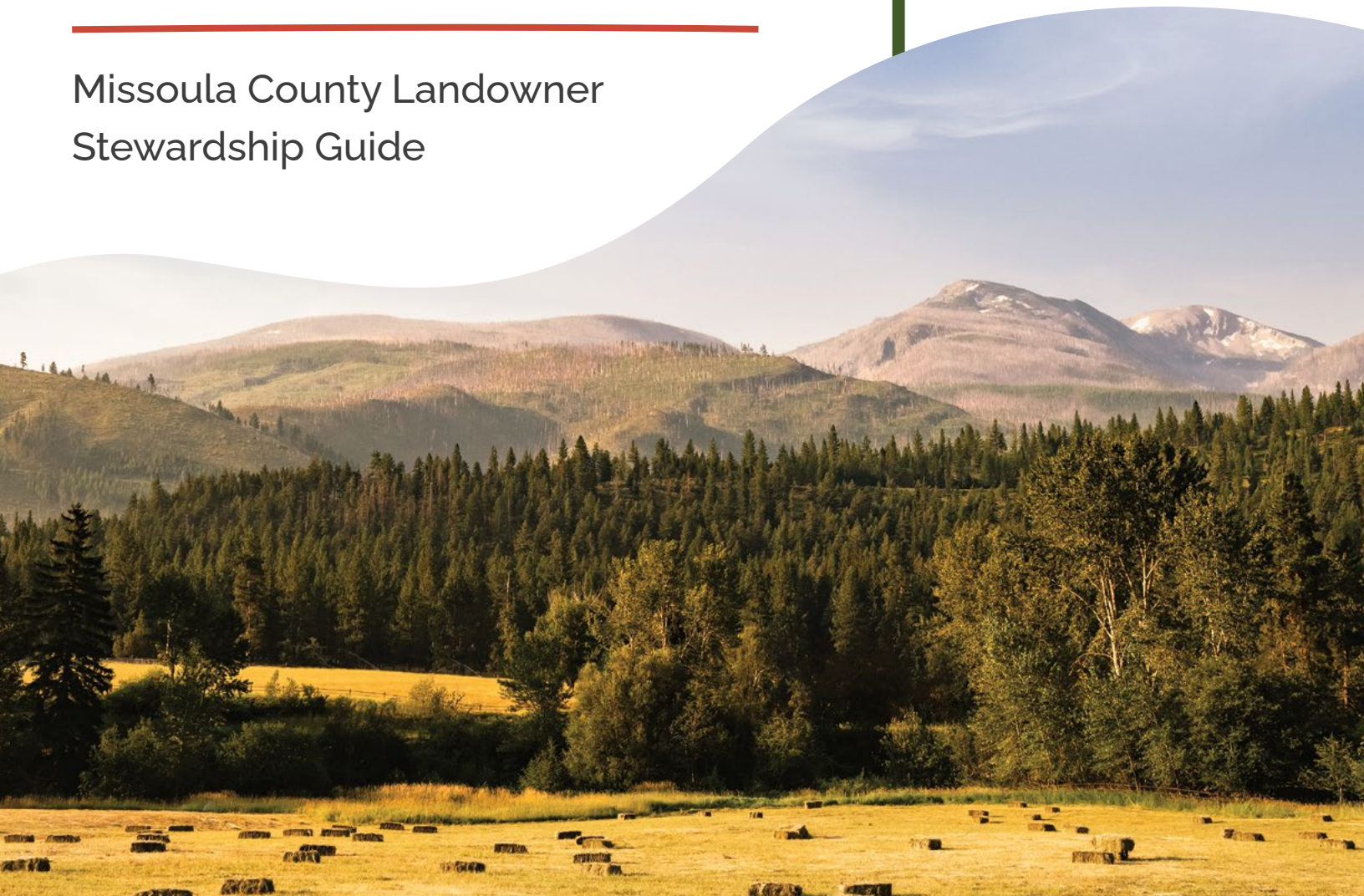
GOOD NEIGHBOR HANDBOOK

Missoula County Landowner Stewardship Guide





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WELCOME TO MISSOULA COUNTY

Missoula County is a place of stunning natural beauty, shaped by soaring mountains, sweeping valleys, quiet forests, and winding rivers. With a strong sense of community and deep-rooted connections to the land, this region offers a truly unique quality of life. Whether you're here for breathtaking views, access to public lands, abundant wildlife, or the slower pace of rural living, there's no doubt that Missoula County's 1.67 million acres hold something special.

In recent years, more people have discovered this amazing place. With this growth comes both opportunity and responsibility. As a resident of Missoula County, you are part of a community that values conservation, responsible recreation, and thoughtful land stewardship. Wildfire preparedness, coexisting with wildlife, protecting water and soil, and respecting neighbors, both human and wild, are all part of life in this corner of Montana. The choices we make as individuals directly impact the health of our environment and the resilience of our communities.

The **Good Neighbor Handbook** was created as a one-stop resource for best land stewardship practices for Missoula County property owners. It offers practical guidance on how to live responsibly on the land, support local ecosystems, and be a good neighbor in a shared rural landscape.

We're glad you're here!



MISSOULA COUNTY'S MISSION

To provide quality public service to protect and enhance the well-being of the people, communities and environment of Missoula County.

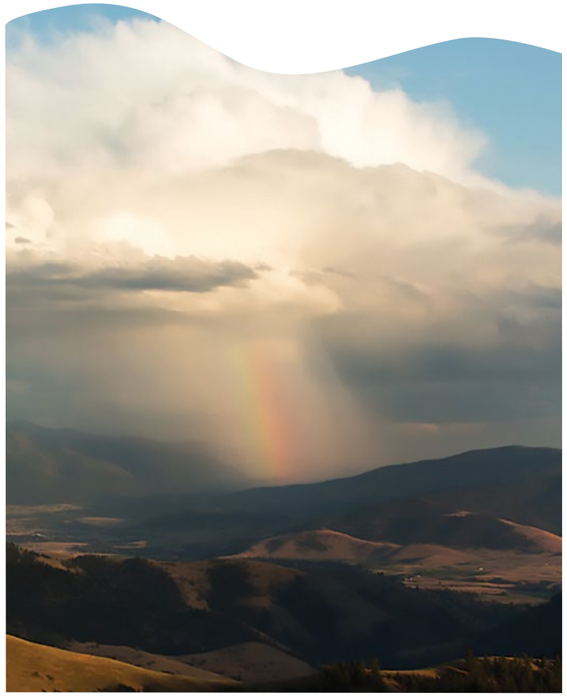


HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Located in western Montana, Missoula County is defined by its mountainous terrain, rich river valleys, and vast forests. Bordered by the Sapphire and Rattlesnake Mountains and encompassing parts of the Bitterroot, Clark Fork, and Blackfoot Rivers, the county spans over 2,600 square miles. Its unique location at the convergence of five valleys makes it a natural hub for wildlife and human movement alike.

For thousands of years, the area that is now Missoula County has been located in the aboriginal territory of the Séliš (Salish) and Qĺispé (Kalispel) people. Many Salish place-names exist throughout Missoula County, reflecting its place in the traditional tribal way of life—and its continuing importance to members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes today. Missoula County is grateful for our strong relationship with tribal partners and the opportunity to steward the cultural and natural resources of these special places together. Take time to learn more by visiting **cskt.org** or **csktsalish.org**.

Lewis and Clark entered Montana in 1805, then European-American fur traders and other explorers followed, then Jesuit missionaries and U.S. military expeditions. The establishment of Fort Missoula in 1877 marked a turning point in the area's development, coinciding with the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the arrival of settlers, miners, and homesteaders. The Northern Pacific Railroad reached the valley in 1883, boosting trade and transforming Missoula into a growing commercial center.



Missoula County was officially established in 1860 and was one of the original nine counties of Montana Territory. The area's economy was initially fueled by logging, mining, and agriculture, and later expanded with the founding of the University of Montana in 1893. Over the years, Missoula has become known for its vibrant arts scene, strong conservation ethic, and connection to outdoor recreation.

Today, Missoula County is home to over 120,000 residents. The county's history, from Indigenous stewardship to the present day, remains evident in its landscapes, communities, and way of life.

WORKING LANDS

SHARED LANDSCAPES, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Missoula County is shaped by working lands—ranches, farms, and forests that provide food, fiber, wildlife habitat, and open space. In fact, nearly 80% of private land in the county supports agricultural or timber production. These landscapes are not just scenic. They're the backbone of our local economy, our heritage, and our way of life.

As more people move into rural areas, homes are increasingly located alongside hay fields, pastures, and logging roads. Living near working lands means embracing the rhythms, sounds, and responsibilities that come with active land use.

Montana provides farmers and ranchers protections through right-to-farm laws to help buffer producers from nuisance complaints and some local regulations.

