



319 Nonpoint Source Final Application

FY2017 Final Applications are due Monday, September 26, 2016 by 2:00 pm

Section I: General Information

Project Title Ranching for Rivers

Project Sponsor Information

Sponsor Name Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana

Registered with the Secretary of State? Yes

Registered with SAM? Yes

County Lewis and Clark

Website www.swcdmi.org

Tax Identification # 23-7096823

DUNS # 137350505

Primary Contact Jessica Makus

Signatory Ann McCauley

Title Programs Manager

Title Associate Director

Address 1101 11th Avenue

Address 1101 11th Avenue

City Helena State Montana Zip Code 59601

City Helena State Montana Zip Code 59601

Phone Number 406-443-5711

Phone Number 406-443-5711

Fax Number n/a

Fax Number n/a

E-mail Address jessica@macdnet.org

E-mail Address ann@macdnet.org

Signature Jessica L Makus

Signature Ann McCauley

Project Location

12 Digit HUC #(s) Any HUC with an accepted WRP

(1) Waterbody Name from 2016 List of Impaired Waters Project Specific

(1) Probable cause(s) of impairment to be addressed (ex. metals) Sediment, nutrients, pathogens, and/or temperature

(2) Waterbody Name from 2016 List of Impaired Waters _____

(2) Probable cause(s) of impairment to be addressed (ex. metals) _____

(3) Waterbody Name from 2016 List of Impaired Waters _____

(3) Probable cause(s) of impairment to be addressed (ex. metals) _____

Activity 1 Name Riparian Pastures Latitude (1) n/a Longitude (1) n/a

Activity 2 Name _____ Latitude (2) _____ Longitude (2) _____

Activity 3 Name _____ Latitude (3) _____ Longitude (3) _____

Nonpoint Source (NPS) Information

Which WRP does the project implement? Any DEQ accepted WRP What is the WRP status? DEQ-Accepted

Does the project address impairments identified in a TMDL? Yes Waterbody Type River/Stream

Functional Category Watershed Management

1st Pollution Category Agriculture (Grazing Related Sources) Percent of Total (%) 80

2nd Pollution Category Hydromodification (Channel Erosion/Incision) Percent of Total (%) 10

3rd Pollution Category Hydromodification (Removal of Riparian Vegetation) Percent of Total (%) 10

4th Pollution Category _____ Percent of Total (%) _____

Project Funding

319 Funds Requested	<input type="text" value="\$100,000.00"/>	Does the project sponsor have any open 319 contracts?	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Matching Funds		Project Title	<input type="text" value="Planning for Success: WRP develop. through CDs"/>
<i>State Cash Match</i>	<input type="text"/>	DEQ Contract Number	<input type="text" value="216009"/>
<i>Local Cash Match</i>	<input type="text"/>	319 Award	<input type="text" value="\$72,000.00"/>
<i>In-Kind Match</i>	<input type="text" value="\$82,500.00"/>	Projected Closing Date	<input type="text" value="12/31/2017"/>
Total Match	<input type="text" value="\$82,500.00"/>	Project Title	<input type="text"/>
Other Federal Funds	<input type="text"/>	DEQ Contract Number	<input type="text"/>
Total Project Budget	<input type="text" value="\$182,500.00"/>	319 Award	<input type="text"/>
Administrative Fee	<input type="text"/>	Projected Closing Date	<input type="text"/>

Section II: Project Description

Goal and Objectives: Describe the overall goal and specific objectives for this project.

Ranching for Rivers (R4R) is a simple, low cost, yet highly effective program designed to reduce pollutant loading to waterbodies currently impaired for sediment, nutrients, and/or temperature. This program will provide cost share to riparian landowners to improve riparian grazing management through the construction of riparian pastures and watering infrastructure. The program will be offered across Montana on DEQ-identified, impaired waterbodies with a Watershed Restoration Plan (WRP) in place. By creating pastures within riparian areas currently being grazed, landowners can effectively control grazing management within these areas, which will promote riparian health and vegetation, improve water quality, and improve the fishery and wildlife habitat over time.

