

# Lincoln Conservation District Strategic Plan

## 2022-2027

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### Situation

Lincoln County is situated in Northwest Montana corner of the state bordering Canada and Idaho. The county consists of four incorporated areas including Libby (county seat), Eureka, Troy, and Rexford. Unincorporated communities include Stryker, Fortine, Trego, West Kootenai, Yaak Valley, Lake Creek Valley and Bull Lake. The population as of 2019 included 19,537 residents.

Lincoln County is dominated by mountainous, forest-covered terrain with the Cabinet, Purcell, and Salish mountain ranges. The mountainous terrain is cut by narrow river valleys forming the Tobacco Valley, Libby Valley and the Yaak Valley. The elevation in Lincoln County ranges from about 1,820 feet above sea level where the Kootenai River enters Idaho to over 8,700 feet in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness.

Lincoln County is comprised of an area of 3,675 square miles. Approximately 90 percent of the county's total land is owned and managed by the US Forest Service, the State of Montana or large private corporations. Lincoln County is comprised of 9.2% privately owned non forest land and 92% of the land is covered by forestland.

The Lincoln Conservation District was formed in June 1943 under the State Conservation Act. It is one of 58 Conservation Districts in Montana. Conservation Districts work within their local counties to fulfill the state's policy to conserve soil, water and other natural resources. The role of Conservation Districts emerged from the "Dust Bowl" conditions of the 1930s.

The Lincoln Conservation District boundaries include all of the county with the exception of the 1947 city limits of Libby and Troy. The district is governed by a board of seven supervisors. Five of the supervisors are elected and two are appointed by the towns of Eureka and Rexford. Associate supervisors also serve on the board. Advisors from the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks provide technical support.

## **Vision**

Engaged community members working together to promote sustainable management of all natural resources in Lincoln County

## **Mission**

Facilitate programs to promote and protect the natural resources of Lincoln County Montana to benefit area residents and visitors

## **Guiding Principles**

We are strong advocates of education, collaboration, and practices that promote conservation of our natural resources

We will leave a lasting legacy to ensure that Lincoln County is a vital and thriving community for our families to live, work and play for generations to come.

## **Goals: Natural Resource Conservation and District Operations**

### **A. Natural Resource Conservation**

#### **1. Maintain healthy watersheds**

##### Objective

1. Decrease number of 310 complaints received by 10 percent
2. Complete two stream restoration projects
3. Improve water conservation
4. Decontaminate 100 percent of fouled boats entering Lincoln County

##### Critical Success Factors:

Knowledge of the 310 Law and permitting process

Public understanding of TMDL issues and impaired streams

Grant funding

Trained AIS Inspectors

Collaboration with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks

##### Barrier:

Lack of public awareness of the 310 Law

Aging irrigation system

Increased development

Invasive species

TMDL threatened streams

### Strategy

Provide technical assistance for implementing Best Management Practices on 310 projects

Work with producers to improve water management practices and delivery system efficiencies

Collaborate with partners and landowners to identify priority stream restoration projects

Identify funding strategies for restoration projects

Encourage stakeholders to update Kootenai River Basin Watershed Restoration Plan and utilize data for prioritizing restoration projects

Encourage MTFWP involvement in working group process

Partner with County Commissioners and participate on the Lincoln County Planning Board to review land use proposals for maintaining the integrity and sustainability of Lincoln County natural resources

### Action Plan

- A. Submit RDG Planning Grant for Graves Creek bank stabilization (RH, Feb, 2022)
- B. Restore Brimstone Creek to increase amount of available water and the natural stream pattern.
- C. Obtain technical assistance for Brimstone Creek restoration
- D. Conduct a workshop for realtors with a focus on the 310 law
- E. Apply for 223 funding for Wolf Creek bank stabilization and tree planting
- F. Identify water quantity issues associated with Meadow Creek and explore solutions to ensure water for fire protection
- G. Monitor Sinclair Creek recovery
- H. Consider Yaak River restoration and easement
- I. Provide technical assistance to Glen Lake Irrigation District to improve irrigation infrastructure
- J. Develop handout for Best Management Practices
- K. Review and prioritize stream projects
- L. Streamline the 310 complaint process
- M. Monitor flow measurements and water quality
- N. Increase public knowledge of TMDLs and the role of watershed groups in watershed planning
- O. Conduct onsite inspections for 310 applications and complaints

## **2. Promote healthy forest management practices**

### **Objective**

1. Sell a minimum of \$700 of tree seedlings for reforestation, wildlife habitat, and shelterbelts
2. Provide cost share program information to reduce the cost of thinning for private landowners resulting in minimized fire risk

### **Critical Success Factors:**

Understand community needs

Community is aware of grant opportunities

### **Barrier:**

Influx of new landowners changing the way in which the land has traditionally been used

### **Strategy**

Understand available funding opportunities for landowners

Promote the use of low impact fuels reduction equipment that reduces fire danger while protecting soil and water resources

Collaborate with NRCS and DNRC

Support community forests and conservation easements in Lincoln County

Support initiatives for value-added manufacturing and small diameter wood utilization for Lincoln County's small forestland owners

Promote a sustainable supply of timber to local forest producers

### **Action Plan**

- A. Offer annual tree sale program
- B. Provide information on cost share programs to landowners
- C. Participate in forestry/conservation workshops in Lincoln County
- D. Assist with Forest Stewardship programs in Lincoln County
- E. Review and comment on State and Federal timber supply issues and proposals
- F. Provide public information regarding fuels reduction and forest management

