



BITTERROOT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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RULES

Adopted by

The Bitterroot Conservation District

to

**Implement the Natural Streambed and Land
Preservation Act of 1975**

Chapter No. 463, Montana Session Laws 1975;

Title 75, Chapter 7, MCA

Senate HB 310, 1975 Legislature

Amended by 1977 Legislature

Amended by 1979 Legislature

Amended by 1987 Legislature

Amended by 1995 Legislature

Amended by 2003 Legislature

Amended by 2019 Legislature

Amended by 2025 Legislature

Compiled by

**Montana Department of Natural Resources &
Conservation in consultation with**

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Revised: 2026

Introduction

A change to the 310 Law occurred in the 2025 legislative session following adoption of SB10. This law change required a revision of the Conservation District rules. Changes are indicated with strikeout for deleted text and red for added text.

These rules contain language from the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act, the Administrative Rules of Montana and the Montana Code Annotated. The Administrative Rules of Montana are indicated by [ARM] and the Montana Code Annotated is indicated by [LAW].

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RULE 1. TITLE.

- (1) These rules may be cited as the Bitterroot Conservation District rules for implementation of the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act of 1975, as amended, commonly referred to as the 310 Law.

RULE 2. POLICY.

- (1) It is the policy of the Bitterroot Conservation District that the natural rivers and streams, and the lands and property immediately adjacent to them, within Ravalli County are to be protected and preserved to be available in their natural or existing, state, and to prohibit unauthorized projects, and in so doing to keep soil erosion and sedimentation to a minimum, except as may be necessary and appropriate after due consideration of all factors involved. [LAW]
- (2) Further, it is the policy of this district to recognize the needs of irrigation and agricultural use of the rivers and streams of the state of Montana and to protect the use of water for any useful or beneficial purpose as guaranteed by the constitution and laws of the State of Montana. [LAW]
- (3) The legislature, mindful of its constitutional obligations under Article II, section 3, and Article IX of the Montana constitution, has enacted the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act of 1975. In recognition of the legislature's intent, it is the district's intent that the requirements of this Act and implementing rules provide adequate remedies for the protection of the environmental life support system from degradation and provide adequate remedies to prevent unreasonable depletion and degradation of natural resources. [LAW]

RULE 3. PURPOSE.

- (1) The purpose of these rules is to provide guidance to all concerned parties regarding the administration of The Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act in the Bitterroot Conservation District; and to specify procedures for compliance with the policy contained in Rule 2.

RULE 4. DEFINITIONS.

Unless the context otherwise requires, the following definitions are applicable to these rules:

- (1) "Act" means The Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act. [ARM]
- (2) "Activity" or "activities" means a proposed physical alteration or modification to a natural perennial-flowing stream or river, its bed, or its immediate banks.

- (3) "Applicant" means any person presenting notice of a project to the supervisors. **[LAW]**
- (4) "Application" means a notice of proposed project on a form provided under Rule 7, Forms, and containing all of the required information.
- (5) "Bed" means the channel occupied by a stream. **[ARM]**
- (6) "Channel" means the area of a stream measured from mean high water mark to mean high water mark. **[ARM]**
- (7) "Department" means the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. **[LAW]**
- (8) "District" means:
- (a) a conservation district under Title 76, Chapter 15, MCA, in which the project will take place;
 - (b) a grass conservation district under Title 76, Chapter 16, MCA where a conservation district does not exist; or
 - (c) the board of county commissioners in a county where a district does not exist. **[(8)(a-c) LAW]**
- (9) "Directly affected person" means a person who by means of an affidavit establishes that as a result of the proposed action the person's property or water rights will more likely than not be impacted by soil erosion, sedimentation, flooding, or channel alteration, or the stream flow, turbidity or water quality will more likely than not be altered at or near the person's property or diversion point, or that the fish or aquatic habitat in the stream in which the person has a management interest will more likely than not be altered by the project. For purposes of this definition, person includes a government entity.
- (10) "Emergency" means an unforeseen event or combination of circumstances that call for immediate action to safeguard life, including human or animal, or property, including growing crops without giving time for the deliberate exercise of judgment or discretion under the Act. **[ARM]**
- (11) "Immediate banks" means the area above the mean highwater mark and directly adjacent to the stream, which when ~~disturbed physically altered or modified~~ **will physically alter or modify the state of a stream in contravention of 75-7-102 MCA.** **[ARM]**
- (12) "Extreme Drought" means a prolonged period of less than normal precipitation such that the lack of water causes a hydrologic imbalance as designated by the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as, at least, abnormally dry.

- (13) "Livestock grazing activities" means grazing animals.
- (14) "Mean high water mark" means the line that water impresses on the land for sufficient periods to cause physical characteristics that distinguish the area below the line from above it. Characteristics of the area below the line include, when appropriate, deprivation of the soil of substantially all terrestrial vegetation and destruction of its agricultural value. [ARM]
- (15) "Natural perennial-flowing stream" means a stream, which in the absence of diversion, impoundment, appropriation, or extreme drought, flows continuously at all seasons of the year and during dry as well as wet years. [ARM]
- (16) "Permit" means the written consent of the supervisors authorizing a proposed project.
- (17) "Person" means any individual, corporation, firm, partnership, association, or other legal entity, not covered under 87-5-502, MCA. [LAW]
- (18) "Physical alteration or modification" means human-caused actions resulting in the placement, removal, or disturbance of materials of any nature or character.
- (19) "Plan of Operation" or "annual maintenance plan" means an annual plan for a project of recurring nature that, if approved by the supervisors, authorizes a specific activity for a period not to exceed 10 years. [ARM]
- (20) "Project" means ~~an activity~~ a physical alteration or modification that results in a change in the state of a natural, perennial-flowing stream or river, its bed, or its immediate banks.
 - (a) Project does not include:
 - (i) an activity for which a plan of operation has been submitted to and approved by the district. Any modification to the plan must have prior approval of the district.
 - (ii) customary and historic maintenance and repair of existing irrigation facilities that do not significantly alter or modify the stream in contravention of 75-7-102, MCA
 - (iii) livestock grazing activities. [(20)(a)(i-iii)LAW]
- (21) "Stream" means any natural perennial-flowing stream, or river, its bed, and its immediate banks, ~~and its channels~~ except a stream or river that has been designated by district rule as not having significant aquatic and riparian attributes in need of protection or preservation under 75-7-102 [LAW], and includes the entire stream from its mouth to its source even if portions go dry periodically. ~~The term does not include a stream or river that has been designated by district~~

~~rule as not having significant aquatic and riparian attributes in need of protection or preservation under 75-7-102, MCA. [combined ARM & LAW]~~

- (22) "Supervisors" means a board of supervisors of a conservation district, the directors of a grass conservation district, or the board of county commissioners where a proposed project is not within a district. [LAW]
- (23) "Team" means one representative of the supervisors, one representative of the department, and the applicant or the applicant's representative. [LAW]
- (24) "Written consent of the supervisors" means a written decision of the supervisors approving a project and specifying activities authorized to be performed in completing the project. [LAW]

RULE 5. APPLICABILITY.