Methods: Describe the approach selected to address/correct the problem(s), e.g. types of BMPs to be installed, and other important activities.

Fencing and water infrastructure cost share will be made available to participating landowners to create riparian pastures within land currently being used for grazing along DEQ-impaired waterbodies. "Grazing in riparian or shoreline zones" is the number one confirmed source of impairment recorded by DEQ on listed waterbodies. This project will directly address this substantial source of nonpoint source pollution through voluntary conservation across Montana. These riparian pastures will provide a highly effective way to reduce sediment and nutrient loading, and eventually temperature, to impaired waterbodies, enabling ranchers to control the timing and intensity of grazing, control cattle stream access, and promote management flexibility as an alternative to complete cattle exclusion. In addition to cost share for fencing, this program will provide the landowner with the services of a range specialist to help design a riparian grazing management plan to maximize and sustain the conservation benefits and nonpoint source load reductions of the new riparian pasture. Over time the load reductions resulting from implementation of this program will contribute to the ultimate goal of improving water quality, promoting healthy habitat, and delisting these impaired waterbodies.

Summary: Provide a brief summary of the project.

R4R will be offered to all landowners with riparian grazing activities along a DEQ-identified, impaired waterbody within a watershed with a DEQ-approved WRP. Applications will be submitted by interested landowners and reviewed by SWCDM based on the following criteria: DEQ-impairment listings for the proposed site, expected project effectiveness, estimated completion time, and project cost. Preference will be given to projects on high priority waterbodies as identified in individual WRPs. Once projects have been selected, landowners will have one year to complete riparian pasture construction. SWCDM will visit each site to review pasture design, and measure eroding streambanks along the project area to make sediment load reduction estimates following the Mass Balance Equation in DEQ's Load Reduction Estimation Guide. Nutrient (N & P) load reductions will also be estimated using a site-specific modified version of the Agricultural Loading Estimate guidance described in DEQ's Lower Blackfoot Nutrients TMDLs and Water Quality Improvement Plan (page 5-13). Photo monitoring points will be established for landowners to assess their progress moving forward. A range specialist will also be available to each landowner to develop a customized grazing management plan to achieve the maximum restoration benefit from the fencing project. SWCDM will compile load reduction estimates for each project and submit them to DEQ to determine program effectiveness. Once landowners complete the fencing projects, submit invoices for materials, and submit photos of the finished pasture, and are approved by DEQ, landowners will be reimbursed 50% of the estimated project cost determined in their application. An education and outreach campaign will be developed for the agricultural community to highlight the significant habitat, wildlife, and water quality benefits of the program, plus the improved management flexibility it can provide.

Section III: Background Information

Statement of Project Need and Intent

The coordinator of the Missouri River Conservation District Council (MRCDC), a partner of SWCDM, held a meeting in 2015 asking ranchers to identify areas of need with regard to range management. One result of that meeting was the identification of the need for the development of riparian pastures within current rangeland. Ranchers surveyed communicated the desire to build these pastures and improve riparian management, but they lacked the funds to complete the work alone and in the timeline desired. By providing 50% of the cost share for fencing materials and related watering infrastructure, R4R meets this need. The idea proved very successful during a pilot program over the winter/spring of 2016 because it assisted ranchers with grazing management goals they identified and intended to implement, but needed financial assistance to complete. It is so effective because the projects occur on private rangeland, and ranchers voluntarily participate because they are committed to the investment and the health of the land. They are required to invest 50% (in some cases \$20,000-30,000 of their own money), plus time and labor to participate in this program, proving their commitment to seeing long-term success.

Describe the pre-project planning that has already occurred.