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Expect the unexpected

Tractors at dawn, cows in the road, or dust from harvest are all part of life near working lands. Farming and ranching doesn't stick to a 9–5 schedule.

Water and weeds

Ditches, creeks, and shared roads need shared attention. Be proactive about water rights, noxious weeds, and fire-safe practices.

Buy local

Support working lands by shopping local—Missoula County is rich with fresh veggies, grass-fed beef, honey, firewood, and lumber.

Fences matter

Montana is an open range state—you are responsible for fencing livestock out. Shared fences usually mean shared upkeep. Talk with neighbors early to avoid future headaches.

Patience on the road

Give space to livestock drives and slow-moving equipment. A few extra minutes is a small price to support local producers.

Learn from the land—and your neighbors

Good stewardship is a team effort. Ask around, share tips, and stay curious about how others care for the land.

WORKING RHYTHMS OF RURAL LIFE

Living near farms, ranches, or forests means sharing space with the seasonal rhythms of rural life. Each season brings its own activity, often starting early and running late to make full use of daylight hours.

Winter

Ranchers are calving—often at all hours—caring for newborn calves in cold conditions. Timber is sometimes harvested now, when snow protects sensitive ground.

Spring

Farmers prep fields and plant crops in April and May—expect long days and late nights. Ranchers move livestock to summer pastures, sometimes along rural roads.

Summer

Haying and harvesting is in full swing. Watch for large equipment and trucks. Logging increases at higher elevations as roads dry out—especially during cool early mornings to avoid fire risk.

Fall

It's weaning season, so don't be surprised by a few days of loud mooing. Hunting seasons begin—wear orange, know the regulations, and be respectful of private lands, including those enrolled in Montana's Block Management Program. Visit [fwp.mt.gov](fwp.mt.gov).



BUILD A THRIVING, RESILIENT GARDEN

Whether you're planting your first vegetable bed or managing a mature landscape, Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension is here to help. Their Plant Clinic, Master Gardener volunteers, workshops, and educational resources, provide science-based guidance to help you create healthy, productive, and resilient gardens and landscapes.

HAVE A PLANT PROBLEM?

Visit the Missoula County Plant Clinic for expert assistance with:

- Plant identification
- Insect and disease diagnostics
- Weed identification and management
- Soil testing interpretation and fertility recommendations
- Creating drought-tolerant and climate-resilient landscapes

Bring in plant samples, photographs, insects, or questions, and our team will help diagnose problems and recommend practical, environmentally responsible solutions.

GROW SMARTER

Healthy gardens start with a solid foundation. Learn how soil testing, proper plant selection, integrated pest management, and good gardening practices can reduce problems before they start while increasing the beauty, productivity, and resilience of your landscape.

Visit extension-store.montana.edu to explore free resources for yard and garden, natural resources, agriculture, family and home, and community!

GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

If you're looking for land to farm, ranch, or own reach out to Farm Connect Montana by visiting farmconnectmontana.org.

SUPPORT LOCAL. EAT FRESH.

Missoula County is rich in locally grown food and goods from crisp vegetables and grass-fed beef to farm-fresh eggs, honey, and more. Buying local supports working lands and delivers unbeatable quality and flavor to your plate.

Explore the county's summer farmers' markets or connect directly with local farmers and ranchers.

Visit the Montana Department of Agriculture website ([agr.mt.gov](agr.mt.gov)) for information on everything from farmers' markets and pest control, to bee keeping and irrigation.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START? Resources such as Abundant Montana's Find Food and Farms Map and annual Local Food Guide make it easy to find nearby markets and producers. Visit abundantmontana.com.

SUPPORTING YOUR PROPERTY'S POLLINATORS

Missoula County is home to an impressive diversity of native pollinators—more than 230 bee species have been documented here, and over 360 species are known across Montana. Many of these important insects, including bees and butterflies, face increasing pressures from habitat loss, pesticide use, and disease. As a new resident, you can play a meaningful role in supporting them right in your own yard.

One simple option is planting a flowering bee lawn. While not a full replacement for native plant habitat, bee lawns can offer valuable nectar and pollen for a variety of pollinators while still functioning as a comfortable, attractive, low-maintenance lawn for your household. If you're considering a flowering bee lawn, your **Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension** office can help you determine whether it's a good fit for your property and provide guidance on responsible installation and maintenance.

Pollinators thrive when they have access to diverse flowering plants—especially native shrubs, trees, and perennials—as well as safe nesting and overwintering sites, such as dead plant material. Adding a pollinator garden is another way to support pollinators. Every spring the **Missoula Conservation District** gives away native wildflower seed to support development of native habitat on your property.























IDENTIFICATION & HELP

Missoula County has excellent local resources to help you ID and manage both native plants and noxious weeds.

Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension
missoulaeduplace.org | (406) 258-4200
Plant ID, land management planning, and seed recommendations.

Montana Native Plant Society
mtnativeplants.org
Guides to native alternatives and restoration advice.

Missoula Conservation District
missoulacd.org | (406) 258-3430
Free on-site consultations and workshops.

Montana Weed Control Association
mtweed.org | (406) 925-0708
Statewide information on weed control strategies and policies.

COMMON GROUND

From the Bitterroot to the Seeley-Swan, Missoula County landscapes support more than 100 species of mammals, over 250 species of birds, and a vast array of amphibians, reptiles, insects, and fish. Whether you live deep in the woods, beside a creek, or just outside of town, your land plays a role in this shared ecosystem.

Step outside and you may spot white-tailed deer browsing the brush, hear the call of a western meadowlark, or notice a rufous hummingbird zipping between blooms. You might see elk grazing in a nearby field, black bears foraging in the fall, or butterflies drifting over your wildflowers. And while you may not always notice, pollinators, soil microbes, and native grasses are hard at work every day, keeping the land resilient and productive.

Every parcel of land, no matter how big or small, provides habitat. From riparian areas to backyard gardens, each piece connects with the larger landscape, offering food, cover, and movement corridors for wildlife. This section explores how to care for your piece of the landscape—whether it's by managing invasive weeds, planting native species, conserving water, or protecting healthy soil. **Being a good neighbor here means being a good steward of the land we all share.**



SOIL SMARTS

Your soil is more than just dirt. It's alive! Healthy soil supports everything from backyard gardens to forests to pastureland. Whether you're growing food, managing timber, or just enjoying a scenic view, preventing erosion and compaction is key.

- Minimize soil compaction by directing foot and vehicle traffic away from steep slopes and native ground cover.
- Use mulch or native ground cover wherever possible.
- Limit erosion by promoting healthy root systems.

There are many resources to get help testing your soil and learn about local best practices like Missoula County's Department of Ecology and Extension (**missoulaeduplace.org**), the Missoula Conservation District (**missoulacd.org**), and the local Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) office (**nrcs.usda.gov**). The Missoula Conservation District also rents a no-till-drill to residents of Missoula and neighboring counties.

NATIVE PLANTS ARE NEIGHBORLY

Missoula County is home to hundreds of native plant species from towering ponderosa pines and wild rose shrubs to delicate camas and arrowleaf balsamroot. These plants have evolved for millions of years alongside our region's soils, climate, fire cycles, and wildlife. Native plants are not only beautiful, they're resilient and essential to the health of our ecosystems.

WHY GO NATIVE? Once established, native trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers need minimal water, fertilizers, or chemical inputs. They're hardy, adapted to local conditions, and provide food and habitat for native birds, pollinators, and wildlife. Choosing native species is a smart, low-maintenance way to create a more sustainable and wildlife-friendly landscape.

TIPS TO GET STARTED WITH RESTORING NATIVE VEGETATION AROUND YOUR HOME, RANCH, OR BUSINESS



Start with your site

Choose plants suited to your property's unique soil and light conditions. Is your land shady or sunny? Dry or moist? Upland grassland or near a creek?



Shop local

Look for nurseries and seed suppliers that specialize in native and locally sourced plants. The Montana Native Plant Society at **mtnativeplants.org** is a great place to learn more about what grows well here.



Give them a good start

Native plants can take a couple of years to get fully established. Provide some extra water at first and keep the weeds down while roots take hold. Remember to protect your new plants from deer. After that, they'll thrive with little help from you.



If it's native, keep it

When possible, protect any existing native plants. Mature native landscapes are priceless and nearly impossible to replicate overnight.



Don't be afraid of dead plant material

Standing and fallen dead trees, leaf litter, and dead stems are essential homes and food sources for insects and other wildlife and are important for building healthy soils—leave them there when you can!