- (1) The district will make determinations on the applicability of these rules, the Act, and the streams covered under the Act. [ARM]
- (2) **The Act and** these rules apply to projects on a natural perennial-flowing stream, or portions thereof, including its ~~bed, immediate banks, and~~ channels, unless the stream has been designated as not having significant aquatic and riparian attributes in need of protection **or preservation**. The district considers a stream to flow perennially if it dries up periodically due to man-made causes, or extreme drought. [ARM]
- (3) A person who is directly affected by the ~~supervisors' determination of the~~ applicability, interpretation or implementation of ~~the law,~~ these rules **or the Act and who disagrees with a jurisdictional determination made by the supervisors,** ~~a written consent, or a designation of stream, or a portion of a stream,~~ may request a declaratory ruling under Rule 20, Declaratory Ruling. A person may not request a declaratory ruling under Rule 20 for a final action of the supervisors' approval, modification, or denial of a proposed project or an emergency action. [LAW]
- (4) These rules do not apply to ditches, intermittent streams, or wetlands not associated with the bed or immediate banks of a stream. [ARM]
- (5) In order for a stream to be covered under the Act, it must:
 - (a) be a natural waterway.
 - (i) Natural rivers or streams that have been rechanneled for road construction, flood control, irrigation, or other public works are considered natural waterways.
 - (ii) Natural rivers or streams that are used as part of an irrigation delivery system as allowed under 85-2-411, MCA, are considered a natural waterway, but only if those natural streams had perennial flow prior to diverting water through them.

- (iii) Artificial or man-made waterways that have been constructed for the purposes of conveying water for any purpose are not considered a natural waterway.
 - (iv) Flood channels, high water channels, and side channels of natural, perennial-flowing streams are considered part of a stream if water naturally enters the channels during high water or normal flow.
- (b) contain continuous natural flows.
 - (i) Water diverted into a natural channel for the withdrawal or diversion downstream shall not be considered part of the natural flow of a stream;
 - (ii) Water feeding a natural channel from any ground water source, tributary, springs, or other natural source, shall be considered part of the natural flow.
 - (iii) Water stored in a reservoir that maintains or raises the flow of a stream shall be considered natural flow.
 - (iv) Streams that dry up because of diversion, impoundments, appropriation, or extreme drought shall be considered to have continuous natural flows.
- (6) The Bitterroot Conservation District may use, but is not limited to, the following information to make its determinations:
 - (a) USGS maps;
 - (b) Water Resource Surveys;
 - (c) Water rights records;
 - (d) Landowner and resident interviews;
 - (e) Hydrology reports;
 - (f) On-site evaluations to gather information on geomorphology, vegetation, insects; past human activity;
 - (g) Historical information;
 - (h) Aerial photos;
 - (i) Stream flow data; or
 - (j) Any other relevant information.
- (7) The district, either on its own motion, or if petitioned to review the designation of a stream, will use the factors set forth in this rule to make a determination.
- (8) Persons dissatisfied with the supervisors' determination may petition ~~with~~ **the** district to make a declaratory ruling, as outlined in Rule 20, Declaratory Ruling. **[LAW]**

RULE 6. AQUATIC AND RIPARIAN ATTRIBUTES - EXCLUSIONS

- (1) This rule describes the process for excluding natural perennial-flowing streams from district jurisdiction where there is no need for protection under 75-7-102, MCA. The process for determining whether a stream is a natural perennial-flowing stream is described in Rule 5, Applicability.

(2) ~~Upon the district's motion or upon request of a person, the district may adopt a rule to exclude a stream, or portion thereof, from its jurisdiction upon finding~~ **The district may adopt a rule to exclude a stream, or portion thereof, from its jurisdiction upon finding** **determination** ~~that a perennial flowing~~ **the stream does not have significant aquatic or** ~~or~~ **and** **riparian attributes in need of protection or preservation** **under the Act.** [ARM]

(a) In order to make a determination, the district ~~shall hold~~ **must conduct** a public meeting ~~as outlined in Rule 11, Public Participation,~~ to gather information relative to the aquatic or riparian attributes of a stream. **Notice of the public meeting shall be publication of a notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the area at least twice with an interval of at least 14 days between the two publication dates. The first notice must be published at least 28 days prior to the meeting.**

(b) If after a public meeting, the district determines that a stream has no **significant** aquatic or riparian attributes **in need of protection or preservation,** the district may ~~adopt its rule excluding~~ **exclude** the stream, or portion thereof, from its jurisdiction **of this act by adoption of a district rule.** [ARM]

RULE 7. FORMS.

(1) The district and the applicant shall use the following forms.

(a) Form 270 – Notice of Proposed Project is the application form to be submitted by the applicant to the supervisors for project review. The Joint Application for Proposed Work on Streams, Wetlands, Floodplains, and Other Water Bodies is considered Form 270.

(b) Form 271 – Arbitration Agreement to be used by team members who are requesting to resolve disputes through arbitration.

(c) Form 272 – Team Member Report for team members to submit project recommendations to the supervisors.

(d) Form 273 – Supervisors' Decision, or permit, to convey district's decision to the applicant and team members.

(e) Form 274 – Official Complaint Form for a person to notify the district of an activity taking place without written consent of the supervisors.

