

# DISTRICT DIRT

PETROLEUM COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Spring 2026

*Local Common  
Sense Conservation*

Photo Credit: Trish Smith

## WINNETT ACES/PCCD MUSSELHELL BANK RESTORATION PROJECT

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The Petroleum County Conservation District encompasses the county's 1,071,000 acres and the board is comprised of five county elected officials and two appointed city officials. This board is tasked with the education and conservation of the county's natural resources.

The Petroleum County Conservation District through education, outreach and program and project development works hard to put local common sense natural resource conservation on the ground and to educate the current and future producers and landowners on natural resource conservation all while helping them to continue sustainability in their businesses.

The Petroleum County Conservation District regularly partners with other conservation districts, watershed groups, stakeholder groups, state and federal agencies, as well as some NGO's and nonprofits to put conservation on the ground.

As part of the Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) Member Training, members participated in service projects across Central Montana communities. One of these projects included the next phase of the Winnett ACES/PCCD Musselshell Bank restoration project south of Mosby, MT. In partnership with IND Hemp (based in Fort Benton, MT), BSWC members installed willows along the streambank to support long-term stabilization while utilizing hemp-based products donated by IND Hemp. Hemp straw bales were used to help retain moisture and encourage healthy vegetative growth and fiber blocks



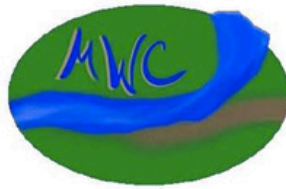
were placed along the brush matrix to ease the transition to the non-modified stream bank. The project was wrapped up this week with laying of the hemp erosion control mat between the willows and newly seeded area above. This project will be highlighted during the Petroleum County Conservation District Annual Ladies Day on the Range Event held June 9th, 2026, east of Winnett, MT.

Written by Skylar Stenson,  
Winnett ACES Conservation Technician  
Winnett Field Office

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# Musselshell Watershed Coalition

## Job Announcement

Musselshell Watershed Coalition  
**Interim**  
Outreach and Project Coordinator

Location: **Virtual home office and/or in office, with in-person responsibilities across the Musselshell River Watershed**

Application Deadline: **June 5, 2026**

Anticipated Start Date: **June 15, 2026**

Starting pay: **Depending on experience**

***Position Open Until Filled***

### Background & job description:

The Musselshell Watershed Coalition (MWC) was formed in 2009 as a collaborative partnership focused on protecting and improving the Musselshell River through basin-wide management and cooperation. The coalition works to support whole river collaboration, improve water quantity through cooperative flow management and irrigation infrastructure, and improve water quality through voluntary, locally driven efforts.

The Musselshell River Watershed covers approximately 9,500 square miles and serves nearly 9,325 residents. The river flows nearly 340 miles from Martinsdale to Fort Peck Reservoir and provides irrigation water for nearly 85,000 acres, 250 farms and ranches, 388 water rights holders, and six municipalities.

The watershed has experienced major flooding events in 2011, 2013, 2014, 2018, and 2019, as well as severe drought conditions in 2021 and 2022 that resulted in record low river flows. Wildfires in 2012 and 2017 further emphasized the importance of coordinated watershed management and resiliency planning.

As fiscal sponsor for the MWC, the Petroleum County Conservation District (PCCD) employs an Outreach and Project Coordinator to help manage coalition projects and partnerships. Duties include coordinating meetings, assisting with watershed planning, writing grants and reports, overseeing outreach and education projects, providing content for the newsletter, supervising a Big Sky Watershed Corps member, and providing staff support to the MWC Board.

The part-time position is approximately 10-20 hours per week and funded through September 2026, with compensation depending on experience.

### To Apply:

Please combine your cover letter, resume, and 3 professional references and email to:  
Trish Smith, [petroleumcd@macdnet.org](mailto:petroleumcd@macdnet.org). Applications are due by Friday, June 5, 2026, at 5:00 pm.  
Questions? Email [petroleumcd@macdnet.org](mailto:petroleumcd@macdnet.org).

# Invasive species: **PALMER AMARANTH**



Harvest equipment needing cleaned  
Photo Credit: NDSU

## Prevention is Key

Palmer amaranth (*Amaranthus palmeri*) is one of the most aggressive and economically damaging weeds in U.S. agriculture. It has only been detected in limited locations in Montana since 2023 with most occurrences having been single plants but larger infestations could be present. Preventing its establishment should be a top priority for producers, land managers, and conservation professionals across the state. Proactive prevention is far more effective and far less costly than trying to control widespread infestations later.