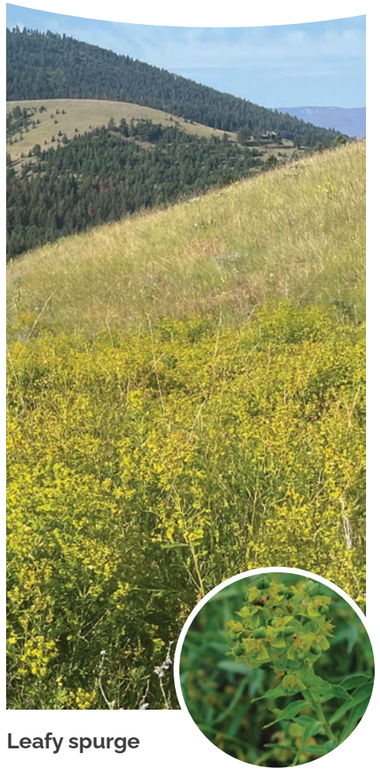
Restoring native habitat takes time, but every bunchgrass, milkweed, and elderberry makes a difference. *Your land can be a powerful part of the bigger picture.*



NOXIOUS WEEDS: A SERIOUS PROBLEM

Invasive and noxious weeds can spread quickly and outcompete native plants, degrading wildlife habitat, and negatively impacting working lands. You can play an important role by learning which species are present on the landscape, recognizing emerging invaders, and understanding which noxious weeds require ongoing containment. Contact the Missoula County Weed District or Plant Clinic for identification and guidance on weed control.

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR NEW INVADER SPECIES, INVASIVE ANNUAL GRASSES, AND WIDE-SPREAD NOXIOUS WEEDS



Leafy spurge



Rush skeletonweed



Spotted knapweed

PREVENTION, DETECTION, CONTAINMENT

SEE SOMETHING UNFAMILIAR? FIND OUT WHAT IT IS.

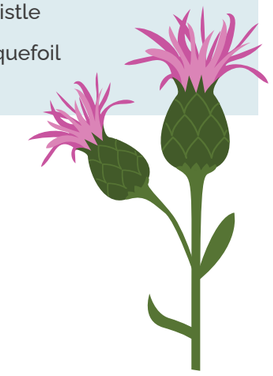
- When in doubt, ask for help with identification.
- Early detection and rapid response are the most effective tools for protecting your property, your neighbors, and public lands.
- Learn which invasive and noxious weeds are present in your area.
- Be aware of plant materials brought onto your property, such as hay or landscaping plants.
- Once invasive plants become established, control takes ongoing time and effort.
- Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension free services:
  - Identification
  - Site visits/property mapping
  - Treatment options

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE NOXIOUS WEEDS

Emerging invaders
- Rush skeletonweed
- Ventanata
- Perennial pepperweed
- Whitetop
- Yellowflag Iris

Invasive annual grasses
- Cheatgrass
- Ventanata
- Japanese brome
- Medusahead
- Bulbous blue grass

Wide-spread noxious weeds
- Spotted knapweed
- Leafy spurge
- Dalmatian toadflax
- Oxeye daisy
- Canada thistle
- Sulfur cinquefoil



Submit a sample of an unfamiliar plant or check out Noxious Weed Fact Sheets and Identification and Recommendation resources.

Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension, Plant Clinic and Weed District
missoulaeduplace.org | (406) 258-4200

OUR MOUNTAINS, OUR WATER

WHY WATER CONSERVATION MATTERS

In Missoula County, our water primarily begins as snow high in the Bitterroot, Rattlesnake, Sapphire, Swan, and Ninemile Divide mountain ranges. That snowmelt feeds the Clark Fork, Bitterroot, Blackfoot, Clearwater, and Swan rivers, and supports wetlands, agriculture, forests, and communities from the Swan Valley to Lolo and Arlee to Frenchtown. Much of our water travels a long journey before it ever reaches a tap or irrigation ditch.

Our region is experiencing hotter, drier summers and changing snowpacks. Add a growing population, and it's easy to see why Missoula County residents—urban, rural, and agricultural—must treat water as a precious resource.

Conserving water helps ensure enough for wildlife, wildfire response, agriculture, and your neighbors. Whether you're on a well, irrigation ditch, or municipal system, small actions make a big difference.

TRY THESE WATER-SAVING TIPS



FLOW IT LOW

Use low-flow toilets and aerated shower heads

Invest in drip irrigation systems or rain barrels for gardens



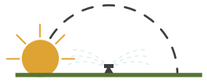
RUN IT FULL

Run dishwashers and laundry machines only when full



FIX IT

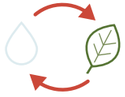
Fix leaky faucets, toilets, or outdoor spigots quickly



TIME IT

Only water in the early morning or evening to minimize evaporation

Figure out the minimum time needed to keep your plants healthy



REPLACE IT

Trade thirsty turf grass with native, drought-tolerant species

Upgrade old appliances to water-efficient models

WASTEWATER & SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Whether you're tucked into the forest outside Condon or in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Missoula, chances are your home wastewater goes one of two ways: into a municipal sewer system or your own septic system.

If you live within city limits, your wastewater is piped to a treatment facility like the Missoula Wastewater Treatment Plant, where it's treated before being discharged into the Clark Fork River. Outside city services, most homes rely on a septic system, where wastewater is filtered through a tank and then absorbed by the ground in a drain field (also called a leach field).

No matter your setup, how you manage your wastewater matters—for your health, your land, your neighbors, and the aquifer we all share.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Keep these ***out*** of your drains and toilets

(They can cause clogs and groundwater pollution!)

- Cooking oils and grease
- Pharmaceuticals and over-the-counter medications
- Diapers, "flushable" wipes, paper towels, feminine products
- Coffee grounds and food waste
- Household chemicals like paint, solvents, pesticides, or drain cleaners

GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

For local support and guidance, contact Missoula Public Health's Environmental Health Division at **missoulapublichealth.org**, Visit the Environmental Protection Agency's septic resources web page at **epa.gov/septic**.

Use responsibly

- Choose phosphate-free, biodegradable cleaning products
- Limit use of garbage disposals (especially on septic systems)
- Conserve water—septic systems function best with less water to process

A little maintenance goes a long way

If your home uses a septic system, regular care is crucial. Systems should be inspected and pumped every 3 to 5 years. Failing systems can leak raw sewage into groundwater, harm rivers and streams, and cause expensive repairs.

Signs of septic trouble

- Sewage odors around your yard or drains
- Slow drains and gurgling pipes
- Standing water near your drain field
- Backups in your toilets or sinks

DRINKING WATER: TAP INTO THE GOOD STUFF

In Missoula County, most people get their drinking water from groundwater wells, either privately owned or managed by public systems. Tap water here is typically fresh, clean, and regulated more rigorously than bottled water. Plus, it's cheaper and creates less waste!

If you're on a public system, you're already benefiting from regular monitoring and safety testing. If you have a private well, you're the boss, so it's up to you to test and protect your water source.

THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Nitrates

Generally found in groundwater impacted by one or many septic systems and bad news for babies and pregnant people.

Arsenic

Naturally occurring in some Montana soils—get your water tested to be sure, especially in areas of bedrock or clay soils.

Bacteria

Can be introduced through leaking pipes or improper well construction, but can also be an indication of fecal coliform, which causes gastrointestinal illness. This test is low cost and test kits can be picked up from **Missoula Public Health**.



GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

Test drinking water annually, especially for bacteria and nitrates. Missoula Public Health offers well water testing, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has great info for private well owners.

Visit missoulapublichealth.org and deq.mt.gov for more information.

PROTECT YOUR STREAMS

KNOW BEFORE YOU FLOW

If you live near a stream or river, your actions matter. Protect riparian health, stay in compliance with local regulations, and tap into expert help by checking with the Missoula County Floodplain Administration Program at missoulacounty.gov or at (406) 258-4657. The most certain way to protect your home and out-buildings is to build well away from the river, the floodplain, and potential new river channels that may be formed by flood events.

Natural riparian plants serve a wide variety of beneficial purposes and work most effectively when as much of the native vegetation is left intact and undisturbed as possible. Season after season, riparian plants are working hard to protect water quality, slow flood waters, provide wildlife habitat, and keep rivers healthy. Natural riparian vegetation provides shade and woody debris important for fish habitat and for insects that in turn support healthy fisheries. They also help prevent excessive bank erosion that can threaten homes and other infrastructure.



GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

Save money and the environment—ditch the plastic bottles and drink local from the tap!

PLANNING PROJECTS NEAR WATER?

Familiarize yourself with this list of resources to ensure any riparian area activities you undertake are legal, permitted, and done using best land stewardship practices.

Missoula Conservation District

missoulacd.org | (406) 258-3430

The Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act of 1975 (the 310 Law) protects streams. You will need a 310 permit for building a bridge, installing a culvert, or disturbing a streambank, and may need one for removing vegetation within 50 feet of a river or creek. The 310 permit is free and the Missoula Conservation District offers landowner consultations and help with stream health.

