than by men. – Chinese Proverb

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**Our Fabulous Urban Supervisor**

Larry Nagel is retiring after 19 years on the board. He was appointed by the Town of Circle in 1998 and has been an invaluable voice for conservation in McCone County ever since. We will miss his leadership, thoughtfulness and kindness.

We wish you the VERY best, Larry!
New Faces to the District ~ Welcome!

New Administrator
Emily Heide

New Urban Supervisor
Michael Hoy

New Urban Supervisor
Ken Ehli

Starts Monday, March 27th
Stewardship Week Press Release  
April 30 – May 7, 2017  
For Immediate Release  

Circle, MT — As a part of McCone County for 74 years, the McCones Conservation District wants to remind you that each of us has a connection to natural resources. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is celebrating the 62nd year of Stewardship week April 30 – May 7, 2017. The 2017 Stewardship Week is themed “Healthy Soils Are Full of Life!” Soil is the starting foundation of all of the food we eat.

The District was formed in August 1942 with the idea to assist people in McCone County develop a more sustainable and rich resource strategy through conservation. The district is committed to being a pivotal role in the community providing educational, informational and developmental opportunities.

“Making the connection back to the soil, where our food gets its start is so important,” says Gene Schmidt. “The next time you sit down to a meal, take a minute to think about where your food came from, and the farmers and ranchers who helped produce it.” As they work to produce food for the growing population, today’s farmers and ranchers are dedicated to using responsible land-management practices to ensure a sustainable food supply and healthy land and soil for future generations.

The McCones Conservation District is a member of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) which oversees the Stewardship Week program. Stewardship Week is one of the largest national annual programs to promote conservation. NACD represents the nation’s 3,000 conservation districts, which were established to encourage resource conservation across the country.

Additional information about the Healthy Soils Are Full of Life! program and other useful resource education is available on the NACD website at http://www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/stewardship-program/.

# # #

Local contact: McCones Conservation District  
Phone: 406-485-2744 x100  
Email: mcconecd@macdnet.org

The National Association of Conservation Districts is the non-profit organization that represents the nation’s 3,000 conservation districts, their state associations and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. For almost 70 years, local conservation districts have worked with cooperating landowners and managers of private working lands to help them plan and apply effective conservation practices. NACD’s website is at www.nacdnet.org.
Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority (DRWA) continues to diligently work toward proving the need and acquiring necessary funding for widespread construction of the regional water system which will allow quality water to be delivered to communities and rural residents living in the Montana Counties of McCone, Dawson, Garfield, Richland, and Prairie, and McKenzie County, North Dakota.

Fresh, clean water is one of our most vital resources. When water is unfit to use, it is not only devastating to the environment, but also to human health. Even though there are investments each year toward keeping water clean and safe, the available water in our area is still falling short when it comes to providing for a healthy existence.

At the time this article is written, Mandi Nay, DRWA Coordinator, is preparing to travel to Washington D.C. to join Senator Daines in dropping the newest federal authorization legislation supporting Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority on the Senate Floor. Readers will be able to see updates regarding this on DRWA’s Facebook page.

This is a critical time for DRWA legislation, from federal and local standpoints. In Helena, there are several bills to be voted on that will affect rural water projects such as Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority. At the time this article is written, there are no updates, but DRWA is planning to provide updates on our Facebook page, or updates can be provided by contacting our office.

The quality of our water is directly linked to the quality of our lives. By supporting clean water initiatives, we can each have a hand in ensuring clean, safe water for ourselves, our families and loved ones, and our communities.

Questions? Comments?
P lease contact:

Mandi: drwa@midrivers.com

Emilee: drwa2@midrivers
(406) 485-3792

To view the bill “drop” visit: https://www.facebook.com/SteveDainesMT/videos/1065925366885412/?hc_ref=SEARCH
Windbreak establishment does not end once the seedlings are in the ground. The new planting is still susceptible to weed competition, hot dry winds, feeding by livestock and rodents, and damage from insects and diseases.

**Weed Control**

Competition from weeds is the leading cause for failure of newly planted windbreaks. Pre-emergent herbicides can reduce the weed populations and minimize cultivation. On areas subject to erosion, vegetation can be controlled with various herbicides. Consult your local conservation agency (Extension Agent) for the best herbicides for your planting. When using herbicides, always read and follow label instructions.