(f) Form 275 – Emergency Report for a person to notify the district of projects undertaken during an emergency to safeguard life, property, or growing crops. [ARM]

(2) **A district may add to the standard forms and may create additional forms. Any district modifying or creating additional forms must provide a copy to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.** [ARM]

RULE 8. PROJECT REVIEW.

- (1) A person planning to engage in a project that will physically alter or modify a stream or river, its bed or immediate banks, must receive a permit prior to undertaking the project. [ARM] To receive a permit, a person must follow the application process.
- (2) The district shall review all projects to ensure they are achieved in a manner consistent with the policy set forth in the Act. The supervisors, in making ~~its~~ **their** decision to deny, approve, or modify an application, shall determine the purpose of the project and whether the applicant is using a reasonable means of accomplishing the project. [ARM] The application review and decision process is outlined in 75-7112, and these rules.
- (3) **The district may reject notices of proposed projects that are not complete. The time frame for project review starts when the application is accepted by the district. [ARM]**

RULE 9. APPLICATION PROCESS.

- (1) The applicant is responsible for providing sufficient information for the supervisors to make a reasonable determination to approve, modify, or deny the application. Incomplete applications may not be accepted. **It is the applicant's responsibility to provide sufficient information for the district to make a reasonable determination to approve, modify, or deny the application. Incomplete applications may not be accepted.** To be complete, the information submitted must be credible and all of the necessary parts of the form filled in with the required information. Information to be provided by the applicant, must include, but is not limited to:
 - (a) The location of the project;
 - (b) The purpose of the project;
 - (c) A detailed description of how the project will be accomplished;
 - (d) Project plans and drawings;
 - (e) Maps of the project site;
 - (f) Proposed dates of project development or construction;
 - (g) Length of time to complete the project; and
 - (h) If required by the district, engineering plans. [ARM]
- (2) The supervisors may require an applicant to provide additional information for projects that appear, from a review of the application, to have the potential to impact the flow characteristics of the stream.
 - (a) The following additional information may be required if requested by the district:

- (i) Names and addresses of landowners that may be potentially impacted by the proposed project;
 - (ii) A description of the potential impacts to the stream from the project wherever they may reasonably be expected to occur;
 - (iii) Design drawings(s) that clearly depict the plan, profile, and typical cross-section views of the proposed activity;
 - (iv) Engineering designs;
 - (v) Project alternatives considered; and
 - (vi) Any other information needed to make an informed decision.
- (b) If required, the information required in subsections (2)(a)(i) and (ii) must be developed with the assistance of a person with experience in identifying potential impacts to stream flow characteristics. The information required in subsection (2)(a)(iii) must be developed with the assistance of a person with experience in the design or construction of projects. Information required in subsections (2)(a)(i) through (iii) must be accompanied by a certified statement from the person who assisted with the development of the information documenting the person's engineering education and/or qualifications to provide assistance under (2)(a)(iv) must be provided.
- (3) Notice of Proposed Project/Permit Application
- (a) The notice of proposed project (permit application) shall be made on Form 270. **[LAW]** The application may be either hand delivered, **emailed**, or it ~~may be~~ mailed to the supervisors at the district office.
 - (i) The application will be officially accepted by the district or its representative if the application is complete and is for a project located in a stream or river or the lands immediately adjacent as described in these rules. The time frame specified in these rules begins upon acceptance of the application.
 - (b) Plans of Operation. If a person is submitting an application for an activity that is conducted annually, such as maintenance of a bridge, culvert, or irrigation structure, the applicant may submit a plan of operation to the district. The district may approve the annual activity for a period of up to 10 years as described in Rule 10, Decision. Plans of operation that have been approved are subject to annual inspection by the district. In addition to indicating on Form 270 that the activity will be done on an annual basis, the applicant will provide the following information to the conservation district:
 - i.** The reason for on-going activity and why it is necessary;
 - ii.** Time of year -- the dates for which the activity will start and be completed each year, including the number of days the activity will take place;
 - iii.** Where the activity will take place; **iv.** How often the activity will take place;
 - v.** An explanation, in detail, of how the activity will take place; and

- vi. An explanation of how the applicant will keep soil erosion and sedimentation to a minimum.
- (c) The district or the district's representative shall, within 10 working days of accepting an application, send a copy of the application to the Department. **[LAW]**
- (d) Where a single land use activity, such as a timber sale, involves multiple locations of a single overall project, such as the placement of several culverts, application for all proposed stream alterations in conjunction with land use activity may be made on a single application. The application shall include a map and legal description of all the multiple locations of the projects.
- (e) If, at any time during the review process, the supervisors determine that the proposal is not a project or that these rules are otherwise inapplicable to the activity, the applicant will be notified in writing that written consent of the supervisors is not necessary. **[LAW]**
- (4) Formation of a Team
 - (a) The department shall, within 5 working days of receipt of the application, inform the supervisors whether the Department requests an on-site inspection by a team. **[LAW]**
 - (b) The supervisors shall call a team together within 20 days of receipt of the request of the department for an on-site inspection. A member of the team shall notify the supervisors, in writing within 5 working days after a notice of inspection if the team member waives participation in the inspection. **[LAW]**
 - (i) If the Department does not request an on-site inspection within the time specified in the subsection, the supervisors may approve, modify, or deny the project. **[LAW]**
 - (c) Each member of the team shall recommend, within 30 days of the date of inspection approval, modification, or denial of the project to the supervisors, using the Team Member Report (Form 272). **[LAW]**
 - (i) The applicant may waive participation in this recommendation. **[LAW]** A non-response is considered a waiver.
 - (d) The supervisors may extend, at the request of any team member, the time limits provided in this rule, when, in their determination, the time provided is not sufficient to carry out the purposes of the Act and these rules. The time extension may not exceed one year from the date of acceptance of the application. The applicant must be notified of the initial time extension within 60 days of the date of acceptance of the application and must be

notified within 7 working days of the supervisors' action granting the extension. **[LAW]**

RULE 10. DECISION.