In the winter/spring of 2016, SWCDM was granted \$50,000 in unspent 319 funding to develop a R4R pilot program within the Missouri River Basin corridor. The project began in January 2016 and was finalized in June 2016. A solicitation and an application form were developed during that time, and SWCDM partnered with conservation districts, MRCDC, NRCS, MSU Extension Service, and DEQ to identify and engage landowners ready to establish riparian fencing. This program generated more interest than funding available and proved to be popular within the Missouri River Basin where it was advertised. This program was so successful, the Chouteau County Conservation District applied for a Renewable Resource Grant (RRGL) in spring of 2016 to continue the program within the Missouri River Basin. SWCDM hopes to continue this program statewide, focusing on areas where WRPs are in place. While the pilot project was a great success overall, SWCDM was asked by participating landowners to provide assistance with appropriate grazing management plans in these new pastures to see the maximum return on their investment. That feedback is the reason SWCDM will partner with range specialists to ensure participating landowners get the support and assistance needed to make this program as successful as possible. Range specialists will work with each landowner to determine the most effective grazing management plan based on landscape needs and the amount of recovery needed for each site. Additionally, SWCDM is working with MRCDC to put on a riparian grazing management webinar series as an additional way to support healthy riparian ecosystems within rangelands.

Collaborative Effort: Describe the collaborative effort you have engaged in to ensure support from all appropriate partners.

SWCDM coordinated with many partners to get the pilot program off the ground in spring 2016. MRCDC was instrumental in providing the basis for the project and assisting landowners with fencing design and grazing management. Additionally, SWCDM worked with several conservation districts, NRCS, MSU Extension, and DEQ to advertise participation in the program, provide technical insight, and ensure program success. SWCDM will continue to maintain these partnerships throughout the program duration. Additionally, SWCDM will engage MSU Extension, NRCS and SWCDM range technicians to develop the additional grazing management efforts that will coincide with the fencing projects. SWCDM is currently working with MSU Extension to determine the most beneficial and efficient way to provide grazing management plans to individual landowners participating in the program.

Partners and Roles: Identify the project partners and their roles.

Partner	Role
DEQ	Oversight and funding of the program; assistance with nonpoint source pollution reduction resources and the process necessary to estimate sediment and nutrient load reductions for each fencing project
MRCDC	Program founder; assistance in soliciting the program to seek out individual landowners ready to establish riparian pastures; MRCDC has also applied for additional funding to offer the program in areas without a WRP
Conservation Districts	Assistance with program solicitation to individual landowners within districts to seek out landowners ready to establish fencing along riparian corridors
MSU Extension	Technical assistance to encourage improved riparian grazing management once fencing projects were in place
NRCS	Technical assistance to encourage improved riparian grazing management once fencing projects were in place

Technical and Administrative Qualifications

SWCDM has a highly technical staff with degrees in natural resource sciences and years of experience in a wide range of natural resource fields. Each senior staff member at SWCDM has previously worked for programs that directly addressed nonpoint source pollution issues. In addition, SWCDM has a broad and diverse board and membership, primarily focused in the forestry, range and agricultural fields. SWCDM works collaboratively with a variety of partners to ensure the highest standard of work is being performed with the most current technological resources. During the spring and winter of 2016, SWCDM managed the Ranching for Rivers pilot program with unspent 319 funding. The program was very successful, generating far more interest than funding available. In total, 5 projects were funded with \$36,000 being spent on the ground in fencing cost share. The 5 projects funded generated \$65,245.92 in non-federal match and protected over 8 miles of streambank from additional erosion and nutrient loading. Estimated load reductions completed using DEQ's Load Reduction Estimation Guide, showed a projected sediment reduction averaging 793 tons of sediment per year per mile of riparian pasture, with a total reduction of 6,561 tons of sediment per year. SWCDM will apply lessons learned from the pilot program to ensure Ranching for Rivers continues to become a more efficient, effective, and successful program available to landowners statewide. Additionally, SWCDM administers numerous federal, state, and non-governmental agreements, and is well-versed in project management with public and private funds.

