Conservation Clamor

WESTON COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCE DISTRICT August 2026

Ongoing Federal Planning

Representing local interests and our natural resources

District staff have been reviewing and attending meetings regarding several federal planning processes, including the Newcastle BLM Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) Update, the Black Hills National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) Revision, the Bridger Pipeline Expansion, and the Rare Earth Resources Plan to mine rare earth minerals in Northeast Wyoming.

BLM RMP

The BLM RMP update is almost complete. For more information, you can visit: https://eplanning.blm.gov/Project-Home/?id=424889c8-a7f2-f011-8407-001dd803dca7

Overall, we are very happy with how this plan turned out. Initial meetings began back in 2022 to start the review and revision process. While there were concessions on both sides, and while we didn't get all the wins we wanted, we do feel that this new plan represents the resources available and provides appropriate management directives while also protecting public access and multiple use of our public lands.

Black Hills National Forest LMP

This process began in 2021 and is still ongoing, but progress is being made. A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be released next fall, allowing the public to provide comments.

For more information, please visit: https://www.fs.usda.gov/r02/blackhills/planning/forest-plan/black-hills-national-forest-plan-revision

Bridger Pipeline Expansion

Bridger Pipeline is planning to install a pipeline from Canada to Guernsey, WY. The proposed action would consist of constructing a 36" pipeline covering a total of 646.8 miles; 63.8 of those miles could cross Federal land. Of the Federal public land, it is anticipated that 58.6 miles would occur on BLM-managed lands (52.5 miles in Montana and 6.1 in Wyoming) and 5.2 miles on USFS-managed lands in Wyoming. Additionally, Bridger's proposed route would parallel existing Bridger-owned infrastructure for roughly 138 miles in Montana and 100 miles in Wyoming.

For more information, please visit: https://eplanning.blm.gov/Project-Home/?id=43c2e68 406-001dd8029ed0

Rare Earth Resources

Rare Earth Resources (RER) is proposing to construct a rare earth mine in Crook County, located on USFS land. The processing facility will be located in Weston County, near Upton.

For more information, please visit: https://www.fs.usda.gov/r02/blackhills/projects/291093