- (1) The supervisors shall review the proposed project and affirm, overrule, or modify the individual team recommendations and notify the applicant and team members within 60 days of the date of application, of their decision. **[LAW]** A permit shall be provided on the Supervisors' Decision Form 273. **[ARM]**
- (2) The team, in making its recommendation, and the supervisors, in denying, approving, or modifying a project, shall determine:
 - (a) the purpose of the project; and
 - (b) whether the project is a reasonable means of accomplishing the purpose of the proposed project. To determine if the project is reasonable, the following must be considered:
 - (i) the effects of soil erosion and sedimentation, considering the methods available to complete the project and the nature and economics of the various alternatives;
 - (ii) whether there are modifications or alternative solutions that are reasonably practical that would reduce the disturbance to the stream and its environment and better accomplish the purpose of the proposed project;
 - (iii) whether the proposed project will create harmful flooding or erosion problems upstream or downstream;
 - (iv) the effects on stream channel alteration;
 - (v) the effects on stream flow, turbidity, and water quality caused by materials used or by removal of ground cover; and,
 - (vi) the effect on fish and aquatic habitat. **[(2) (a & b (i-vi) LAW]**
- (3) If the supervisors determine that a proposed project or part of a proposed project should be modified, they may condition their approval upon the modification. **[LAW]**
- (4) The supervisors may not approve or modify a proposed project unless the supervisors determine that the purpose of the proposed project will be accomplished by reasonable means. **[LAW]**
- (5) Decisions to approve, modify, or deny an application must be made by a concurrence of a majority of the supervisors.

- (6) The applicant must notify the supervisors in writing within 30 days of receipt of the permit if the applicant wishes to proceed with the project in accordance with the permit. No work may begin on a project before the end of the fifteen-day period waiting period unless all team members and the district give written permission. **[LAW]**
- (7) Unless otherwise stated, the term of a permit is one year from the date of the supervisor's decision. An applicant may request, and the district may approve a one-year extension if for any reason the project could not be completed within the initial term of the permit.
- (8) A plan of operation may be approved for activities of a recurring nature for a period not to exceed 10 years. **[LAW]** In order to qualify for an approved plan of operation, the activities must occur in the same location and in the same manner on an annual basis. No time extensions will be given on annual maintenance permits. When the term of a permit for an annual maintenance permit has expired, a person must submit a new application.

RULE 11. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- (1) All business of the supervisors shall be conducted in an open meeting after reasonable notice has been given. **[LAW]**
- (2) A team inspection is not a meeting of the supervisors, however, the public may participate in a team inspection if the landowner has given permission. The district is not responsible for securing this permission or providing transportation to the site.
- (3) Unless privacy interests of an applicant outweigh the public's right to know, all district records are available to the public. **[LAW]** The district chair shall make determinations regarding privacy issues in accordance with applicable statutes.
 - (a) The district chair may close a meeting during the time of a meeting that the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy and then if and only if the district chair determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merit of public disclosure. The right of individual about whom the discussion pertains may waive the right to privacy. In that event, the meeting shall remain open.
- (4) The district shall keep minutes of its meetings and decisions under these rules. **[LAW]**
- (5) Conduct of Regular Meetings/Public Information Meetings

- (a) Before a meeting is held to take final action on a notice of proposed project, the supervisors shall give reasonable notice to the applicant and other persons who may be directly affected by decision.
 - (i) Notice of regular, special, and public information meetings shall be given a minimum of ~~5~~ **2 business days** in advance of the meeting by posting the notice in 5 conspicuous places, or by advertising in the local media, by a news story, or by posting a notice on the district's website.
 - (ii) The district may require the applicant to give written notice to any person the district determines may be directly affected by a proposed project.
- (b) Meetings shall be conducted at the discretion of the Chair under normal rules of meeting procedure. All directly affected persons, including the applicant, shall be provided an opportunity to state their case and to present relevant evidence supporting their positions. At the discretion of the Chair, each directly affected person may also ask relevant questions of another directly affected person.
- (6) The district may hold a public informational meeting when the supervisors determine a proposed project to be controversial, or where additional information is desired prior to final action by the supervisors. If the matter is of significant interest to the public, members of the public shall be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed project prior to final action by the supervisors.
- (7) The district may hold a public hearing to gather information relative to making an initial designation of a perennial-flowing stream.
- (8) Adopting Rule Changes/Public Hearings to Remove Perennial Streams
 - (a) The district shall conduct a public hearing before adopting any major changes in these rules. **[LAW]**
 - (b) The district shall conduct a public hearing, if petitioned, to gather information about whether a natural perennial-flowing stream has significant aquatic and riparian attributes in need of protection or preservation under 75-7-102.
 - (c) Notice of public hearing to be conducted under (6)(a), and (b), shall be given by publication of a notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the area at least twice with an interval of at least 14 days between the two publication dates. The first notice must be published at least 28 days prior to the hearing.
- (9) Hearings for Declaratory Rulings.
 - (a) Hearings for declaratory rulings shall be conducted in accordance with the Act and Rule 20, Declaratory Ruling.

- (b) Notice of hearing for declaratory rulings shall be given as described in this (6)(c) of this rule.

RULE 12. PROJECT CONSTRUCTION.

The following standards shall apply to all projects:

- (1) Projects must be designed and constructed using methods that minimize:
 - (a) adverse impacts, both upstream and downstream;
 - (b) future disturbance to the stream. **[(1) (a – b) ARM]**
- (2) All disturbed areas must be managed during construction and reclaimed after construction to minimize erosion. **[ARM]**
- (3) Temporary structures used during construction must be designed to handle high flows reasonably anticipated during the project construction period. Temporary structures must be completely removed from the stream channel at the conclusion of construction and the area must be restored to a natural and stable condition. **[ARM]**
- (4) Channel alterations must be designed to retain original stream length or otherwise provide hydrologic stability. **[ARM]**
- (5) Streambank vegetation must be protected except where removal is necessary for completion of a project. When removal of vegetation is necessary, it must be kept to a minimum and revegetated as soon as possible. **[ARM]**
- (6) Riprap, rock, or other material used in a project must be of adequate size, shape, and must be properly placed to protect the streambank from erosion. **[ARM]**
- (7) The district may:
 - (a) limit the time and duration of construction to minimize impacts to the stream or associated aquatic life;
 - (b) require the applicant to submit engineering designs; when in the district's judgment, the project's complexity requires greater assurance of project stability to minimize impacts to the stream;
 - (c) require the applicant to provide project completion documentation, which may include photographs. **[(87) (a-c) ARM]**
- (8) ~~A person may not place road fill material in a stream. **[ARM]**~~ Unless specifically authorized by the district, the following projects are prohibited:

- (a) The placement of road fill material in a stream;
- (b) The placement of debris or other materials in stream where it can erode or float into the stream;
- (c) Projects that permanently prevent fish migration; and
- (d) Excavation of streambed gravels. **[(8) (a-d) ARM]**

~~A person may not place debris or other materials in a stream where it can erode or float back into the stream. [ARM]~~

~~Projects may not permanently prevent fish migration. [ARM]~~

- (9) For streambank stabilization projects, the district encourages the use of methods that preserve or enhance natural stream habitat and function.
 - (a) Applications proposing the use of riprap or other hard streambank stabilization methods shall include information establishing that due consideration has been given to methods that use organic materials (e.g., root wads, riparian vegetation, biodegradable geotextile fabrics, tree revetments) as the primary means of stabilization and that such methods are not practicable because:
 - (i) Sufficient long term durability would not be achievable;
 - (ii) Hydrodynamic considerations make it likely that the project would not meet its intended purpose;
 - (iii) The project would result in the same or greater impact on channel stability, flooding, erosion, and/or aquatic habitat; or
 - (iv) Economical considerations prevent the use of such methods.
 - (b) Live vegetation used in a project must remain viable and functional for one year after completion of the project. The district may perform follow-up inspections of projects involving live vegetation and may require that dead vegetation be replaced.
- (10) Instream woody debris should only be removed from the stream when necessary to complete a project or if significant property damage is imminent. If it is necessary to remove instream woody debris, the amount that is removed must be kept to a minimum.
- (11) All permanent stream crossings (e.g., bridges, culverts) should, at a minimum, span the width of the stream at the mean high water mark.
- (12) The applicant must notify the district in writing, either within 15 days of completion of the project, or prior to the end of the permit period, whichever comes first.

RULE 13. DISPUTE RESOLUTION.

- (1) Any permit decision or decision regarding an emergency may be reviewed by an arbitration panel or by judicial review in the district court in the county where the project is located. Judicial review of an arbitration panel's decision may be made under the provisions of MCA, Title 27, Chapter 5, Part 3 of the uniform arbitration act and must be brought in the county where the action is proposed to occur. **[LAW]**
- (2) The applicant may request arbitration as the method to resolve disputes by signing an arbitration agreement either before the application review process or within 30 days of receipt of the supervisors' decision.
 - (a) If an applicant signs an arbitration agreement prior to the application review process, the applicant waives their right to judicial review.
- (3) The applicant may request judicial review of the supervisors' decision by filing a petition in district court within 30 days of receipt of the supervisors' decision. **[LAW]**
- (4) Any other team members may seek formal dispute resolution only through arbitration by signing an arbitration agreement within 5 working days of receipt of the supervisors' decision. **[LAW]**
- (5) The arbitration agreement is outlined on Form 271 and contains provisions for the appointment of arbitrators; the exercise of power by the arbitrators; the hearing process; and fees and expenses of arbitration. **[ARM]**
- (6) An applicant's choice of the judicial review remedy prevails over any other team member's request for arbitration. **[LAW]**
- (7) Subsections (1-6) ~~does~~ **do** not preclude more informal means of dispute resolution. A meeting or meetings, to include, at a minimum, all of the team members and the supervisors, may be scheduled, at the discretion of the supervisors, at any time in order to discuss and attempt to resolve disputes. This subsection does not relieve the team member(s) wishing to dispute a permit decision of the duty to submit a request for arbitration or file a petition for a judicial review in district court in compliance with subsection (3) or any party from any other provision of the statute.
- (8) An appeal of the determination made by judicial review may be made to the Montana Supreme Court. **[LAW]**
- (9) Judicial review of an arbitration panel's decision may be made to district court under the Uniform Arbitration Act (Title 27, Chapter 5, Part 3, MCA). **[LAW]**

RULE 14. INSPECTION OF PROJECTS - PROJECT FOLLOW-UP.

- (1) The supervisors, team members, or their designated representative may inspect any project during or after construction to ~~insure~~ **ensure** that the conditions of the permit were followed and to provide technical assistance to the applicant.
- (2) The district shall notify the landowner prior to entering land to inspect a project, either orally or in writing.
- (3) The district may require the applicant to provide photo documentation of the project. **[ARM]**

RULE 15. EMERGENCIES.

- (1) Except as provided in this rule, the provisions of these rules shall not apply to those actions that are necessary to safeguard life or property, including growing crops, during periods of emergency. The person responsible for taking action under this rule shall notify the supervisors in writing within 15 days of the action taken as a result of an emergency. **[LAW]**
- (2) The emergency notice given under subsection (1) must be provided on Form 275 and must contain the following information; **[ARM]**
 - (a) the location of the action taken;
 - (b) a general description of the action taken;
 - (c) the date on which the action was taken; and
 - (d) an explanation of the emergency causing the need for the action taken.
[LAW]
- (3) The supervisors will determine if the action taken meets the definition of emergency as defined in Rule 4 (10) **[ARM 36.2.402]**. Violations of the emergency procedures are subject to provisions of Rule 17, Penalty/Restoration.
[LAW]
- (4) If the supervisors determine that the action taken meets the definition of a project, the supervisors shall send one copy of the Notice within 5 working days of its receipt to the department. **[LAW]**
- (5) A team, called together as described in Rule 10, shall make an on-site inspection within 20 days of receipt of the emergency notice, **unless the Governor has declared a state of emergency, in which case the team shall be called together within 30 days. [LAW]**
- (6) Each member of the team shall recommend in writing, within 30 days of the date of the emergency notice, approval, modification or denial of the project, **unless**

the Governor has declared a state of emergency, in which case their recommendation shall be made within 40 days. [LAW]