Missoula County Department of Planning, Development & Sustainability

missoulacounty.gov | (406) 258-4657

The Missoula County Department of Planning, Development & Sustainability oversees the County's Riparian Resource Protection ordinance. Before you build or place a structure near a river or creek, or start a new land use practice, it is best to give them a call.

WANT HELP RESTORING YOUR STREAMBANK?

Ask the Missoula Conservation District for grant opportunities or Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) about restoration grants and technical support through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
fwp.mt.gov | (406) 542-5500

Missoula Conservation District
missoulacd.org | (406) 258-3430

BUILDING OR DIGGING?

Check with Missoula County Department of Planning, Development & Sustainability or Missoula Public Health for permits and information on home sites, wells, and septic systems.

Missoula Planning, Development & Sustainability
missoulacounty.gov | (406) 258-4642

Missoula Public Health
missoulapublichealth.org | (406) 258-4755

WANT TO KEEP WATERWAYS CLEAN?

The Water Quality District has resources on everything from riparian improvements to hazardous waste disposal—and local volunteer projects.

Water Quality District
missoulapublichealth.org | (406) 258-4890

RIVERS MOVE!

Channel Migration Zone (CMZ) studies help predict future river movement by analyzing historical patterns. Be aware that almost all streams and rivers in Montana migrate over time, even those where formal CMZ mapping has not been done. Bank stabilization to protect homes or other property is one of the most serious forms of ecosystem degradation in all of Montana. A single home that requires a rip-rapped bank can cut off dozens-to-hundreds of acres of river-wetland corridor and often leads to more rip-rapping downstream. It rarely solves the problem, it just passes it on to neighbors downstream. All bank stabilization projects of any size require a 310 permit.

"Our ranch on the lower Clark Fork has two miles of river frontage. With the aid of a grant from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, I fenced off the entire river riparian zone to exclude livestock grazing. The results have been most rewarding with new growth of cottonwood trees, aspen, willows, and chokecherries contributing to the stabilization of the riverbanks and providing habitat for birds and deer."

—JIM CUSKER, GRASS VALLEY

WATER RIGHTS & DITCHES: IF IT FLOWS, IT MATTERS

Water is a big deal in Montana and water rights can get complicated fast. In Missoula County, some properties have historic irrigation ditches, many of which date back to the 1800s. If you have a water right associated with your property, you may be able to use that water for its intended purpose. If you have a water right and want to keep it, you have to use it or you could lose it. One use is leasing that water to stay in-stream for conservation purposes.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) manages water rights. Check your records or apply for changes at dnrc.mt.gov.

GOOD NEIGHBOR TIPS

- Even if a ditch runs through your property, don't use it to irrigate your lawn or garden unless you have the appropriate water right (check with DNRC).
- Maintain your portion of any shared ditch, even though you may not have a water right to that ditch.
- Don't block or reroute ditches without checking with DNRC first.
- The ditch is not a repository for personal trash and yard waste.



FLOODING: WATER RUNS WILD SOMETIMES

Spring in Missoula County = snowmelt + rain = flooding potential. From the Clark Fork River to small creeks like Grant Creek, flood events can sneak up fast—especially during rain-on-snow events or ice jams.

KNOW YOUR FLOODPLAIN AND PLAN AHEAD

- Store sandbags before you need them.
- Elevate valuables and seal basement cracks.
- Consider flood insurance—homeowners' policies don't cover it.

Check with Missoula County's Office of Emergency Management at missoula.co/emerg-alerts for preparedness resources and alerts.

Floods happen. Don't be caught off guard!

An important note on sandbags: Missoula Conservation District recognizes the placement of sandbags as a temporary emergency protection measure when an unforeseen event calls for immediate action to safeguard human life, animal life, or property (including growing crops), without time to obtain a 310 permit. However, sandbags must be removed immediately after the event, and the Missoula Conservation District must be notified as to where and when they are placed as well as when they are removed. The absolute deadline for removal of sandbags is end of the business day on July 15, annually, or the 310 permit law will be considered violated.

Missoula Conservation District
missoulacd.org | (406) 258-3430



GOOD NEIGHBOR TIPS

- Check out Montana Lake Book—a guide to lakefront living that covers best practices for designing and managing a lakefront homesite, lakefront landscaping, hazardous waste disposal how-tos, and more. Access at mtlakebook.org.
- Contact the Missoula Conservation District to get a free lakefront property assessment. Book at missoulacd.org.

SHORELINE CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Everyday activities—like how we manage wastewater, lawns, or shorelines—can unintentionally add nutrients and sediment to local lakes and other waterbodies. A few simple steps can make a big difference.

Keep your septic in good working order

Regular inspections and timely maintenance of your septic system help prevent excess nutrients from entering groundwater and, ultimately, our lakes.

Maintain natural shoreline vegetation

Leaving native plants in place—or restoring them where needed—helps stabilize banks, reduce erosion from boat wakes, and filter runoff before it reaches the water. Aim for at least 100 feet of natural vegetation as a buffer between your home/yard and a waterbody. If 100 feet is not possible, 20 feet is the minimum required by law.

Get site-specific guidance

Local conservation groups offer voluntary property consultations to help you understand your shoreline, identify potential concerns, and learn practical steps you can take to protect water quality.

Set up a "lake assist site visit" through Clearwater Resource Council at crcmt.org.

IS YOUR LAKEFRONT PROPERTY SUBJECT TO MISSOULA COUNTY SHORELINE REGULATIONS?

Shoreline regulations conserve, protect and restore natural lakes, ponds, wildlife, fisheries, riparian habitat, and wetlands. These regulations exist due to high scenic and resource values, the value of lakeshore property, lake water quality, and important recreational value of lakes to all residents and visitors.

Any alteration to the character of any lake, lakebed, or lakeshore having a water surface area of at least 20 acres and is within the Shoreline Protection Zone in Missoula County needs a permit through Missoula County. This excludes any property within City of Missoula limits.

View regulations at missoulacounty.gov.



LIVING WITH WILDFIRE: YOUR FOREST HOME



EMBRACING A FIRE-PRONE LANDSCAPE

Missoula County's forests, grasslands, and mountains are no strangers to fire. In fact, the Séliš (Salish) and Qĺispé (Kalispel) and other tribes of the Northern Rockies periodically set fire to the land, profoundly shaping this landscape for thousands of years. From ponderosa pines that develop fire-resistant bark to wildflowers that thrive after a burn, our ecosystems have evolved with fire in mind.

Wildfires are a natural and necessary part of Montana's landscape. They clear out dense underbrush, recycle nutrients into the soil, and create space for new growth. Many species, from elk to certain woodpeckers, actually depend on post-fire habitat to survive. But with more people living in and near forests, fire isn't just an ecological process—it's also a community concern.

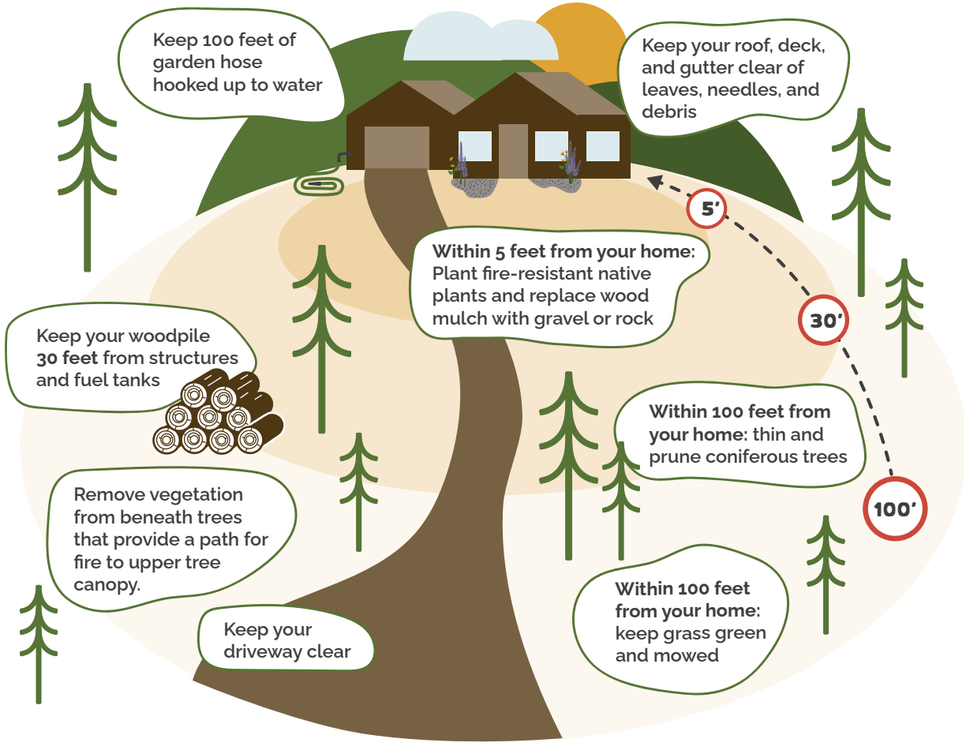
The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), the zone where homes meet forests, covers large portions of Missoula County. If you live in the WUI, you're at greater risk from wildfires, especially during our hot, dry summers. Preparing for wildfire by hardening your home, reducing flammable vegetation, creating defensible space, and using fire-resistant materials can make all the difference.