Past and Current Projects

Funding Organization	Award Amount	Project Description	Project Status	Contact Information
DEQ	\$30,000.00	FY2016 Education and Outreach Mini-grants Program - This program provides funding for education and outreach mini-grants to support projects addressing NPS pollution and water quality for a variety of organizations throughout the state.	Currently Open	Katie Steele, 406-444-0549, ksteele2@mt.gov
DEQ	\$72000.00	Planning for Success: WRP Development thought Conservation Districts - This program was designed to assist conservation districts and other small organizations in the development of DEQ-acceptable WRPs. Funding was made available to these groups to provide staffing, technology, and other resources to make these plans possible.	Currently Open	Robert Ray, 406-444-5319, rray@mt.gov
DNRC	\$165,703.00	Watershed Steward - This program has placed a water resource specialist in the northwestern region of Montana to provide direct technical and coordination assistance to local watershed groups, conservation districts, irrigation districts, and other stakeholders on water quality and quantity issues.	Currently Open	Ann Schwend, 406-444-1806, aschwend@mt.gov
NFWF	\$75000.00	Transition Agriculture - This program is in place to develop a Transition Agriculture Initiative to provide assistance and resources to Montana producers in the face of changing technologies, markets, weather patterns, and species concerns. This program will tie together current programs and resources to improve producer communication and involvement.	Currently Open	Haven Whipple 202-857-0166, haven.whipple@nfwf.org

Section IV: Scope of Work

Task 1 Title Project Coordination, Planning, and Load Reduction Estimates

Description

Coordination efforts provided by SWCDM will include initial project application review and ranking based on the following criteria: DEQ-impairment listings for the proposed site, expected project effectiveness, estimated completion time, and project cost. Preference will be given to projects on high priority waterbodies as identified in individual WRPs. Once projects have been selected, SWCDM will develop MOUs between each participating landowner. MOUs will include the project expectations and timeline, as well as a the final award amount based on the estimate of materials. MOUs will also have an agreement that each participating landowner will commit to the long-term success of the project. SWCDM will visit each fencing site and collect pre-construction photos to establish photo points that may be used in the future by landowners to assess riparian health and recovery. Additionally, eroding streambank measurements will be taken to estimate sediment load reductions resulting from new riparian pastures. During the streambank measurements, the eroding bank along the entire project area will be measured in several places to get an accurate average eroding bank measurement. These measurements will be combined with aerial bank measurements and applied to the Mass Balance method, provided by DEQ in the Load Reduction Estimation Guide. SWCDM will use the Agricultural Loading Estimate guidance in DEQ's Lower Blackfoot Nutrient TMDL to estimate nitrogen and phosphorus load reductions based on the grazing management plan developed between the landowner and the subcontracted range specialist.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Landowner applications, including the location of the project, the waterbody affected, the WRP addressing the impaired waterbody, a complete estimated budget, fencing designs, and a timeline.
 Deliverable 2: MOUs for each participating landowner
 Deliverable 3: Load reduction estimates for each site (including sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus)
 Deliverable 4: A complete copy of all final project designs.

Task 1 Funding

319 Funds	\$12,500.00
Non-Federal Match	\$5,000.00
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	\$17,500.00
Is Match Secured?	Yes

Timeline July 2017 - December 31, 2019

Match Source SWCDM staff time and resources

Task 2 Title Project Implementation

Description

Funding will be used to provide 50% cost share to landowners for material cost for fencing and watering infrastructure. Landowners will develop fencing designs and estimate material cost during the application process and request the appropriate amount of funding necessary to complete their projects. Upon project completion, landowners and/or SWCDM staff will photograph the finished riparian pasture and related watering infrastructure and submit these to SWCDM for review and DEQ approval. Because only 50% of the total project cost will be available to landowners through this program, there will be a 1:1 leverage of non-federal match to 319 funding.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Representative photographs of before and after fencing installation for each individual project.
 Deliverable 2: Invoices of materials purchased for implementation of fencing/grazing projects.