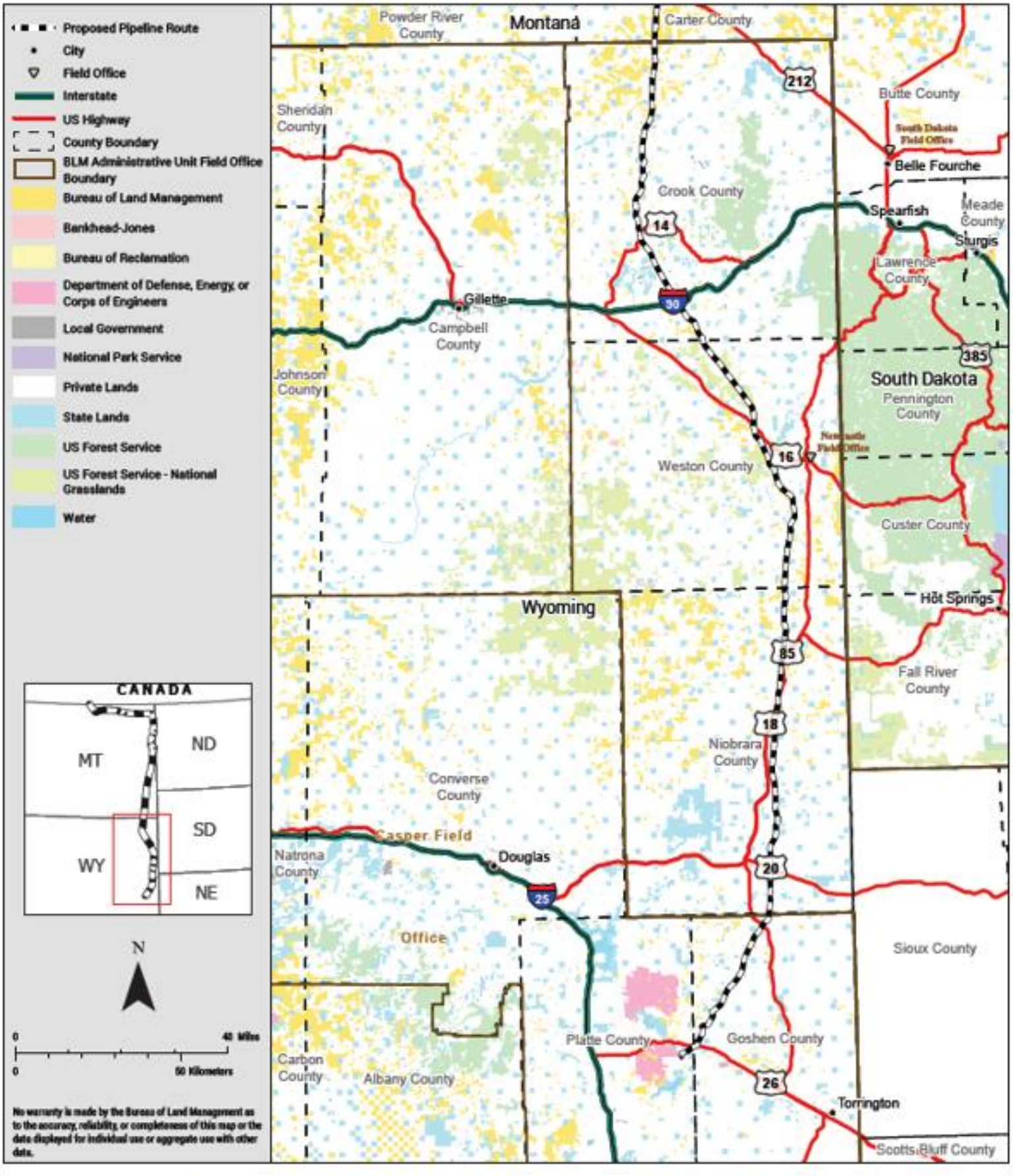
Bridger Proposed Pipeline

Wyoming Overview

Bureau of Land Management
Miles City Field Office
111 Garryowen Rd
Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 233-2800

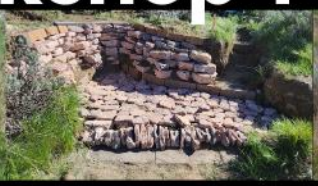
Montana
Wyoming

4/8/2026



LTPBR Workshop Project Tour









Join a tour of several erosion mitigation structures built during our 2025 LTPBR Workshop, well as older structures built by Wyoming Game and Fish and the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association, which have been in place for several years.

When: August 21, beginning at 9 a.m.
Where: meet at the HWY 450/116 intersection
Call us at 307-746-2701x4 or email westoncountynrd@gmail.com for more information

2026 Well Water Testing

Reserve kits by 3PM on October 5th
Pick up your kits Oct. 12th-16th
Collect and return samples on Oct. 20th

This test checks for presence of bacteria/E. coli and levels of nitrate and nitrite, sulfate, and total dissolved solids.

WCNRD will fully cover the cost of this test.

We have a set budget for this program, so tests are funded on a first come, first served basis until funding runs out. Limit 1 test per household, per testing date.

For additional or more in-depth water testing, check out our Lab Test Cost Share program at westoncountynrd.org/lab-testing/

Call our office to reserve your kit or for more information
307-746-2701x4



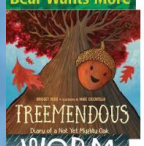
Books we have displayed



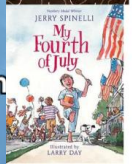




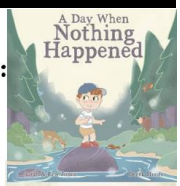


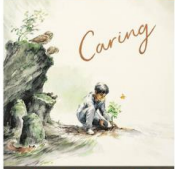


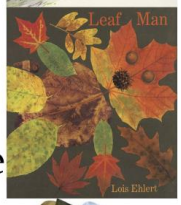


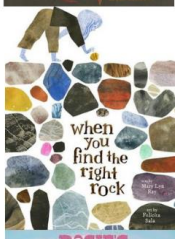


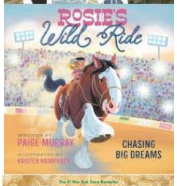
Some of our upcoming books:

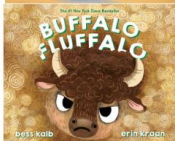












We're coming up on a year since we started installing the StoryWalk® in Centennial Park.

We have had quite a few books on display (about one a month), along with some craft ideas or information related to the book's topic.

We welcome community participation, so if you are interested in helping design an activity or sponsoring a book, let us know!

Stock Water Project Opportunities



With the ongoing drought conditions and stock ponds and spring developments becoming less reliable, there has been a lot of interest in stock water projects lately. Solar conversions, pipeline extension projects, and new wells are among the most common projects undertaken by the Weston County Natural Resource District, and there are funding opportunities to assist with their implementation.

One of the funding sources is the Wyoming Small Water Projects program, hosted by the Wyoming Water Development Office. This program offers a 50% cost share up to $35,000. The project must show a public benefit, so projects on private land must demonstrate a benefit to wildlife and the watershed, such as providing a reliable water source for wildlife where there is either no other water source or the only other source is ephemeral/inconsistent. Depending on the project, funding may be available from other sources, such as Non-Governmental Organizations, like the Mule Deer Foundation or Ducks Unlimited.