- (7) The supervisors shall review the emergency project and affirm, overrule, or modify the individual team recommendations and notify the applicant and team members of their decision within 60 days of receipt of the emergency notice.
 - (a) If an action is approved no further action is necessary in the part of the district or the applicant.
 - (b) In an emergency action that has been modified, the applicant must submit written notice on Form 270 to mitigate possible damages to the stream caused by the emergency action and to achieve a long-term solution, if feasible, to the emergency situation. Notice under this subsection must be filed within 90 days after the supervisors' decision.
 - (c) A person who has undertaken an emergency action that is denied shall submit written notice on Form 270 to obtain approval to remove the project to avoid further damages to the stream caused by the emergency action and to achieve a long-term solution, if feasible, to the emergency situation. Notice under this subsection must be filed within 90 days after the supervisors' decision. [(7)(a-c) LAW]
- (8) Disagreements with the supervisors' decision may be formally resolved according to Rule 13, Dispute Resolution. [LAW]
- (9) The failure of a person to perform the following, subjects the person to civil and criminal penalties:
 - (a) failure to provide emergency notice under subsection (1);
 - (b) failure to submit a notice of the project under subsection (7)(b) and (7)(c); or
 - (c) failure to implement the terms of a supervisors' decision for the purpose of mitigating the damage to the stream caused by the emergency action and of achieving a permanent solution, if feasible, to the emergency situation. [(9)(a-c) LAW]

RULE 16. COMPLIANCE WITH OTHER LAWS.

- (1) Approval for proposed projects or alternate plans does not relieve the applicant of the responsibility of complying with Title 76, Chapter 5, MCA, floodway management and regulation where designated floodplains or designated floodways have been established in accordance with that chapter. [LAW]
- (2) These rules shall not impair, diminish, divest, or control any existing or vested water rights under the laws of the state of Montana or the United States. [LAW]

- (3) The issuance of written consent of the supervisors does not relieve the applicant of the responsibility to obtain other permits or landowner permissions that may be necessary to undertake a project.

RULE 17. PENALTY - RESTORATION.

- (1) Except for emergency action, a project engaged in by any person without prior approval, or an activity performed outside the scope of written consent of the supervisors, is a public nuisance and subject to proceedings for immediate abatement. **[LAW]**
- (2) A person who initiates a project without the written consent of the supervisors, performs activities outside the scope of written consent of the supervisors, places a junked motor vehicle in a streambed or bank, or violates the emergency procedures of Rule 16 or the Act is:
 - (a) guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, the person shall be punished by a fine not to exceed \$500; or
 - (b) subject to a civil penalty not to exceed \$500 for each day that person continues to be in violation. **[(2)(a-b) LAW]**
- (3) Each day of a continuing violation constitutes a separate violation. The maximum civil penalty is the jurisdictional amount for purposes of 3-10-301. A conservation district may work with a person who is subject to a civil penalty to resolve the amount of the penalty prior to initiating an enforcement action in justice's court to collect a civil penalty. **[LAW]**
- (4) In addition to the criminal fine or civil penalty provided in subsection (2), the person:
 - (a) shall restore, at the direction of the court, the damaged stream, as recommended by the supervisors, to as near its prior condition as possible, or:
 - (b) is civilly liable for the amount necessary to restore the stream. The amount of the liability may be collected in an action instituted pursuant to 3-10-301 **(justice court)** if the amount of liability does not exceed \$7,000. If the amount of liability for restoration exceeds \$7,000, then the action must be brought in district court. **[(4)(a-b) LAW]**
- (5) Any person may report a violation of these rules or of the Act to the county attorney or to the supervisors.

RULE 18. COMPLAINT PROCEDURE.

When a conservation district receives a complaint alleging a violation, the conservation district will follow the steps below:

- (1) Request that the complainant submit a written complaint on Form 274. The complaint should specify the nature of the alleged violation, who is involved, where it is taking place, and when it occurred.
- (2) Contact the alleged violator either by telephone or in writing and advise the person of the complaint and that a field investigation will take place. Inform the violator that if a violation is occurring, it must cease immediately.
- (3) Conduct a field investigation, collect evidence, and document the time, date, location, nature of activity, and the person(s) involved in activity. The district will acquire information to confirm or deny that the complaint was valid complaint and whether there is a violation of that Act. If the field investigation does not verify a violation, the district will notify the complainant and the alleged violator, in writing, of the district's findings.
- (4) If a field investigation affirms a violation, the district will send a letter certified with return-receipt requested, setting forth the results of investigation, the course of action required to rectify the violation, and a deadline date for taking the corrective action. If the violator acknowledges the district's request and is willing to work with the district to correct the violation, the district may postpone issuing an Order assessing a civil penalty or forwarding the complaint to the county attorney. If the violator is not responsive to the letter and is not cooperative in correcting the violation, the supervisors may proceed with the violation in accordance with 75-7-123 and may issue a cease-and-desist order.

RULE 19. ORDERS ON VIOLATIONS.

- (1) If the district determines that issuance of an Order is appropriate, the district shall send a letter to the violator, enclosing an order assessing a civil penalty not to exceed \$500 per violation per day. The letter will identify the specific violation, the district finding on noncompliance, the required corrective action, and time frames for compliance, the date the civil penalty commences, and the district's intent to seek judicial enforcement of the civil penalty if it is not paid. If the violator takes corrective action within the required time frame, the district may waive the order for civil penalty.
- (2) If a violator fails to respond to the order, or to take corrective action, the district may seek judicial enforcement by turning the matter over to the county attorney or other legal service provider for the district.

RULE 20. DECLARATORY RULING.

- (1) A person who is directly affected by the supervisors' determination of applicability, interpretation, or implementation of the law, these rules, a written consent, or a designation of a stream, including a portion of a stream, and who disagrees with a determination may petition the supervisors for a declaratory ruling. [LAW]
- (2) Upon receipt of the petition, the supervisors' will determine whether the matter constitutes significant public interest.
 - (a) If the issue raised in the petition for a declaratory ruling is of significant interest to the public, the supervisors shall provide a reasonable opportunity for interested persons and the petitioner to submit data, information, or arguments, orally or in written form, prior to making a ruling. [LAW]
 - (b) If the issue raised in the petition for a declaratory ruling is not of significant interest to the public, the supervisors shall provide a reasonable opportunity for the petitioner to submit data, information, or arguments, orally, or in written form, prior to making a ruling. [LAW]
- (3) ~~If the issue raised in the petition for a declaratory ruling is of significant interest to the public, the supervisors shall provide a reasonable opportunity for interested persons and the petitioner to submit data, information, or arguments, orally or in written form, prior to making a ruling. [LAW]~~
- (4) ~~If the issue raised in the petition for a declaratory ruling is not of significant interest to the public, the supervisors shall provide a reasonable opportunity for the petitioner to submit data, information, or arguments, orally or in written form, prior to making a ruling. [LAW]~~
- (3) Data and information may be submitted at a hearing before the supervisors. Data and information submitted to the supervisors outside of the hearing process must be made available for public review prior to the hearing being conducted before the supervisors. [LAW]
- (4) A proceeding held under this section is not a contested case proceeding. A declaratory ruling under this section is not subject to the provisions of the Montana Administrative Procedures Act. No party may cross-examine any party submitting data and information to the supervisors, but all data and information must be verified by the party submitting it. [LAW]
- (5) This rule may not be interpreted or construed to allow a person to petition for a declaratory ruling under this section for an administrative review of a decision of the supervisors to grant, deny, or condition a written consent for a project or a project undertaken during an emergency. Review of these decisions is