Living with wildfire doesn't mean fearing it—it means being prepared, understanding it, respecting its role, and doing our part to make our homes and landscapes more resilient.

Local organizations like the Missoula County Fire Protection Association, Missoula County Wildfire Mitigation Program, and Montana Department of Natural Resources (Montana DNRC) offer resources, home assessments, and help planning for fire season. **More resources on page 26.**

HOME IGNITION ZONE: WHAT IS IT?

The Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) includes your home and the 100–200 feet surrounding it. Mitigating your HIZ with home hardening and a fire-smart landscape is one of the most important actions a Missoula County landowner can take to reduce wildfire risk. A thoughtfully maintained property not only protects your home—it helps defend the homes around you and provides critical, safe access for firefighters during an emergency. Most homes lost to a wildfire happen due to stray embers from items burning close to the home, making management of your HIZ a top priority.



Reach out to local experts for a free home wildfire risk assessment and guidance on reducing hazardous fuels, selecting fire-resistant plants, and creating a defensible perimeter around your home.

LOCAL RESOURCES & PARTNERS

Missoula County Wildfire Mitigation Program
missoula.co/wildfireprep
Collaborative support for landowners living with wildfire from free home ignition zone site assessments to potential fire mitigation cost share opportunities.

Missoula County Fire Protection Association
mcfpa.org
Free home ignition zone assessments and educational materials.

Missoula Conservation District
missoulacd.org
Guidance on fire-adapted landscaping, soil health, and native plants.

Montana DNRC
dnrc.mt.gov
Wildfire prevention and preparedness resources, grant opportunities, and forest stewardship plans.



GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

- Remove your juniper! Juniper is a highly combustible plant due to the oils of the plant. Do not have juniper near your home or along the access to your property. Removing woody debris or vegetation within 50 feet of a stream may require a 310 permit.
- Incorporate rock mulch, gravel paths, and hardscape breaks to slow fire spread near your home.
- Get the Firewise Landscaping in Montana guide to help you get started! Access at **firesafemt.org**.
- Use MSU Extension's *Montana's Fire-Resistant Plant List* to make a list of plants to choose for your property. Visit **extension-store.montana.edu** and search for "Fire-Resistant Plants for Montana Landscapes".

LEARN MORE ABOUT FIRE-RESISTANT LANDSCAPING

All vegetation can burn under the right conditions—but some plants are more fire-prone than others. Fire-resistant landscaping can reduce flame spread and ember ignition. Fire-safe doesn't have to mean barren. By selecting drought tolerant, native, and fire-resistant species, you can reduce water use by 80%, lower maintenance costs, and increase wildfire resilience around your home and other buildings.



PRESCRIBED FIRE & FUELS REDUCTION

Living in Montana means living with fire. Fire is a crucial ecological process that helps keep our forests healthy. Fire managers will use fire as a tool to maintain these healthy ecosystems, as well as help reduce severe fires and improve suppression efforts later on. Prescribed fire is the controlled use of fire by professionals to reduce hazardous fuels. It helps maintain healthy forests and reduces the risk of large wildfires and prolonged smoke events.

The Montana Prescribed Fire Council
A collaborative group made up of fire professionals across the state, land management agencies, non-profits, and private landowners. The council is working to improve private landowners' ability to burn on private land and developing a Certified Burner program, which landowners can sign up for to learn about writing and implementing burn plans. Learn more about the program at **dnrc.mt.gov/forestry**.

Lolo National Forest Prescribed Burn Information
Follow updates on prescribed burns and forest restoration projects happening in our closest National Forest at **fs.usda.gov/lolo**.

"I don't want to put any firefighter at risk protecting my property. Knowing this motivates me to do everything I can to maintain a fire safe zone around the house."
—ANNE DAHL, SWAN VALLEY, MISSOULA COUNTY LAND STEWARDSHIP AWARD WINNER

STAY INFORMED

Emergency alerts in Missoula County will help you stay informed about emergencies that may affect you. Sign up for timely, actionable alerts at smart911.com. While registering, you can also create a Safety Profile that appears on a 9-1-1 dispatcher's screen when you call from a registered phone number. This information helps responders tailor their response to your specific needs.

BE READY

Pack your "Go-Bag." This should include clothes, food, medical needs, cash, and your digital devices.

Remember the 6 P's. People, prescriptions, pets, papers, plastic, and priceless or personal items.

Make a plan for your livestock. The Missoula County Department of Ecology and Extension has planning resources.



Missoula County's Office of Emergency Management's Evacuation Process consists of two very crucial stages to be aware of.

Evacuation WARNING

Current or projected hazards may require immediate evacuation. This is a good time for final preparation like checking your "go bag" and moving people who need extra help.

Evacuation ORDER

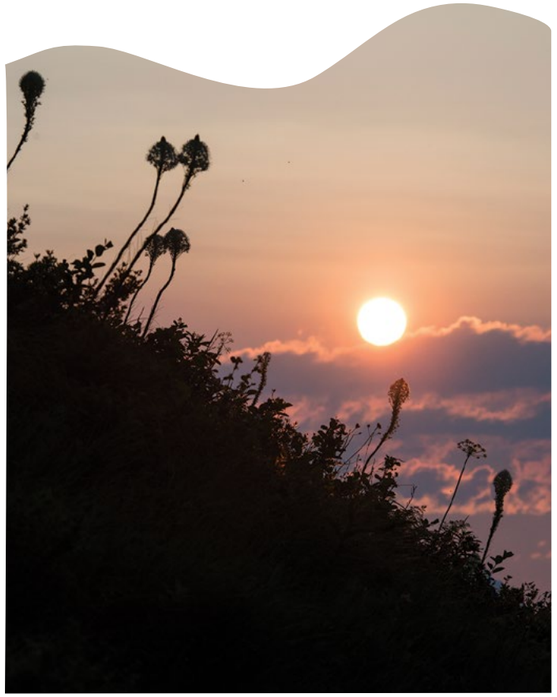
Conditions present an imminent threat of danger or death in the affected area. A slow-moving emergency vehicle with sirens and lights, loudspeaker announcements and/or text alerts via Smart911 all indicate it's time to go now.

Read more at missoula.co/emerg-alerts
Sign up for timely, actionable alerts at smart911.com.

SMOKE & AIR QUALITY

Smoke is another reality of fire season. Wildfire smoke can drift in from miles away and hang in our valleys, affecting air quality and health. Exposure to wildfire smoke can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate COPD, increase inflammation in your body and weaken your immune system. If wildfire smoke is in the air outside, it can easily make its way indoors. Air cleaners with HEPA filters can remove smoke from your home. Stay informed on the local air quality and fire information:

- **EPA Fire and Smoke Map:** fire.airnow.gov
- **Be Smoke Ready:** montanawildfiresmoke.org
- **Get or make your own HEPA air cleaner:** montanawildfiresmoke.org/hepa-filters
- **Review Climate Smart Missoula Fire Ready resources:** missoulaclimate.org/fire-ready
- **Sign up for air quality updates:** missoulapublichealth.org/environment/air



GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

- Know the access options to your home and property in case you need to evacuate. Ideally, a home should have multiple access and escape options for you and firefighters.
- Identify water sources near your home that firefighters could use to refill firefighting equipment—ponds, wells, reliable creeks, or irrigation ditches are possibilities.
- See evacuation checklists and additional preparedness resources at fireadaptedmontana.org/resources.
- Scan the QR code to read the Missoula County Wildfire Preparedness Guide.

OUTDOOR & RESIDENTIAL BURNING



In Missoula County, all fires except small cooking or recreational fires require an outdoor burn permit. Purchase your burn permit at **burn.egovmt.com** before burning limbs, yard waste, and other debris. Burn permits are administered by Missoula Public Health through the Missoula County Burn Permit System.

- Within Missoula city limits, all burning is limited to those with outdoor burn permits only and requires properties to have an acre or more.
- For recreational fires, check local fire restrictions using DNRC's Fire Restrictions page at **mtfireinfo.org**.

CALL 911
To report a house or building fire
CALL 911
To report a wildfire

Know Your Local Fire District

Save the information for the fire district closest to you.