If you are interested in looking at a stock water project, contact the District so we can discuss options. The deadline for applications for the Wyoming Small Water Program is November 15th, so the sooner we begin, the better. Other program deadlines vary. The District can also assist with projects by providing technical assistance to ensure a project will be successful.



Call, email, or stop by the office to talk about your project ideas!
307-746-2701 ext.4
westoncountynrd@gmail.com
ccarter@westoncountynrd.org
1225 Washington Blvd. Suite 3, Newcastle

A MESSAGE FROM OUR USDA PARTNERS

Standing By Producers Through Wildfire and Disaster Recovery

Wildfires, droughts, and other natural disasters are taking their toll on our nation's agricultural producers. Across the country, we see what natural disasters do to farms, ranches, and rural communities through crop and livestock losses, displaced livestock, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted livelihoods putting generational family operations, their way of life, and rural communities at risk.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to delivery of the technical and financial support you need to recover and get back on your feet. At the USDA, we know recovery is not just about rebuilding what was lost, but about helping producers recover, move forward and prepare for the next challenge because disasters are not a matter of if, but when. This is why USDA is here to work beside farmers and ranchers every step of the way.

Contact your local FSA office today to learn how we can help you recover from and protect against disaster-related losses. Visit farmers.gov for details or call the Weston County FSA Office at (307) 746-2701, extension 2.

Common Causes of Brown Needles

2026 is shaping up to be a tough year for trees, so you may be noticing more brown needles than normal. As we discussed in our last newsletter, the warm winter and dry conditions may have resulted in winter burn, and the drought is likely to have caused further desiccation. Mountain Pine Beetle activity has increased and we are seeing a significant increase in the number of infected trees throughout the Black Hills. Additionally, a suspected culprit of tree decline is the spread of dothistroma needle blight, a common fungal disease. Each of these problems can cause needle discoloration, so it's important to know what other signs to look for so that you can take appropriate action. With all of these conditions, increased watering will help to prevent the problem in the first place, and in the case of desiccation and dothistroma, will help the tree recover.

- **Desiccation (caused by winter burn and/or drought)**
  - **Cause** - Needles lose more moisture than can be replaced. Drought, unusually warm winter weather, delayed dormancy, strong sunlight, wind, and rapid temperature shifts can be contributing factors.
  - **Symptoms** - Needles turning brown. Browning usually starts at the tips of the needles and moves inwards, and usually starts at the ends of branches, spreading inward to the trunk. Brown areas may be spread randomly throughout the tree, but are often clustered on the windward or south-facing side.
  - **Treatment**
    - Apply 2-3 inches of organic mulch.
    - When possible, provide a wind barrier.
    - During fall and winter, water trees on days when the temperature is above 40 degrees. In the spring, when temperatures are consistently above freezing, water trees deeply. Continue to water throughout the summer.
    - Avoid fertilizing and pruning until the tree has recovered.
    - Monitor stressed trees, as they will be more susceptible to disease and pests.
- **Dothistroma**
  - **Cause** - *Dothistroma pini* fungus spores from infected needles spread through wind or rain splash onto new needles.
  - **Symptoms** - When first infected, dark green bands and yellow or tan spots and bands form on the needles. The dark green bands fade soon after appearing. Later, these bands and spots turn brown or reddish-brown. The infected needles progressively turn pale green, tan, then brown, while the base of the needle remains green. This progression can happen rapidly, with the brown appearing just 2-3 weeks after the first appearance of symptoms. Damage usually appears on lower branches first and travels upwards. While not immediately fatal to the tree, it will weaken it and can eventually cause enough defoliation that the tree dies.
  - **Treatment**
    - You cannot treat already-infected needles. They will eventually drop on their own.
    - Prune severely infected or dead lower branches.
    - You can try to prevent the spread of the fungus to other needles, parts of the tree, and nearby trees by applying fungicides designed to control Dothistroma. Multiple applications may be required to protect both last season's needles and new growth.
    - The timing of fungicide application varies by tree species, so look up the recommendations for each affected species. The goal of treatment is to break the life cycle of the fungus and prevent it from infecting new growth.
    - Watering the tree will help it recover, but keep the needles dry while doing so. Water on needles will spread the fungus.
    - Dry years can slow the spread of the fungus as it is more difficult for the fungus to reproduce and spread without moisture.