exclusively provided for in 75-7-121 as it pertains to arbitration or judicial review. [LAW]

RULE 21. PROCESS FOR DECLARATORY RULING.

- (1) A directly affected person must submit a petition that states how and why the person is directly affected by the district's action and the specific question or initial determination made by the district to be addressed in the declaratory ruling. The petitioner must also indicate if they are requesting a hearing before the supervisors.
- (2) A hearing before the supervisors will be held if either the petitioner requests it or the matter is determined to be of significant public interest under Rule 20. If a hearing is to be held, the following process will be followed:
 - (a) Within 30 days of the filing of a petition, the district shall appoint a hearing officer, who may be a supervisor, to conduct the declaratory ruling hearing. The hearing officer will regulate the course of the hearing, and with a concurrence of the district, set the time, place and date of the hearing.
 - (b) Within 30 days of appointment of a hearings officer, the district shall set a date for a hearing to gather information and data, allow public comment, and allow the public to submit written comment. The hearing may be continued if necessary. The district shall provide notice of the hearings as described in Rule 11, Public Participation. A quorum of the supervisors must be present at the hearing. The district shall maintain a record of the petition, notices, all information and data gathered, any proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law.
 - (c) The hearing officer will make a recommendation to the supervisors for their approval and adoption within 60 days of the conclusion of the hearings process. The district may extend this time frame if necessary.
- (3) The supervisors, and if a hearing is held, the hearing officer, shall consider the totality of all the circumstances based on all information presented.
- (4) A declaratory ruling, consisting of findings of fact and conclusions of law, must be made by a concurrence of a majority of the board. Only those supervisors present during the hearing will participate in the decision.
- (5) ~~Within 30 days of the filing of a petition, the district shall appoint a hearing officer, who may be a supervisor, to conduct the declaratory ruling hearing.~~

~~The hearing officer will regulate the course of the hearing, and with a concurrence of the district, set the time, place and date of the hearing.~~

- (6) ~~Within 30 days of appointment of a hearings officer, the district shall set a date for a hearing to gather information and data, allow public comment, and allow the public to submit written comment. The hearing may be continued if necessary. The district~~

~~shall provide notice of the hearings as described in Rule 11, Public Participation. A quorum of the supervisors must be present at the hearing. The district shall maintain a record of the petition, notices, all information and data gathered, any proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law.~~

- ~~(7) The hearing officer will make a recommendation to the supervisors for their approval and adoption within 60 days of the conclusion of the hearings process. The district may extend this time frame if necessary.~~
- ~~(8) The hearing officer and the supervisors shall consider information provided by the petitioning party to be persuasive unless the information is overcome by a preponderance of all available information presented at the hearing.~~
- ~~(9) A declaratory ruling, consisting of findings of fact and conclusions of law, must be made by a concurrence of a majority of the board. Only those supervisors present during the hearing will participate in the decision.~~

Explanation:

~~New Rule added due to 2003 legislative changes.~~

RULE 22. JUDICIAL REVIEW OF DECLARATORY RULING

- (1) A directly affected person or an interested person dissatisfied with a declaratory ruling may seek judicial review in district court. The district court review shall be only on information and data established on record before the district. A district determination may be reversed or modified if the declaratory ruling is:
 - (a) in violation of a constitutional or statutory provision;
 - (b) in excess of the statutory authority of the supervisors;
 - (c) affected by error of law; or
 - (d) arbitrary or capricious, characterized by abuse of discretion, or a clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion. **[(1)(a-d) LAW]**
- (2) Any aggrieved person who was a party to the declaratory ruling proceedings who is dissatisfied with the district court determination may seek judicial review by an appeal to the Montana Supreme Court. **[LAW]**

RULE 23. SURETY BONDS.

- (1) The supervisors may require the project applicant to furnish, prior to the commencement of a project and as a condition of the written consent of the supervisors, a sufficient surety bond approved by the supervisors, conditioned upon the proper reclamation of the streambed and land involved in the project and conformance with any conditions in the project permit.

- (2) Once an applicant has posted a sufficient surety bond and prior to the release of that bond, the supervisors shall inspect the applicant's completed project for proper reclamation and conformance with any conditions placed on the applicant's project permit. If the project passes inspection, the supervisors shall release the surety bond.
- (3) If an applicant's project is not properly reclaimed and does not properly conform to conditions placed on the applicant's project permit, and the applicant refuses after receiving a written warning containing notice of all deficiencies to properly reclaim the area in question or conform the project to the conditions on the permit, the supervisors shall, after granting the applicant an opportunity for a hearing before them, refuse to release said bond and shall take such legal action as is necessary to use such bond to the extent required to have the project properly reclaimed or to have all conditions of the approved project plan or permit met.

APPENDIX

A. IN-STREAM WOODY DEBRIS

1. Findings

- a. Streams and rivers transport woody debris (WD) from blowdown trees or channel migration into floodplain areas. WD has a major effect on stream form and function.
- b. WD accumulation is considered an important component of healthy aquatic systems. It provides habitat for fish and other aquatic life, organic material for riparian plants, and nutrients for aquatic organisms.
- c. Removal of WD by landowners, recreationists, or others may have a negative impact on stream habitat and function.
- d. Manipulation of small or isolated WD (e.g., a single branch) generally has less impact on stream habitat and function.
- e. Depending on the location and site, WD may pose a risk to property and public safety.