Task 2 Funding

319 Funds	\$70,000.00
Non-Federal Match	\$70,000.00
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	\$140,000.00
Is Match Secured?	No

Timeline July 2017 - December 31, 2019

Match Source Landowners will provide 50% cost share

Task 3 Title Technical Assistance

Description

Ranching for Rivers will provide and coordinate the services of a range specialist to assist landowners constructing riparian pastures with the development of riparian specific grazing management plans. This service will cover a wide range of riparian habitat throughout different regions of the state and enable landowners to have the resources necessary to improve and conserve riparian habitat in the years to come. Services will be provided by a subcontractor with the necessary background and technical expertise in riparian grazing management. Sites will be evaluated on a case by case basis to ensure each grazing plan is developed and tailored to individual landscape settings. This will ensure each participating landowner has the resources needed for long-term success and riparian habitat health.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Individual grazing management plans for each participating landowner

Task 3 Funding

319 Funds	\$7,000.00
Non-Federal Match	
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	\$7,000.00
Is Match Secured?	

Timeline July 2017 - December 31, 2019

Match Source _____

Task 4 Title Education and Outreach

Description

This past September, the Ranching for Rivers program worked with a local production company to develop a short video outlining the benefits of this program to ranchers, but specifically focusing on how well managed riparian pastures can also benefit the natural landscape and habitat. This outreach campaign was targeted to the conservation community to spread the message that cattle in riparian areas does not always equal a negative effect on habitat. SWCDM will continue to distribute this video during appropriate meetings and conference events throughout the duration of this program. In addition to using this video, SWCDM will further develop outreach and education, this time focused specifically on the ranching and agricultural communities. This program was initiated by the need for it expressed by landowners along the Missouri River corridor and this education and outreach task will work to spread that message to ranching communities in other regions of the state, highlighting the management flexibility this program provides, while also stressing the extensive ecological benefits that come with it. Additionally, SWCDM will work with MSU Extension and other partners to put together a grazing management webinar series to reach out to a broad audience of ranchers, highlighting appropriate grazing management strategies throughout a variety of landscapes. This will serve as an education tool as well as an opportunity to advertise the Ranching for Rivers program.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Further promotion and distribution the of Ranching for Rivers video produced in fall 2016.
 Deliverable 2: Development and distribution of an education and outreach campaign, including a grazing webinar series, which will focus on the ranching community.

Task 4 Funding

319 Funds	\$500.00
Non-Federal Match	\$7,500.00
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	\$8,000.00
Is Match Secured?	

Timeline July 2017 - December 31, 2019

Match Source Distribute video and additional E&O at range events

Task 5 Title Project Administration

Description

SWCDM will oversee and be accountable for all tasks outlined in this application. SWCDM will prepare quarterly status reports, annual reports, a final report, and billing statements. SWCDM will update the DEQ project manager with all program activities through these reports and with regular communication. All reports will be submitted in electronic format or as requested by the DEQ project manager.

Deliverables

Deliverable 1: Quarterly status reports and billing statements, annual reports and billing statements, and final report and billing statement

Task 5 Funding

319 Funds	\$10,000.00
Non-Federal Match	
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	\$10,000.00
Is Match Secured?	

Timeline July 2017 - December 31, 2019

Match Source _____

Task 6 Title _____

Description

Deliverables

Task 6 Funding

319 Funds	
Non-Federal Match	
Other Federal Funds	
Total Cost	
Is Match Secured?	

Timeline _____

Match Source _____

Project Milestone Table: Complete the following Project Milestone Table by entering task numbers and titles in the left hand column, then check the box(es) for the appropriate quarter(s) and years(s) in which you will be working on the task.