Palmer amaranth poses a serious threat because of its rapid growth, extreme competitiveness, and prolific seed production. Individual plants can grow several inches per day and produce hundreds of thousands of seeds, allowing populations to expand quickly once introduced. In addition, many populations across the U.S. have developed resistance to multiple herbicides, making chemical control increasingly difficult. These characteristics make prevention the most critical management strategy for Montana, where it is not yet known to be established.

## Quick Facts:

- Palmer amaranth is one of the most aggressive and destructive weeds in U.S. agriculture.
- Commonly known as Palmer pigweed.
- Can grow up to 2-3 inches per day.
- Mature plants often reach 6-8 feet tall.
- One female plant can produce up to 1 million seeds.
- Competes heavily with crops for water, nutrients, and sunlight.
- Can cause major yield losses in corn, soybeans, wheat, and other crops.
- Many populations are resistant to glyphosate and other herbicides.
- Spreads through contaminated hay, equipment, manure, and seed.
- Early detection and preventing seed production are critical for control.

## Pathways of Introduction

The primary pathways for Palmer amaranth introduction into Montana are contaminated seed, forage, and farm equipment. As a result, using clean, certified seed is one of the most important preventive steps. Millet and Palmer amaranth seed are the same size, color, and density, making them difficult to separate, so cover crop and forage mixes containing millet are a concern. Producers should carefully review seed labels for weed content and avoid purchasing materials that may contain pigweed species unless they have been properly tested. Montana classifies Palmer amaranth as a restricted weed seed with zero-tolerance, meaning zero seeds per pound are allowed. Bird seed is also a vector for Palmer amaranth, since it doesn't fall under agricultural seed or feed regulations in Montana or surrounding states, and it is responsible for several introductions here and in neighboring states.



**Palmer amaranth seedling**  
Photo Credit: MSU extension

## Early Detection

“Field scouting” and early detection are essential. Regular monitoring, especially during mid- to late-summer, but beginning in early-May, helps identify suspicious plants before they produce seed. Because Palmer amaranth closely resembles other pigweeds common in Montana, accurate identification is critical and often requires expert confirmation. If a suspected plant is found, landowners should contact their local MSU Extension agent, county weed coordinator, and Montana Department of Agriculture immediately. Take pictures, get GPS coordinates, and leave the plant standing to make identification easier. Early detection and rapid response (EDRR) can prevent long-term infestations.

Sanitation practices also play a key role in prevention. Cleaning farm equipment, vehicles, and tools after working in potential infested areas reduces the risk of spreading seeds between fields. This is critical with the use of custom cutters to harvest your crops as well. Similarly, managing field edges, ditches, and disturbed areas, where Palmer amaranth often establishes first, can limit opportunities for introduction and spread.



**The long flowering stem of Palmer amaranth**  
Photo credit: MSU extension

Finally, education is critical for the prevention and spread of Palmer amaranth. Producers, applicators, and land managers must stay informed about the weed's identification, biology, and spread vectors. Collaboration among neighbors, agencies, weed districts and conservation districts helps ensure rapid reporting and response efforts.

In Montana, Palmer amaranth remains a preventable species. By prioritizing clean seed, routine scouting, equipment sanitation, and rapid response, landowners can protect agricultural productivity and prevent this highly invasive weed from gaining a foothold in Montana.

Brent Smith, CEMIST Program Manager  
Josh Wagoner, MDA, EDRR Coordinator









# Ladies Day on the Range

TUESDAY, JUNE 9TH, 2026

Topics covered:

-  **What to know about cover crops**
-  **Rooted in Purpose**
-  **Birds & Boots on the Prairie**
-  **Musselshell Riverbank Tour**

*Ladies:*

*Please bring a lawn chair, a sack lunch and good walking shoes  
RSVP's not required, but appreciated, so we can plan  
drinks/snacks accordingly!*



**Kate Vogel** grew up in Elbert, Colorado, where she developed her passion for agriculture. She attended at Colorado State University and studied how to reduce fallow in dryland cropping systems. Since moving to Montana, she has become a leader in soil health and regenerative agriculture, particularly the use of cover crops. In 2014, she joined her husband Marcus at North 40 Ag. She manages the operations and shares her knowledge through seed sales and consulting. She and Marcus have four children and enjoy attending Bobcat games, visiting clients' fields, and exploring the mountains.