Arlee
bit.ly/4voWQZh | (406) 726-3222

Clinton Rural Fire District
clintonruralfire.com | (406) 825-6560

East Missoula Rural Fire District
eastmissoulafire.org | (406) 549-5078

Florence
florencefire.org | (406) 273-2357

Frenchtown Rural Fire
frenchtownfire.org | (406) 626-5791

Greenough-Potomac Volunteer Fire Department
gpvfd.org | (406) 244-5796

Lolo
mrfdfire.org | (406) 549-6172

Missoula County Fire Protection Association
mcfpa.org

Missoula Public Health
missoulapublichealth.org | (406)-258-4755

Missoula Rural Fire District
mrfdfire.org | (406) 549-6172

Seeley Lake Fire
seeleyfire.org | (406) 677-2400

Swan/Condon
bit.ly/4eRzky2 | (406) 754-2870



LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Missoula County is located at the center of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, where the northern Rockies converge with prairie, forest, and river and stretches north from Glacier National Park deep into Canada and south to Yellowstone National Park. It's one of the most biologically diverse and ecologically intact ecosystems left on Earth.

From grizzlies and mountain lions to bull trout, sandhill cranes, and migrating elk, our county is home to an astonishing variety of species. Some of these animals travel vast distances between alpine peaks, river valleys, and lowland grasslands, navigating ancient migration routes that still thread through working lands and neighborhoods today.

This place is wild—and that's what makes it special. But with that comes responsibility. Living in Missoula County means learning to live with wildlife, not in conflict with it.

KEEP WILDLIFE WILD

Want to help wildlife thrive? Give them space, don't feed them, and don't try to house them, even if they appear in need of help. It's that simple.

Don't feed wildlife

Trash, pet food, fruit trees, and hay can lead to the death of wild animals. Clean up and securely store anything that could attract wildlife. It's illegal to intentionally feed big game and predatory wildlife in Montana.

If you care, leave it there

Leave baby animals that seem abandoned alone. Likely, the parent animals are nearby and will come back. Same for injured animals—Montana doesn't have a robust wildlife rehab network like other states, so it's not likely that animal can be treated and released back into the wild, causing more trauma to the animal and you than necessary. Raptors are the exception—Wild Skies Raptor Center (wildskies.org) can be called if you find an injured raptor.

Avoid introducing non-native species

Do not release unwanted pets or other non-native species onto your property or into nearby waterways. Non-native species like bullfrogs and goldfish can collapse sensitive ecosystems in Montana. Visit dontletitloose.com to learn more.

Drive like wildlife lives here (because it does)

Every year, hundreds of deer, elk, and other animals are hit on Missoula County roads, especially at dawn, dusk, and night. Stay alert, slow down, and watch for movement along road edges. Deer and elk travel in groups.



PETS AND WILDLIFE

Dogs

Keep dogs leashed or under strict voice control—especially near streams, trails, and open space. Deer or elk chased by dogs are unnecessarily stressed, especially in winter. Wildlife chased into fences can become tangled and stuck, often resulting in death. Wildlife chased into roadways endanger both animals and motorists. Montana State law prohibits dogs from chasing hoofed game animals and the pet owner can be held responsible.

Cats

Outdoor cats are THE leading cause of death to native birds and small mammals in the United States.

Predators

Montana's native, predatory animals can and do injure or kill pets that are not under their owner's control.

Take preemptive measures to protect small pets and chicken coops. Raptors can and will go after these things but are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes can be trapped or shot by landowners or pest control companies.

Wildlife issues? Call Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at (406) 542-5500.

SAFE WILDLIFE VIEWING: BE CURIOUS, NOT CARELESS

- Whenever you are in an area where bears could be present, carry bear spray. Learn and practice how to use it annually.
- Park in legal, safe spots. Never block traffic to watch wildlife.
- Never bait or call to animals.
- Use binoculars, scopes, or zoom camera lenses—never approach.
- Stay quiet. Avoid sudden movements or loud noises.
- Be patient—good wildlife viewing takes time, distance, and respect.

BE BEAR AWARE

Montana is bear country. The Missoula area is home to grizzly and black bears. The most important thing you can do to help prevent conflicts with bears, keep people safe, and keep bears out of trouble is to secure anything they may see as food. Missoulabears.org is an informational resource for residents living in Missoula County. It provides updates on bear activity and conflicts, community resources, and a link to report bear conflicts. If you live in the Swan Valley, swanvalleyconnections.org offers bear resources for that area.

AVOID ATTRACTING BEARS TO YOUR PROPERTY

Garbage

- If you live in the Missoula Bear Buffer Zone or Potomac Bear Mitigation Zone, you are required to use bear-resistant cans or enclosures for your trash. Visit missoulapublichealth.org to see where the zones are.
- Store garbage in an IGBC-certified bear resistant bin in a secure location. See more at igbconline.org.
- Keep garbage and recycling in a secured building at all times and put containers out only on collection day.

Livestock

- Store livestock feed in a secure building, in a bear-resistant container.
- Secure vulnerable livestock (chickens, goats, sheep) with an electric fence.

Pet food, bird feeders and seed, or BBQs

- If feeding pets outside, feed only during the day and clean up spilled or uneaten food.
- Avoid feeding birds during active bear season. Consider using bird houses, bird baths, and native vegetation instead.
- Clean BBQs thoroughly after use.

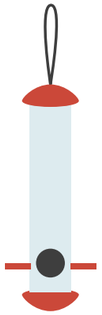
CREATING A WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY PROPERTY

SECURE ATTRACTANTS TO REDUCE CONFLICT WITH WILDLIFE



Human-related foods, such as garbage, bird feeders, domestic fruit trees, and poultry or livestock that are accessible to wild animals can increase conflicts with wildlife, including bears.

Find information on how to manage specific attractants at missoulabears.org.

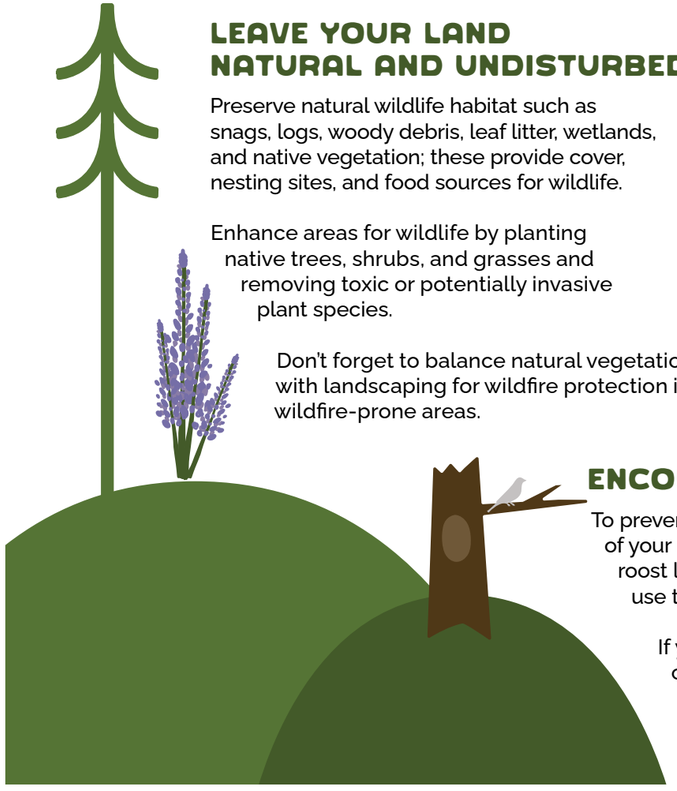


LEAVE YOUR LAND NATURAL AND UNDISTURBED

Preserve natural wildlife habitat such as snags, logs, woody debris, leaf litter, wetlands, and native vegetation; these provide cover, nesting sites, and food sources for wildlife.

Enhance areas for wildlife by planting native trees, shrubs, and grasses and removing toxic or potentially invasive plant species.

Don't forget to balance natural vegetation with landscaping for wildfire protection in wildfire-prone areas.







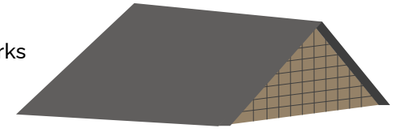
SPRAY SPARINGLY

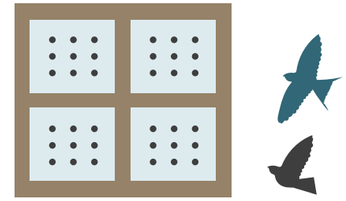
Herbicies and pesticides have their use in land management, but should be used sparingly and only according to application and storage guidlelines and regulations.

ENCOURAGE GOOD NESTING HABITS

To prevent unwanted nesting birds and bats in your home, consider boxing in the eaves of your roof and secure attic vents with wire mesh. Providing other places to nest or roost like snags, cliffs, caves, or even old out-buildings, they will be encouraged to use this habitat instead of your home.