Milestone	Spring 2017	Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Winter 2017	Spring 2018	Summer 2018	Fall 2018	Winter 2018	Spring 2019	Summer 2019	Fall 2019
Task 1: Project Coordination, Planning, and Load Reduction Estimates	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>										
Task 2: Project Implementation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Task 3: Technical Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Task 4: Education and Outreach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>										
Task 5: Project Administration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										
	<input type="checkbox"/>										

Submit **project map(s)** and **letters of support (at least 3)** along with the Final Project Proposal form. If your organization is not the author of the WRP you hope to implement, you must request a letter of support from the original authoring entity. If the authoring entity refuses to provide a letter of support, use the additional space at the end of the application to describe their response. If design drawings are available, provide those as well. For on-the-ground work, include copies of applicable permits if available.

- Project Map
- Letters of Support
- Design Drawings
- Applicable Permits
- Draft of amended WRP (if applicable)
- Photos
- Landowner Agreements

Use the space provided for any additional information that may not have been captured elsewhere in this Final Project Proposal

Ranching for Rivers provides a great opportunity for collaboration with landowners motivated to improve riparian conditions on private grazing land. This simple, yet highly effective project is practical and successful because it solicits landowners motivated to improve their private riparian grazing land for the long term. During the pilot project, over \$65,000 in non-federal match was generated with \$36,000 in 319 funding for 5 individual projects. The bulk of this match was contributed by landowners as an investment in their land and to improve stream health and riparian habitat for years to come. One landowner contributed over \$34,000 of cost share in fencing materials alone to protect cottonwood saplings regenerated during flooding that occurred in 2011. Another landowner put in over \$20,000 in fencing material cost share to improve riparian conditions on his land. The beauty and simplicity of the success of this program is, by requiring landowners to put in the other half of the money, they are highly invested in these improvements and show their commitment to long-term success. These are projects landowners have hoped to construct for some time, but needed the financial assistance to get it on the ground. Ranching for Rivers provides landowners with the opportunity to make these improvements, while enabling them to continue to be some of Montana's most impressive stewards of conservation. Thank you.

Dick and Connie Iversen
13749 CR 332
Culbertson, Mt. 59218

September 19, 2016

Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Attn: Robert Ray
Watershed Protection Section
1520 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0901

Re: Letter of Support for the Ranching for Rivers 319 Proposal

Dear Mr. Ray,

We are writing on behalf of the Dick and Connie Iversen Ranch to extend our support for the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana's (SWCDM) application for funding to provide the Ranching for Rivers program to landowners throughout Montana.

Our ranch, located along the Missouri River in very eastern Montana was affected by the 500 year flood of 2011. Over 5 miles of stream banks of the Missouri River was affected by this flood on our ranch alone. The flood destroyed much of the cropland along the river by depositing silt and sand. Also the riparian pastures along the river were covered with this same sediment. While we spent much of next two years bringing as much cropland as we could back into production, many acres of were covered with too much silt to be ever used as cropland again. The riparian pastures were bare, covered in as much as 6 feet of silt, had large areas of young cottonwood and willow trees growing and all of the fences were destroyed. So we made a decision to maintain as many of the new seedlings on the abandoned cropland and riparian pastures as possible. After three years of nonuse, we began replacing fences as we could afford. By 2015 some of the pastures could again be grazed but management to keep the young tree seedlings properly grazed was difficult.

In the winter of 2016, we were contacted by staff of SWCDM that some assistance for cost share of fencing for our type of riparian project was available. We applied and were approved. Our project cost over \$35,000 in fencing and water developments to allow us to develop 5 different riparian pastures. The SWCDM grant paid for \$12,385 of this cost.

We will graze 3 of the 5 pastures in 2016, and try for this ratio each grazing season. This assistance for fencing and off stream watering has allowed us to lightly use the pastures with no noticeable damage to the tree seedlings. It has also given us an opportunity to utilize the pastures to control the invasion of weeds such as Canadian Thistle. We conservatively estimate we have approximately 200 acres of new riparian forests that are properly managed because of fencing and water developments.

We fully support the Ranching for Rivers proposal by SWCDM, and feel certain this project will directly result in increased benefits to Montana's watersheds.

