The Montana Steam Permitting Guide that was first published in 2001 has recently been revised and updated. The manual is designed to provide guidance to Montana Conservation District Supervisors in making decisions for 310 permits and assisting land owners in considering the best options for working in and around streams, lakes and rivers. The purpose of the Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310 Law) is to ensure that projects will be carried out in ways that minimize impacts to stream or river functions, or adjoining property. While this guide can serve as an educational tool intended to be shared with landowners for more informed decision making, we want to emphasize the importance of working with local and state resource and permitting specialists early on in the process to help identify causes and most appropriate solutions for landowners and our shared water resources.

The guiding principle behind wise stream management is to select tools and methods that are compatible with a stream’s natural tendencies, and to minimize undesirable side effects. Often, this means letting a stream set its own course, forming and re-forming natural meanders, or abiding by historical flood patterns. These are the lessons learned over fifty years ago when concerned citizens and resource agencies developed the Montana Stream Protection Act (124 Permit), the first state stream protection bill of its kind in the nation. The Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310 Law) further expanded stream habitat protection in 1975.

When more hands-on management is necessary, the best tools and methods are those that support natural stream form and function. To that end, this manual includes chapters describing the permitting process, stream form and function, stream management methods to address streambank erosion, stream crossings and irrigation infrastructure.

Examples of stream projects are provided, along with design criteria for different types of projects. This document is a guide only and should not be construed as a rule for projects. The provided information is not a substitute for consulting professionals in the selection, design, permitting and implementation of projects impacting Montana’s rivers, lakes and streams. Some Conservation Districts have adopted construction standards for certain projects and others may or may not allow all of the projects listed in this guide, depending on the local circumstances.

Hard copies of the guide will be sent or delivered to all 58 Conservation Districts soon. There is also an electronic copy on the DNRC Stream Permitting website, and it can be found at the following link: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/licenses-and-permits/stream-permitting/stream-permitting-book>. Finally, thank you for protecting Montana’s rivers, lakes and streams.