2. Standards

- a. A 310 permit is generally required for projects involving cutting and removal of in-stream WD.
- b. A 310 permit is not required in cases where the material to be cut is part of a single tree and is less than 6 inches in diameter.
- c. In every case, cutting and removal of in-stream WD shall be done in a way that has the least impact on stream habitat and function. (Rule 12.12. Project Construction.)
- d. Regardless of whether a 310 permit is required, all cut material must be removed and/or placed above the ordinary high-water mark. (Ravalli County Floodplain Regulations.)
- e. Please note that landowner permission must be obtained for cutting or placement of debris above the ordinary high-water mark, even if a 310 permit is not required. (MCA 45-6-203 “Criminal trespass to property”.)

B. RIPARIAN VEGETATION

1. Findings

- a. Riparian vegetation is an integral component of a healthy stream environment. Riparian vegetation stabilizes stream banks, contributes to lower water temperatures, filters sediment during flood events, creates overhead cover for fish, and provides habitat for many wildlife species.
- b. Riparian vegetation along otherwise unconfined stream channels is important for maintaining a stable stream corridor.
- c. Land management activities that reduce riparian vegetation immediately adjacent to streams can result in loss of habitat and bank erosion, even during moderate flows.

2. Standards

- a. A 310 permit may be required for projects involving cutting or removal of riparian vegetation on lands immediately adjacent to natural rivers and streams. (Rule 2.1.)
- b. Cutting, removal, or disturbance of riparian vegetation should be kept to the minimum amount necessary to achieve the project goals. (Rule 12.5. Project Construction.)
- c. The project plan must include provisions for replacing or reseeding any riparian vegetation that is damaged during the course of the project.

C. FISH PASSAGE AT ROAD CROSSINGS

1. Findings

- a. Road crossings may create adverse hydrologic conditions, high velocities, turbulence, and barriers that prevent fish from moving upstream.
- b. Preventing fish passage blocks spawning migrations and use of upstream habitats, negatively impacting fish populations.
- c. Projects that permanently prevent fish migration are prohibited. (Rule 12.10. Project Construction.)
- d. There are many factors which may affect fish passage. Each site is unique and therefore requirements for fish passage may vary from site to site.

2. Standards

- a. In determining crossing requirements that will provide a reasonable means for allowing fish passage, consideration must be given to the uniqueness of the site, species and size of fish present, channel width, discharge and gradient of the stream.
- b. Bridges are the best structures in providing fish passage, followed, in decreasing order of desirability, by bottomless culverts, embedded culverts, and non-embedded culverts.
- c. Culverts should be placed on the grade of the stream and preferably be located in a straight reach so that flow will not be directed against the bank.
- d. Culvert outlets should not be perched.
- e. All permanent stream crossings should, at minimum, span the width of the stream at the mean high-high water mark. (Rule 12.13 Project Construction.)

D. IRRIGATION DIVERSION AND HEADGATE MAINTENANCE

1. Findings

- a. Irrigation diversions and headgates tend to collect floating wood and other debris that can interfere with their ability to deliver the legal amount of water and therefore may require periodic maintenance and repair.

- b. An activity that constitutes customary and historic maintenance and repair of existing irrigation facilities that do not significantly alter or modify the stream in contravention of 75-7-102 is not considered a 310 project.

2. Standards

- a. A 310 permit is not required for customary and historic maintenance and repair of existing irrigation facilities that do not significantly alter or modify the stream in contravention of 75-7-102 MCA. (Rule 4.20. Definitions.) Examples are removal by hand of woody debris and/or minor sediment deposition that interferes with the function of a diversion or headgate.
- b. Temporary measures to divert water toward a headgate that are placed by hand and do not significantly alter or modify the stream in contravention of 75-7-102 MCA are considered to be customary and historic maintenance and therefore do not require a 310 permit. Examples are placement of tarps or small rock wings. All such measures must be removed to return the stream to its natural state at the end of the irrigation season.
- c. A 310 permit is required if the maintenance and repair activities may significantly alter or modify the stream. Examples of such projects are temporary measures to divert water towards a headgate involving gravel berms, or concrete barriers. All such measures must be removed to return the stream to its natural state at the end of the irrigation season.
- d. If the maintenance and repair activities are performed routinely in the same location and in the same manner from year to year, a maintenance 310 permit for the activities may be approved for a period of up to 10 years. (Rules 10.8. Decision.)
- e. Any work that is outside the scope of a maintenance permit will require a regular 310 permit.

E. BURIED UTILITY LINE CROSSINGS

1. Findings

- a. Utility lines that cross underneath a stream or river are generally installed using a method called horizontal directional drilling, in which a hole is bored underneath the streambed.
- b. Improper installation and placement of buried utility line crossings can have significant negative effects on streams due to disturbances of streambeds and banks.
- c. Buried utility line crossings that become exposed due to erosion can create a public safety hazard and result in damage to infrastructure.

2. Standards

- a. Where possible, the bore holes for utility lines must be set back at least 30 feet from the mean high-water mark and go at least two times the modeled scour depth below the bottom of the stream channel.
- b. If conditions at the site do not allow the above conditions to be met, alternative setbacks and depths that ensure no negative impact to the streambed and banks may be approved.
- c. In cases where the applicant intends to install buried utility lines at multiple locations, a single 310 application may be used as long as the same methodology will be used at each

site. The application must include a map showing the location of each site along with the coordinates or legal descriptions. (Rule 9.3.d. Application Process.)

F. OFF-STREAM REVETMENTS

1. Findings

- a. Off-stream revetments are defined as material (e.g., buried rock) placed away from the stream bank with the intent of providing erosion control once the stream migrates to that location.
- b. Except as noted in the rules, a “project” is an activity that results in a change in the state of a natural, perennial-flowing stream or river, its bed, or its immediate banks. (Rule 4.20. Definitions.)
- c. “Immediate banks” means the area above the mean high water mark and directly adjacent to a stream which when disturbed will physically alter or modify the state of a stream in contravention of 75-7-102, MCA. [ARM]

2. Standards

- a. Off-stream revetments have the potential to affect the state of the stream and therefore require a 310 permit and are subject to the same standards for 310 projects as given in Rule 12. Project Construction.