- **Mountain Pine Beetle**
  - **Cause** - While there are always Mountain Pine Beetles, trees normally fight them off by flushing them out of their trunks with sap. However, during a drought, trees do not have enough water to produce this sap, so the beetles start to overtake the trees' ability to fight them off. Once beetles take over a tree, the females release pheromones to attract beetles from miles around. Warm winters allow more larvae to survive the winter, and heat allows the beetles to complete their lifecycles faster, so during a hot, dry year like this one, they can reproduce and spread rapidly.
  - **Symptoms**
    - Pitch tubes, sawdust in the crevices of the bark and at the base of the tree, extensive woodpecker damage, tunnels and blue stains under the bark
    - Needles usually don't start to change color until about 8-10 months after an attack, so by the time you see brown needles, the tree is already infested.
    - Numerous exit holes - small, round, no sawdust - indicate the adults have already emerged.
  - **Treatment**
    - Healthy trees can be protected using insecticide sprays on the trunk, pheromones that tell insects to stay away, or by injecting special types of insecticides into the tree's vascular system to make the tree's wood toxic to the beetles.
    - Insecticide sprays do not work once trees have been infested. No sprays are able to kill larvae inside the tree.
    - Once trees have been infested, the only option is to cut down and destroy the tree, ideally before the adult beetles emerge. The most cost-effective method for multiple infected trees is to cut them down and into 2- foot sections.
    - For treating individual infected trees, once cut down:
      - Peel back the bark (by hand or mechanically) to expose the larvae and cause them to dehydrate, starve, and eventually die.
      - Burn, bury under at least 8 inches of soil, or chip.
      - Solar treatment, which uses sunlight to heat logs, can kill up to 75% of the beetles inside a tree if done properly.



Pitch tubes on beetle-infested tree
Photo courtesy of Scott Tunnock,
USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Needles infected with dothistroma
Photo courtesy of Robert L. James,
USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Browning from desiccation
Photo courtesy of
Robert L. Anderson,
USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Mountain pine beetle tunnels
Adults beetles and larvae create networks of tunnels under the bark, damaging the tree and spreading blue stain fungus.
Photo courtesy of Scott Tunnock,
USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Typical "bottom up" spread of dothistroma infection
Photo courtesy of MN DNR Archives,
MN DNR, Bugwood.org

Board of Supervisors

David Tysdal dtysdal.wcnrd@gmail.com
Chairman, Rural

Tucker Hamilton thamilton.wcnrd@gmail.com
Vice Chairman, Rural

Emily Hartinger ehartinger.wcnrd@gmail.com
Secretary/Treasurer, Rural

Gene Norman gnorman.wcnrd@gmail.com
Supervisor, Urban

Tom Streeter tstreeter.wcnrd@gmail.com
Supervisor, At-Large

District Staff

Caleb Carter ccarter@westoncountynrd.org
District Manager (307) 746-2701 ext. 4

Erin Whitcher westoncountynrd@gmail.com
Administrative Assistant (307) 746-2701 ext.4

District Hours
7:30 am to 4:30 pm—Monday-Friday

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

NRCS Field Office

Hours: 7 am to 4:00 pm (307) 746-2701 ext. 3

Paul Eitel paul.eitel@usda.gov
District Conservationist

Codie Van Meter codie.vanmeter@usda.gov
Rangeland Management Specialist



Find us online!

Be sure to check out our website for all your updates and WCNRD news. You can find forms to sign up for programs, event details, and more!

westoncountynrd.org

You can also connect with us on social media:

facebook.com/westoncountynrd

instagram.com/westoncountynrd

Mission Statement

"Providing leadership in conserving the natural resources in Weston County by providing information, education and technical assistance to meet the needs of our users."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Supervisor Election
Application for Election by
to be on the ballot. Applications are available at the District Office.

2 rural positions are up for election this year - Fill out an
August 25th

November 3rd.

Voting will take place at the District Office on

LTPBR Project Tour
intersection

Friday, August 21 @ 9 a.m. - Meet at the Hwy 450 and 116

Well Water Testing Day
collect sample Oct. 20th

Reserve test kits by October 5th, pick kits up Oct. 12-16th,

a.m. or Upton City Hall by 11 a.m.

bring kits to WCNRD office in Newcastle by 10

Weston County Natural Resource District
1225 Washington Blvd. Suite 3
Newcastle, WY 82701
(307) 746-2701, ext. 4
westoncountynrd@gmail.com

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
Rate
Newcastle, WY
Permit No. 52
Return Service
Requested

August 2026 Conservation Clamor

Meetings are held the second Tuesday of every month at 12:00p.m. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

The Weston County Natural Resource District is an equal opportunity employer

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Brown Needles: Pine Beetles, Dothistroma Fungus, and Desiccation