If you have bats roosting in your home contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for help understanding the benefits and risks, and finding a solution if the bats need to be excluded.

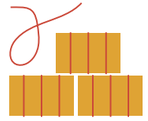




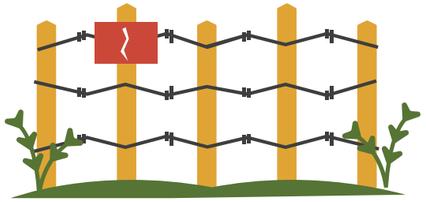
BE A FRIEND TO THE BIRDS

Avoid window collisions with window stickers Nearly 1 billion birds are killed each year from window collisions. Bird safe stickers spaced 2"-4" apart can prevent birds from hitting large windows.

If you feed your horses, cows or other animals hay, pick up the baling twine to save raptors and other birds from becoming entangled.



ELECTRIC FENCES CAN SAVE LIVES



Electrifying chicken coops/runs, orchards, gardens and beehives that may attract wildlife, especially bears, is an important component to living with wildlife safely and avoiding repeated human-wildlife conflicts.

You can also install wildlife friendly fencing that allows wildlife to migrate easily across your property. Learn more at fwp.mt.gov.

GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks "Living with Wildlife" webpage contains landowner information specific to living with over 20 species of wildlife. Information on each species helps landowners key in on specific problems and solve them through understanding wildlife behavior.

RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

PACK SMART. TREAD LIGHT. GO WILD.

Morning breaks across the Potomac Valley. A black bear scours the creekbank for berries. Sandhill cranes call out from a wet meadow. A bull trout darts under boulders in the Blackfoot River. These moments of wild grace still exist, and your choices help keep it that way.

In Missoula County, we live on the frontlines of some of the most intact mountain ecosystems in North America. The Northern Rockies are not just our backyard, they are the ancestral lands of Indigenous Nations. Working ranches, vast forested landscapes, and rich watersheds provide vital habitat for some of the rarest species in the lower 48.

Recreation connects us to this place, but it also impacts it. From the Rattlesnake to the Seeley-Swan, the choices we make on trails, rivers, and roads ripple through ecosystems and communities. Responsible recreation isn't about guilt or rules. It's about reverence—for the wild around us, the people beside us, and those yet to come.



WHAT RESPONSIBLE RECREATION LOOKS LIKE

STICK TO THE TRAIL

In areas that are popular for hiking, biking, and motorized use, off-trail travel can negatively impact soils, plants, and wildlife. Only go off-trail in remote and relatively low-use areas.

RESPECT SEASONAL CLOSURES

Winter is harsh here. Animals like elk and deer need rest, not stress. Know before you go—closures protect both wildlife and habitat. Adhere to seasonal closure signs.

LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND

Antlers, feathers, wildflowers—they belong here, not on your shelf. It is illegal to possess any part of most native birds in Montana, including feathers.

BRUSH IT OFF

Avoid moving seeds and other plant parts from one area to another. This can spread harmful invasive weeds that can destroy ecosystems.

KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Many open lands and trails in Missoula County connect, but not all properties are managed by the same agency or organization or have the same rules. Be aware of property-specific jurisdictions and regulations.

PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT

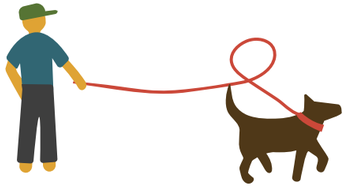
Always take all trash with you, even orange peels and dog waste that may seem "biodegradeable."

BE RIVER SMART

When floating, camping, or fishing, respect private land and keep access sites clean. Learn to identify and avoid trampling sensitive riparian areas.

BUY IT WHERE YOU BURN IT

Don't move firewood. Hitchhiking pests like emerald ash borer and bark beetles can devastate Montana's forests. Transporting firewood spreads invasive insects and diseases.



DOGS ON TRAILS: KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Missoula County is a dog-loving place, but not everyone is a fan of your furry hiking buddy. Here's how to keep trails safe, clean, and friendly.

Scoop the poop

Yes, every time. Dog waste spreads disease, pollutes waterways, and ruins boots. Don't leave dog bags behind, pack them out.

Leash up where required

In high-traffic areas or near wildlife habitat, leash rules help protect both animals and your dog.

Yield to horses

Always give horses the right of way. Leash your dog and step off the trail on the downhill side.

Voice control means real control

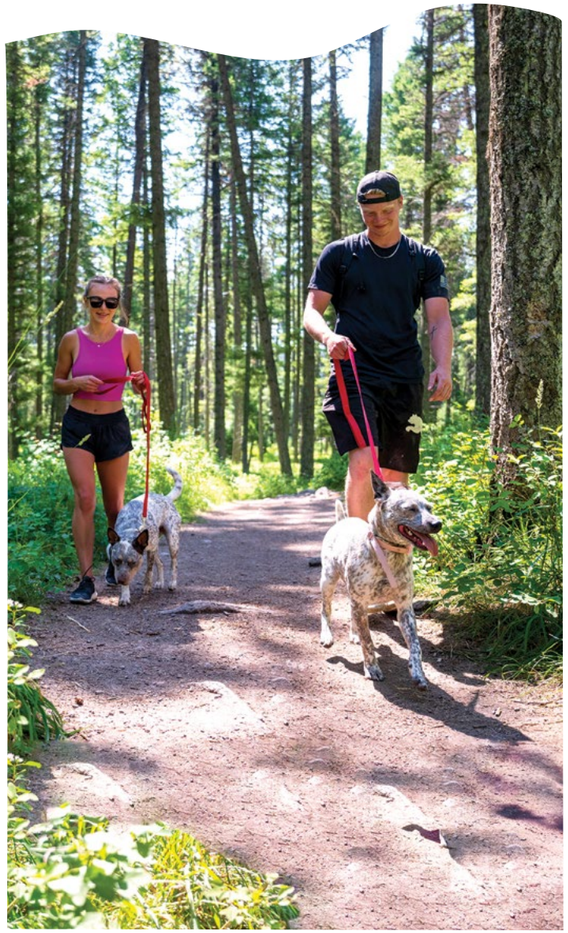
Your dog should stay close and come immediately when called even with distractions like other dogs, people, or deer.

Respect trailheads and parking lots

Keep dogs out of traffic, off picnic blankets, and away from curious toddlers.

Communicate

Ask people's permission before allowing your dog to approach them, their pet, or their kids.



Want to go deeper? Check local leash rules through Missoula Parks & Recreation, the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area, or Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

MOTORIZED RECREATION: RIDE RESPONSIBLY, PROTECT THE LAND.

Stay on designated roads, trails, and groomed routes

Prevent erosion, protect wildlife habitat, and avoid damaging sensitive soils or riparian areas. Montana's motorized trail systems exist because riders stick to legal, mapped routes—if a trail isn't signed as open, assume it's closed.

Respect wildlife and seasonal closures

Slow down around wintering wildlife, avoid disturbing nesting areas, and honor all seasonal gate and trail closures. These restrictions protect animals during times when disturbance can be life-threatening.

Be a good neighbor on shared trails

Yield to non-motorized users, reduce speed around others, and keep noise to a minimum near homes, campgrounds, and livestock. Courteous behavior keeps access open and helps everyone enjoy the backcountry.

Prevent invasive species spread

Clean mud, seeds, and plant material from your ATV, dirt bike, or snowmobile before riding a new area. Even small amounts of debris can introduce weeds and harm native ecosystems.

Ride prepared and minimize impact

Carry emergency tools, spark arrestors, and fire-safe exhaust systems; avoid spinning tires or creating new tracks; and never ride through wet meadows or streams. Pack out all trash, fuel cans, and broken gear.

Know the rules before you go

Check local travel maps, avalanche advisories, forest restrictions, and registration requirements for your machine.

Responsible riders help maintain safe, sustainable access for future generations.





HUNTING & FISHING DONE RIGHT

Respect the rules and local resources

Always carry the proper license and follow season, bag, and gear rules for the waterbody or hunt area you're using—regulations change, so check with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks before you go.

Handle fish for survival

When practicing catch-and-release, minimize time out of the water, use single/barbless hooks or quick-release tools, land fish quickly, and avoid squeezing or lifting by the gills. These practices greatly improve survival of released fish.

Prevent spread of invasive species

Clean, drain, and dry boats, waders, and gear between waterbodies and never move live bait or aquatic plants. These simple steps help stop invasive species that harm fisheries.

Leave no trace and pack out trash

Pack out all trash, spent shells, and fishing line. Clean up campsites and avoid leaving visual scars.

Be ethical afield

Seek and follow landowner permission and Block Management Area rules, respect private property and posted boundaries, recover game promptly, and follow humane, safety-first harvesting and field-dressing practices. Ethical behavior helps maintain landowner goodwill and future access.