### **3. Reduce invasive species**

#### Objective

1. Isolate Ventenata population to established areas
2. Develop two weed management area cooperatives
3. Provide weed sprayer equipment rental opportunities in North Lincoln County
4. Increase invasive species management knowledge by offering Private Applicator Training Courses

#### Critical Success Factors:

Collaboration with the weed board

#### Barrier:

Equipment storage and maintenance

#### Strategy

Partner with North 93 Rentals

Collaborate with Lincoln County Weed Board

Administer the Private Applicator Training Program

Encourage strategies to promote healthy plant communities

#### Action Plan

- A. Include weed management educational information on website
- B. Provide technical assistance for noxious weed identification, management, and prevention
- C. Include weed management information, with a Ventenata focus, in BMP information
- D. Apply for Noxious Weed Trust Funding to organize weed cooperatives
- E. Offer cost share programs for targeted weed management/revegetation
- F. Offer PAT class

#### **4. Promote agricultural and small acreage management practices that improve soil health, habitat, and crop production**

##### **Objective**

5. Distribute 1 acre of seed to establish pollinator gardens
6. Increase number of soil samples by 20 percent
7. Provide weed sprayer equipment rental opportunities in North Lincoln County to reduce number of noxious weeds left untreated
8. Increase invasive species management knowledge by offering Private Applicator Training Courses

##### **Critical Success Factors:**

Staff with pesticide government/research license

##### **Barrier:**

Landowners who lack proper equipment

##### **Strategy**

Reduce excess pesticide and fertilizer application

Provide educational opportunities to disseminate information on pasture management and grazing strategies

Support initiatives for value-added products that benefit Lincoln County's small agricultural producers

Encourage strategies to promote healthy plant communities

Provide rental equipment to producers such as no-till drill, seeders, ATV logging equipment, etc.

##### **Action Plan**

- A. Provide soil sampling services and fertilizer recommendations
- B. Provide forage analysis services
- C. Conduct small acreage management seminar
- D. Apply for Noxious Weed Trust Funding to organize weed cooperatives
- E. Offer cost share programs for targeted weed management/revegetation
- F. Create handouts identifying grasses, pasture mixes, trees and shrubs suitable for Lincoln County

Provide support for Glen Lake Irrigation District in water conservation and fish screening practices

#### **B. District Operations**

##### **1. Administer 310 Law**

Objectives:

1. Follow up on 100 percent of 310 permits and complaints to ensure compliance
2. Supervisors attend at least one 310 training

Critical Success Factor

Understanding of 310 Law

Barrier

Amount of volunteer time required of Supervisors

Strategy

Seek out training opportunities

Thoroughly discuss, clearly understand, and state requirements for 310 permit approval or mitigation prior to voting

Action Plan

- A. Review Model Rules and policies each April
- B. Take a copy of Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310 Law) to all inspections and meetings for reference
- C. Review Stream Permitting Manual once a year

## 2. Maintain positive board member engagement

Objective:

1. Recruit a minimum of 1 associate members
2. Decrease time commitment for board members
3. Increase board interactions outside of meetings

Critical Success Factors

A diverse board with varying levels of age, experience, and background

Barriers

Supervisors are busy with other commitments

Lack of formal training for supervisors

Email overload

Strategy

Identify training opportunities

Supervisors participate in 310 inspections outside their respective areas and work with other people

Diversify engagement opportunities

Develop leadership for succession planning

Participate in MACD

### Action Plan

- A. Supervisors participate in a work project such as tree planting
- B. Supervisors attend a rolling rivers stream trailer training
- C. Supervisors assist with educational opportunities such as school demonstrations
- D. Attend MSU Local Government Board Training
- E. Review Supervisor Manual
- F. Recruit an associate member
- G. Sponsor annual dinner for supervisors and family (December)

## **3. Public Outreach**

### Objective:

- 1. Increase public understanding of LCD's role in Lincoln County
- 2. Increase public's knowledge of natural resource conservation
- 3. Identify local needs and provide appropriate solutions

### Critical Success Factors

Board and staff engagement

### Barrier

Time

### Strategy

Meet with local boards

Engage in educational opportunities with youth

Communicate with legislators, county commissioners, and mayors

Maintain website and social media presence

Develop informative brochures

Maintain partnership with NRCS, DNRC, MT FWP, KRN

Support MACD and NACD

### Action Plan

- A. Identify boards to visit and put information in respective newsletters
- B. Update website and add partners
- C. Provide demonstrations with the stream trailer at schools and community events
- D. Attend county commissioner and town council meetings
- E. Correspond/call local legislators
- F. Provide financial support to local Envirothon Teams
- G. Provide board member representation for the Lincoln County Planning Board
- H. Engage with local watershed groups
- I. Maintain membership with MACD and NACD
- J. Attend Area 5 meetings and Annual MACD Conference

- K. Provide leadership to statewide committees when appropriate
- L. Utilize social media to promote programs and educational highlights
- M. Update Lincoln County Rural Living Handbook

#### **4. Fiscal Management**

**Objective:**

- 1. Maintain savings account to reflect one year of operating expenditures
- 2. Obtain grants to compliment mil levy for operational funding

**Critical Success Factors**

County funding  
DNRC funding  
Grant funding

**Barriers**

State funding  
Unpaid taxes

**Strategy**

Communicate impact to stakeholders  
Closely monitor tax revenue and spending

**Action Plan**

- A. Conduct special meeting for Permissive Medical Mill Levy
- B. Develop and manage annual budget
- C. Monitor district spending by reviewing financial documents each month
- D. Create impact report to deliver to stakeholders