Consistent vegetation control insures a vigorous, well-established windbreak. Clean cultivation of newly planted windbreaks gives the trees an advantage in obtaining moisture. However, some vegetation between rows reduces soil erosion and drying caused by strong winds. Planting an annual crop such as corn or sorghum between the rows protects the soil and young trees (especially conifers) from wind damage and will trap snow in the winter for added moisture. At a minimum, an area thirty-six inches in diameter around each tree should be free of grass and weeds for 3 to 5 years.

**Livestock**

Keep livestock out of windbreaks at all times. Livestock browse and trample young seedlings, cause soil compaction, and reduce the effectiveness of the lower portions of the windbreak. Use fences to protect your windbreak anytime livestock are nearby.

**Wildlife Damage**

Newly planted trees and shrubs are particularly susceptible to damage by small mammals. If rodents are a problem, continue control measures initiated the previous year. An advantage of clean cultivation after establishment is that small rodents tend to avoid bare ground. If the planting is relatively small, fencing with chicken-wire or plastic guards provides a barrier to rabbits and most other small mammals. Commercial animal repellents are also available, but are not always reliable.

**Insects and Diseases**

Inspect your windbreaks regularly for signs of insects or diseases. Early identification allows early control of these situations before damage decreases windbreak effectiveness. Stressed trees can conceal the effects of insects and diseases, so be particularly alert for outbreaks during dry years.

**Irrigation**

In low rainfall regions or under drought conditions, supplemental water may be necessary for the survival of newly planted trees and shrubs. Various types of drip irrigation systems are available and in some regions may receive cost-sharing funding. In very dry areas, it is essential for newly planted trees to receive additional watering at the time of planting.

**Replanting**

Even under the best of conditions, some seedlings die. Check for and replace dead seedlings for at least three years. The effectiveness of a windbreak depends largely on the initial impact of the wind against full, compact rows of trees and shrubs. Gaps or low density areas within the windbreak concentrate the force of the wind, causing more problems than in unprotected areas.

Article source: Windbreak Establishment, by Patricia Boehner and James R. Brandle, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Sherman Finch, Soil Conservation Service
Alternative Gardening Methods: Bag Gardening

BAG GARDENING #1: Bags as containers

So maybe, at first glance, alternative gardening ideas like, say, planting directly into a bag seems like the ultimate in laziness. But take a closer look and you’ll be convinced that success doesn’t always have to come hard. An ideal option for green-thumb wannabes living in condos, mobile homes or urban jungles, bag gardens thrive almost anywhere. There’s no worry about weeds, and no guesswork about amending soil. Plus, it’s even attractive now that you have gorgeous grow bag options like the ones pictured here from Gardener’s Supply Company.

Step 1. Position your bag wherever you like—on a patio, alongside the house, on a balcony—in an area that gets at least six to eight hours of full sun a day (if you’re growing vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers or peppers; leafy greens can tolerate a few hours less). It’s important to position it first because it can get heavy to move later.

Step 2. Fill your bag with soil all the way to the top. You don’t have to worry about drainage because these bags were designed to have good drainage built in.

Step 3. Sow seeds or young plants in bags, and water well. Like most gardens, bag varieties benefit from mulch, so pile on any chemical-free grass clippings, straw or leaves you have on hand.

BAG GARDENING #2: Straight from the soil bag

Tired of fighting bad soil and annual chickweed, Lois Ruskell bought nine bags of topsoil on sale, laid them flat in her garden, cut slits in the top and bottom, and planted seeds and plants directly in the bags. Ruskell says her “garden in a bag” eliminated weeding altogether and “left me with better soil at the end of the season.”

Here’s what we love about this method:

1. It’s inexpensive. Home Depot’s selling 40-lb. bags of topsoil for $1.37, so you can create a 20-by-3-ft. garden for less than $40. (Unlike the soil in your yard, bags of soil are tilled and ready to plant.)

2. Not only will few or no weeds grow around your plants, the bags will smother existing weeds under the plastic.

3. Next year, you can empty the topsoil into the garden and begin building up the beds. Use the plastic to suppress weeds in garden paths.