Sincerely,





MISSOULA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

3550 Mullan Rd., Suite 106
Missoula, MT 59808-5125
(406) 829-3395 x101
email: mslacd@montana.com
www.missoulacd.org

Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Attn: Robert Ray
Watershed Protection Section
1520 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0901

September 12, 2016

Re: Letter of Support for SWCDM Ranching for Rivers 319 Proposal

Dear Mr. Ray,

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM) is seeking funding for its Ranching for Rivers program through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's 319 Nonpoint Source Project Funding. Ranching for Rivers works with landowners to create riparian pastures and improve the health of Montana's rivers. The Missoula Conservation District supports the Ranching for Rivers program, as it directly aligns with our goals of improving riparian habitat and protecting water quality through cooperative efforts with Montana landowners.

Ranching for Rivers participants receive up to 50% cost-share funding for fencing and on-land water development for livestock, providing an added incentive to private landowners. The program also gives landowners the flexibility to work toward their own natural resource goals, such as bank stabilization through seeding and planting. At its heart, Ranching for Rivers is a community-based, collaborative program that works to improve riparian habitat, while listening to and respecting the rights of private landowners.

The Missoula Conservation District supports and encourages the funding of the SWCDM Ranching for Rivers program. Continued funding will enable this program to continue to provide a low-cost, effective approach to improving the health of Montana's rivers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tim Hall
Missoula Conservation District Chair

1101 11th Ave
Helena, MT 59601



Phone: (406) 454-0056
mrcdc@macdnet.org
www.MissouriRiverCouncil.info

September 20, 2016

Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Attn: Robert Ray
Watershed Protection Section
1520 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0901

Re: Letter of Support for the Ranching for Rivers 319 Proposal

Dear Mr. Ray,

I am writing on behalf of the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC) to extend our support for the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana's (SWCDM) application for funding to expand the Ranching for Rivers cost-share program to landowners throughout Montana.

The Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC) is a coalition of 15 conservation districts along the mainstem of the Missouri River that is dedicated to coordinating and implementing natural resource projects across political boundaries. The Council is devoted to a future where conservation of the Missouri River's natural resources is accomplished through grassroots collaboration, education, incentives, and voluntary action.

The Ranching for Rivers program is a perfect example of voluntary conservation efforts benefiting the natural resources of Montana. The pilot project conducted in 2016 demonstrated the willingness of landowners to actively engage in riparian area management, and the number of inquiries for the project funds demonstrated the need for this type of cost-share assistance throughout the state. Having cost-share funding available through a simple process allows landowners to build critical infrastructure in a timely manner and speeds the conservation benefits. Additionally, local projects attract attention and provide learning opportunities for other landowners to see how implementation of best management practices can improve the environment and their own livestock operation.

Montana's rivers are a treasure to its citizens and the many recreationalists that visit our state each year. Expansion of the Ranching for Rivers program has the potential to improve riparian vegetation, decrease sedimentation and bank erosion, and improve habitat for wildlife, on many miles of rivers and streams. Providing opportunities for landowners to continue with their livelihood, while simultaneously protecting natural resources is critical to the sustainability of Montana's economy and the conservation ethic of people.

The MRCDC believes that locally led efforts are the best efforts to conserve and protect the landscape of Montana, and fully supports the Ranching for Rivers proposal by SWCDM. We look forward to the natural resource benefits produced through these projects, and the expansion of voluntary conservation implementation in Montana.

Sincerely,



Rachel Frost, Coordinator
Missouri River Conservation Districts Council

Gallatin Conservation District
Broadwater Conservation District
Lewis & Clark Conservation District
Cascade Conservation District
Chouteau County Conservation District

Blaine County Conservation District
Big Sandy Conservation District
Fergus County Conservation District
Petroleum County Conservation District
Phillips Conservation District

Garfield County Conservation District
Valley County Conservation District
McCone Conservation District
Roosevelt County Conservation District
Richland County Conservation District