



*Serving Montanans First through Natural Resource
Management*

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

2027 Biennium Goals and Objectives

The **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation** is responsible for managing state trust land; protecting Montana's natural resources from wildfire; promoting stewardship of state water, soil, forest, and rangeland resources; aiding the conservation districts; providing natural resource conservation education; and providing support to the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation and other commissions and advisory councils. Our vision is to ensure Montana's land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations.

CENTRALIZED SERVICES DIVISION

Provides management and administrative services for the department. This includes activities such as legal, human resources, financial, information technology, records management, administrative hearings, safety, and communication services.

OIL AND GAS CONSERVATION DIVISION

Is responsible for programs operated for the prevention of resource waste through regulation of oil and gas exploration and production. This division supports the quasi-judicial Board of Oil and Gas that is charged with regulation of the industry.

CONSERVATION AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Provides administrative, legal, and technical assistance and financial grants to the conservation districts and manages natural resource conservation and development grant and loan programs for local governments, state agencies, and private individuals. The division also administers five attached councils and commissions and the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team.

WATER RESOURCES DIVISION

Is responsible for the administration of all water use within the state, including maintaining the database for all water rights, providing technical and legal support for implementation of approved water compacts for Indian tribes and federal agencies, managing state water projects, investigating water use act violations, ensuring dam safety compliance, and providing water adjudication support to the Water Court.

FORESTRY AND TRUST LAND DIVISION

Is responsible for planning and implementing forestry programs statewide. Division responsibilities include protecting natural resources from wildfire, regulating forest practices, providing a variety of services to private forest landowners, implementing cross boundary projects to build resilient forests, sustainable economies, and fire adapted communities, increasing forest restoration, management, and health on federal lands, and growing and selling seedlings for conservation and reforestation plantings on state and private lands in Montana.

The Division also manages state trust land resources to produce revenues for the trust beneficiaries while considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land. This work is done under the direction of the State Board of Land Commissioners (comprised of the Governor, State Auditor, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Secretary of State), who are constitutionally charged to oversee trust resources. The department director is the chief administrative officer of the board.



Strategic Outcome

#1

BETTER MANAGE OUR LANDS

Improve and expand forest management by utilizing all available tools across management ownerships and meet Trust Land Management Division Annual Sustainable Yield target.

Key Measures

Place an additional 70,000 acres under management by December 2026.

Identify an additional 2 landscape-level, 10,000-acre project areas.

Establish related agreements for 2 landscape-level projects.

Work with partners to increase the use of prescribed fire on state and private lands.

Achieve the increased annual timber sales volume in 2027 Biennium of 60 million board feet per year.

Complete an additional 10 Community Wildfire Protection Plans.



Strategic Outcome

#2

STREAMLINE PERMITTING AND REGULATORY PROCESSES

Increase outreach with customers to better facilitate service in the water permitting process.

Apply for Class VI primacy from EPA to streamline permitting and regulatory process for carbon sequestration projects.

Plug and reclaim all orphaned wells under contract from Federal IJA Initial Grant.

Key Measures

Increase outreach to Montanans by conducting outreach campaigns, trainings, and listening sessions on water rights permitting. Increase our listserv participation to over 20,000 Montanans.

Work with stakeholders to pass and implement legislation to ensure a smooth transition from statewide water adjudication to long-term administration of water rights; and meet the state's new water demands while protecting existing water rights.

Designate Class VI primacy team with BOGC staff and contractors to assemble primacy application; begin stakeholder engagement; submit primacy application to EPA by end of FY2026 and receive primacy by end of FY2027.

Complete Initial Grant Orphan well project by September 30, 2025.

IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Making accurate water right and public land access information easy to find and use.

 Strategic Outcome #3	Key Measures	Digitize and streamline water distribution projects for more efficient water management on the ground, which is publicly available, benefitting water users and managers alike.
		Conduct a water rights outreach campaign to water users to increase education and familiarity around their water rights. Update administrative rules for recreational use of trust land to ensure readability and alignment with statutory changes from the legislature.

 Strategic Outcome #4	MORE EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT	
	Streamline internal processes by adopting relevant technology.	
	Key Measures	Review Loan submission and servicing with Board of Investments to determine if they can more efficiently service DNRC loans. Launch a centralized public customer portal, to be integrated with the new my.mt.gov portal, by December 2025. Fully digitize DNRC's top 10 high-impact processes end-to-end, including signatures and payments, by December 2026. Deploy a cloud financial management information system by December 2025.



EFFICIENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Get federal and state funds on the ground as soon as possible.

**Key
Measures**

Complete 100% of the 423 ARPA Water and Sewer grants (\$408 million) by the end of 2026.

Obligate 70% of the HB 6 and HB 7 grants for Renewable Resource Grant and Resource Development Grant programs by the end of 2027.