**Lesley Rolls** is the water conservation program coordinator for the Petroleum County Conservation District, holding a B.S. in Resource Conservation from the University of Montana and currently pursuing a master's at Montana State University. Previously a wildlife biologist focused on avian science, she studied various birds across the U.S. For the Annual Ladies Day on the Range, she will discuss her research, bird species in central Montana, the impact of regenerative agriculture on birds, and ways to support them year-round. The event will include a birding walk to observe local species.



**Kacie Sikveland** is the founder of 41 Grains, a Montana farm-based food company focused on creating nutritious, value-added foods from pulse crops. What began as an idea in 2019 grew into a family business producing lentil snacks and chickpea flours rooted in soil health and regenerative agriculture. Passionate about connecting farming to the food on people's plates, Kacie shares the story behind building a farm-to-food brand from the ground up. Through 41 Grains, she works to strengthen rural economies, support Montana agriculture, and encourage other farmers—especially women—to explore value-added opportunities that align with their families, farms, and communities.



**Desi Seal**, Winnett ACES Conservation Programs Manager, is from a ranching family in Nevada and moved to Montana in 2019. She earned a degree in sustainable natural resource management from UM Western, led Nevada Cattlemen's Association, practiced law in Billings, and advances conservation partnerships while raising her family in Winnett. **Reba Ahlgren**, raised near Roundup, MT, earned a Business Finance degree with an Accounting minor from MSU. She began with NRCS in 2005, became District Conservationist in Winnett (2021), and balances conservation work with ranching and raising three kids with her husband, Charlie. FWP may also be in attendance.

**Meet at Trish's family ranch at 10:20am**

**5 Rowton Rd, Mosby, MT, just off HWY 200**

**Directions from the West: Cross the Mosby Bridge, take 1st left onto Rowton Rd, and continue straight uphill 100 yards**

**End time: Approximately 3pm**

**For more Info:**

**Contact Trish**

**@ 406.428.8151**

**[petroleumcd@macdnet.org](mailto:petroleumcd@macdnet.org)**

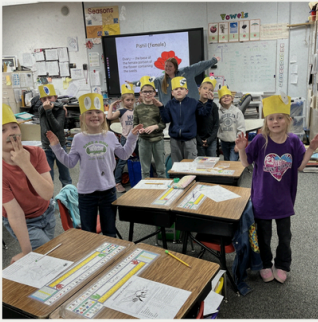
# PCCD's annual Kids Ag & Conservation Education Day

## Put on by the MT Farmer's Union!



### PRE-K/KINDERS

Pre-K and Kindergarten students learned about edible plant parts by matching plants to their fruits and vegetables, comparing fresh, dried, and microgreen peas, and planting their own microgreens for hands-on experience.



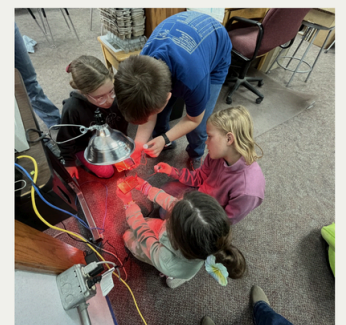
### 1ST/2ND GRADE

First and second graders participated in an engaging pollination simulation activity, where they crafted simple models to mimic how animals contribute to seed dispersal and plant pollination.



### 3RD/4TH GRADE

Students in 3rd and 4th grades explored the concepts of electric motors and solar cars, gathering and integrating information to explain that energy and fuels come from natural resources, and that their usage impacts the environment.



Fifth and sixth graders explored the fascinating world of GMOs and DNA by actively participating in DNA extraction activities. They also delved into researching and synthesizing information about the technologies that have revolutionized the way humans influence the inheritance of desired traits in organisms.

### 5TH/6TH GRADE

# Announcements & Notices

## DISTRICT 411

### 310 PERMITS are required:

If you are planning any project including the construction of new facilities or the modification, operation, and maintenance of an existing facility that may affect the natural existing shape and form of any stream, its banks or its tributaries. Any private entity or non-governmental individual that proposes to work in or near a stream on public or private land must obtain a 310 permit prior to any activity in or near a perennial stream.