Follow carcass, disease, and disposal rules

Comply with state rules for carcass transport and disposal and take recommended steps (testing where advised) for diseases such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)—improper disposal is illegal on public lands.

Choose the non-lead option

Traditional lead-based ammunition can leave fragments behind in gut piles and carcasses, which are toxic to the wide variety of bird species that scavenge on dead animals. Choosing non-lead ammunition when hunting can make a big difference for birds like bald and golden eagles, hawks, and vultures.

SOCIAL MEDIA: SHARE WISELY

We get it! You just found the perfect alpine lake or trail-side vista. Capturing it is natural. Sharing it? That deserves some thought.

Ditch the geotags

Instead of pinning exact spots, tag a general area like "Bitterroot Mountains" or "Western Montana."

Model good behavior

Show Leave No Trace in action. Avoid glamorizing risky stunts or illegal camping. Avoid posting photos of wildlife at sensitive times (e.g., owl on a nest).

Ask before you post

If you're on private land, near sacred Tribal sites, or conservation easements, get consent first.

Give back

Inspired by the outdoors? Join a trail crew or ambassador program, river cleanup, or habitat restoration project. Groups like Five Valleys Land Trust, Clark Fork Coalition, Blackfoot Challenge, and Swan Valley Connections offer plenty of ways to get involved.



THIS PLACE DESERVES OUR BEST

Recreation renews us. It connects us to the land, to each other, and to something bigger than ourselves. But with privilege comes responsibility. Let's move through this landscape with humility, care, and curiosity. And let's leave space for marmots, moose, trout, and cranes to thrive long after our footprints fade.

GOOD NEIGHBOR TIP

As a private landowner, you can work with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to allow public access to your property for hunting, fishing, and/or wildlife watching. These agreements can provide compensation to landowners, management of access regulations and infrastructure, and an enforcement presence. Agreements can be flexible and vary based on individual landowner needs.

For more information about licenses, regulations, and the Block Management Program visit fwp.mt.gov.

LAND CONSERVATION

KEEP MISSOULA WILD, WORKING & WONDERFUL

Missoula County isn't just a place, it's a lifestyle. Rolling ranchlands, thriving forests, crystal-clear rivers, and wildlife-rich landscapes shape who we are. From hayfields to hiking trails, the land supports everything we love about Western Montana. And more and more folks are stepping up to keep it that way.

Land conservation in Missoula County isn't new, it's part of our story. Over the years, local landowners have teamed up with land trusts, agencies, and the community to protect everything from family farms to wildlife corridors. Whether it's a hundred-acre ranch or a cherished backyard forest, people here are thinking ahead to ensure future generations can enjoy the same wide-open views, clean water, and living landscapes we do today.

Conservation easements and habitat leases

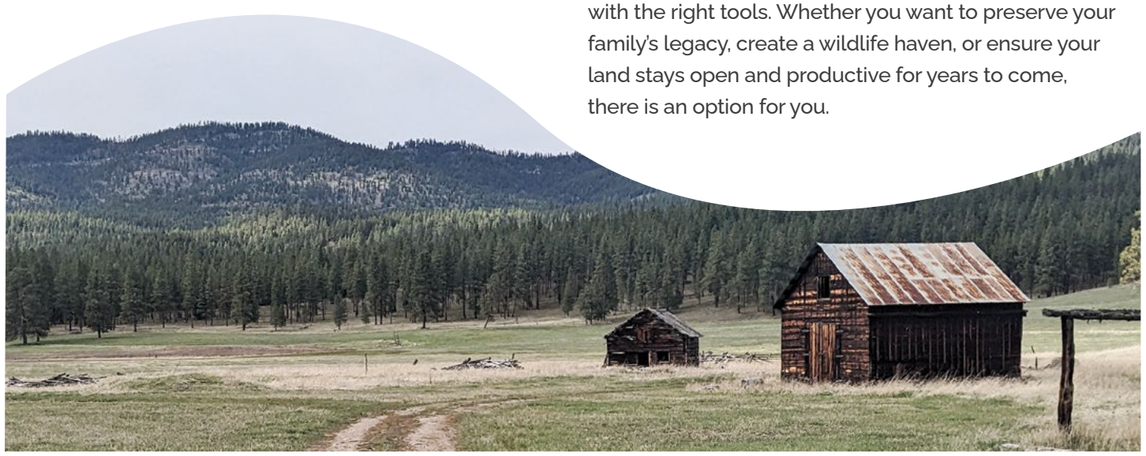
These voluntary legal agreements are one of the most powerful tools landowners use to protect land from development while still allowing private ownership, ranching, farming, timber harvest, and recreation. More than 60,000 acres in Missoula County have already been protected this way—and counting.

Why conserve land?

Because once it's gone, it's gone. And because clean water, elk habitat, local food, and mountain views are worth protecting.

Want to learn more?

There's a handful of organizations ready to help you explore options for your land. Conservation isn't one-size-fits-all, and these groups can help you match your goals with the right tools. Whether you want to preserve your family's legacy, create a wildlife haven, or ensure your land stays open and productive for years to come, there is an option for you.



WANT TO PROTECT YOUR PIECE OF THE WEST?

Every project starts with a conversation. These local and statewide organizations can help you explore how to conserve your land, plan for the future, and protect what matters most.

Blackfoot Challenge
(406) 793-3900 | blackfootchallenge.org

Five Valleys Land Trust
(406) 549-0755 | fvlt.org

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
(406) 444-2535 | fwp.mt.gov

Montana Land Reliance
(406) 443-7027 | mtlandreliance.org

The Nature Conservancy
(406) 443-0303 | nature.org/montana

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
(800) 225-5355 | rmef.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(406) 793-7400 | fws.gov/mountain-prairie

Vital Ground Foundation
(406) 549-8650 | vitalground.org

MISSOULA'S OPEN SPACE BOND FUND

Since 1980, Missoula County residents have supported the use of Open Space Bonds, protecting iconic landscapes throughout Missoula County. More recently, in 2006 and 2018, Missoula County voters overwhelmingly supported subsequent Open Space Bonds, totaling $25 million, to continue protecting lands that make our county special.

So far, Open Space Bond funds have helped preserve over **35,000 acres** of open space and **nine miles of public trails** through **65 projects** across the county. That means more clean water, more habitat, more places to play and more reasons to love where we live.

These projects were supported by Open Space Bonds

- Wildlife habitat and migration routes
- Local farms, ranches, and working forests
- Access to rivers and streams
- Scenic views and undeveloped open space
- Recreational trails and commuter corridors
- Water quality and community health
- Smart growth and sustainable development

THANKS, NEIGHBOR!

Thanks to these investments, future generations will be able to hike, fish, hunt, grow food, and simply breathe in the beauty of a landscape that still feels wild and free.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Topics of importance for rural landowners are many, and this handbook is limited to just a few of the most pertinent and common landowner concerns in Missoula County. We hope you'll seek more information on other subjects that are important to you and share what you learn with others in your community. Here are a few resources for other items that may be of interest to Missoula County landowners.

U.S. Forest Service Northern Region Office

fs.usda.gov/r01 | (406) 329-3750

Missoula County encompasses parts of the Lolo National Forest, the Flathead National Forest, and the Bitterroot National Forest.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

blm.gov | (406) 329-3914

Regional BLM field office in Missoula.

Missoula County Public Works

missoula.co/publicworks | (406) 258-4753

Rural roads, road maintenance, and dust control.

Missoula County's Building Department

missoulacounty.build | (406) 258-3701

Building permits for new and existing homes/buildings.

Missoula Organization of Realtors

missoularealestate.com | (406) 728-0560

Information on purchasing or selling property in Missoula County.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN PARTNERSHIP & APPRECIATION

The original Good Neighbor Handbook was a product of Missoula County's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee (OLC) in 2010. Building on the success of this great resource, OLC decided it was time for a much needed update to the Handbook that contained the latest and greatest land stewardship practices and represented a true collaboration between multiple land management agencies and conservation organizations. This version of the Good Neighbor Handbook was edited by and reviewed by many natural resource experts, agencies and organizations.

HANDBOOK IS PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

Missoula County

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Missoula Conservation District

THE HANDBOOK WAS SPONSORED BY:

clearwater credit union

Missoula Electric Cooperative

WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM:

Montana State University Extension Missoula County

Missoula County

Wildfire Ready Missoula County

Parks & Recreation

Parks, Trails & Open Lands Missoula County

Five Valleys Land Trust

mph Missoula Public Health



Missoula COUNTY

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

MISSOULA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

For more information about the Good Neighbor Handbook, where to get more copies or to provide feedback on this publication, contact Missoula County's Open Lands Division at (406) 258-4869.