But here’s what gives us pause about Ruskell’s brainstorm:

1. It’s only good for shallow-rooted plants, like lettuce and tomatoes. Root vegetables, like beets or carrots, need a deeper growing medium, though I guess you could stand the bags up and plant root veggies that way, if you can figure out how to keep the bags from toppling over.

2. There are no worms in the bags, and worms are natural fertilizer and aeration machines.

3. Topsoil needs fortification from compost, manure, or peat moss, which help retain moisture and add nutrients.

4. Will just a couple of slits provide a large enough opening for water to get in and out of the bag? We’re not so sure.

5. But our biggest concern is that a plastic bag garden doesn’t look so hot, which won’t do much for your home’s curb appeal. So if you try this method (and I’m going to), cover the bags with mulch.
Baby’s breath (Gypsophila paniculata) is native to Eurasia and was introduced to North America as an ornamental. It is a showy plant that is still used as an ornamental in some parts of the United States and is popular in the cut flower industry. The first recorded introduction of this species was in the Canadian province of Manitoba in 1887, and in 1953 its weedy attributes were noted in Saskatchewan. It is now widespread across Canada and the northern U.S.

**Identification:** A member of the Pink (Caryophyllaceae) family, baby’s breath is a multi-branched, perennial forb that can grow up to 3’ tall; often the plant appears globe-like in shape due to it branching nature. Leaves are opposite, lance-shaped and arise at swollen nodes. The number of leaves decreases with increasing plant height and during flowering. Sweetly scented flowers are small and white with 5 sepals and 5 petals. Fruits occur as small capsules that contain 2 to 5 black, kidney-shaped seeds. It has a taproot.

**Impacts:** Baby’s breath can form dense stands and displace desirable grasses and forbs. Because of the large taproot and ability to produce millions of seeds, this plant is difficult to remove once established. It is reportedly mildly toxic to cats and dogs due to the toxin gyposenin, which causes irritation to the gastro-intestinal tract. On a positive note, baby’s breath has been associated with an increase in arthropod abundance and diversity, livestock can eat baby’s breath in the vegetative phase, and there are reports of that saponins found in the root system may increase the efficacy of cancer drugs.

**Habitat:** Although it can persist in many types of habitats, large populations most often occur in coarse-textured soils in pastures and hayfields, lightly to heavily grazed rangelands, roadsides, and other disturbed habitats. It is often found in high densities along fence lines or in ravines due to its tumbling habit.

**Spread:** Baby’s breath reproduces by seed. Each plant can produce nearly 14,000 seeds that are loosely held in capsules, and most drop off near the parent plant. Individual plants often break off at the base at maturity and tumble in the wind, spreading remaining seeds up to 1 km. Seeds display little dormancy, and the little documentation available suggests they may remain viable for about two years. Baby’s breath occasionally regenerates from pieces of the root crown.

**Management:** In Montana, baby’s breath is not on the state noxious weed list but is listed as a county noxious weed in the following counties: Blaine, Broadwater, Chouteau, Daniels, Deer Lodge, Flathead, Jefferson, Richland, Sheridan, Silver Bow, and Valley. *(Soon in McCon)*. Since 1934 it has been reported in 22 counties in Montana. Because it is not widely distributed across Montana, early detection and rapid response is the management priority for most of the state. Hand pulling or digging is effective, but difficult due to the plant’s relatively large taproot. Mowing before seed development will help to control baby’s breath, but it will not kill it. Herbicides that contain metsulfuron methyl are effective when applied during the bolt to pre-flower stage.
MCCONE CONSERVATION DISTRICT Mission Statement

Conservation District Authority

Mission Statement—By performing a leadership role in conservation for McCone County, the District will develop a more sustainable and economic resource management plan for the community.

Conservation District Authority—MCA 76-15-102

Declaration of policy: It is hereby declared to be the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of soil and soil resources of this state, for the control and prevention of soil erosion, for the prevention of floodwater and sediment damages, and for furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water and therefore to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state.

310 Permit Check before you start your project!

If you are planning a project that may affect the natural existing shape and form of any stream, its banks or tributaries in McCone County, you must obtain a 310 permit prior to commencing any activity. A project may be any new construction, modifications or maintenance on existing infrastructure or facility. Contact us at 406-485-2744 x100 for more information.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill. You know how it is with an April day.

~ Robert Frost