When in doubt please email or call the CD Office: petroleumCD@macdnet.org OR 406-429-6646 ext. 104 for more info

**PCCD IN Office Hours:**  
 Mon, Wed, Thur, 10am-5pm  
 813 N. Broadway Ave, Winnett, MT  
 Available M-F 8-5 by email or phone:  
 petroleumcd@macdnet.org/406.428.8151



**SEE IT, REPORT IT...  
 ON THE iNATURALIST APP**

### How to Report Invasive Species in Montana

Download the iNaturalist app



Take a Photo or Record a Sound



Next Steps

- App will suggest an identification
- Accept that or suggest your own identification
- Other iNaturalist users around the globe can confirm your identification or suggest another



#### What Happens to Observations You Report?

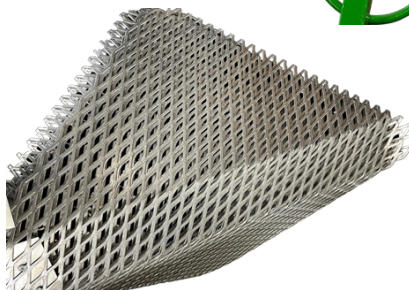
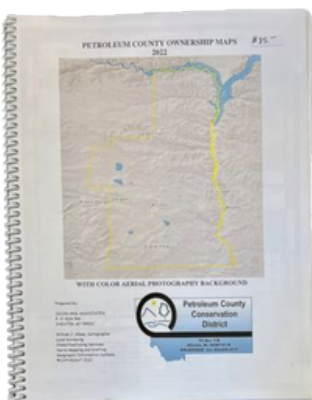
- Observations will be identified by volunteer citizen scientists in the iNaturalist community and agency biologists
- Observations with confirmed species identifications are brought into statewide databases monthly
- Weed and aquatic invasive species managers and other natural resource managers are emailed reports of infestations.
- Control efforts are undertaken to prevent further spread

**More Ways to Report Invasives:**  
<https://invasivespecies.mt.gov/report>

How-To  
 iNaturalist Resources



## Items for Purchase or Rent at the PCCD



**FOR RENT**  
 Tree Planter  
 Fabric Layer  
 Level & Tri-pod  
 Flow Meter  
 Rangeland Monitoring Bag  
 No-Till Drill  
**EZ Ject (woody invasive species control)**

**FOR SALE**  
 2023 Land Ownership Maps  
 Fabric rolls (by roll/foot, depend on size) & fabric staples  
 Wildlife Escape ramps  
 Sage Grouse Fence Markers  
 Gate Closers

**\*\*Email the CD Office for availability of all items. Prices are subject to change\*\***

*The public is always invited to the Conservation District meetings. Regular meetings are held each month at the USDA/PCCD office up on the hill. Meeting time is usually the last Wednesday of the month at 5:00 p.m. Look for notices posted around Winnett.*

*All PCCD and NRCS programs are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, nation of origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.*

**Petroleum County Conservation District Board**

- Laura Kiehl - Chairman, Elected Supervisor
- Rodney Rowton - Vice-Chairman, Elected Supervisor
- Brenda Brady - Treasurer, Elected Supervisor
- Ralph Corbett - Urban Supervisor
- Jay King - Rural Supervisor
- Butch Arthur - Urban Supervisor
- Tye Lund - Rural Supervisor
- VACANT** - Associate Supervisor

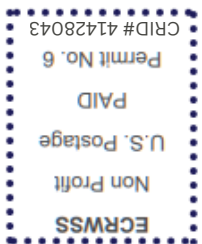
**PCCD – NRCS Office Staff**

- Trish Smith - PCCD Administrator
- Katie Lund - PCCD Fiscal Manager
- Loyd Bantz - District Technician
- Reba Ahlgren - NRCS District Conservationist
- Mike Lucas - NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist
- VACANT** - MWC Coordinator
- Molly Masters - MRCDC Coordinator
- Brent Smith - CEMIST Program Manager
- Skylar Stenson - Conservation Technician
- Lesley Rolls - Water Conservation Program Manager

If you are interested in joining the PCCD Board, have rental/sale or 310 permit questions, please reach out to the CD:  
**petroleumcd@macdnet.org, 406-429-6646 ext 104**

For more up to date information on events and meetings please check out the District's:  
Facebook page @ <https://www.facebook.com/Petcocd55> OR  
Website @ [PetroleumCD.org](http://PetroleumCD.org)

Postal Patron



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