



Montana NRCS Conservation Update

April 2011 Quarterly Newsletter www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov



In This Issue

- ❑ Troubling But Productive Times
- ❑ Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food
- ❑ Partnerships
- ❑ Saving Sage-Grouse Project Update
- ❑ Activity Book for Kids
- ❑ Rangeland Utilization Monitoring DVD
- ❑ Chief White Receives Award
- ❑ No-Till Studies
- ❑ Soil Health
- ❑ Chief Plenty Coups Cottonwood Tree Cuttings
- ❑ High Tunnel Update
- ❑ Facts Regarding Lightning
- ❑ Safety Meeting
- ❑ Flood Preparation Tips
- ❑ Beartooth RC&D Council
- ❑ Ladies Ag Night in Hardin
- ❑ USDA Notice to Women and Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers
- ❑ Malta Area Ranchers Demonstrate Conservation Values
- ❑ Human Resources Report
- ❑ Upcoming Events

Helping People Help the Land

Troubling But Productive Times

Joyce Swartzendruber, State Conservationist

The 2011 budget year is half over and government agencies are still struggling to conduct business while we wait for Congress to resolve our budget crisis.

We know we produce invaluable services to the public. Based on the participation and sincere interest exhibited by our customers, we know that our financial assistance programs are more popular than ever.

The bottom line: we at NRCS are committed employees, carrying out our mission and working above and beyond the call of duty to do it.

What will carry us through the budget crisis? It is the knowledge that our successes clearly demonstrate the value of the work we do. We are professionals who successfully address a diverse list of needs and services.

For example:

- *Our soil survey information receives approximately 4,000 hits per month on Web Soil Survey.*
- *1,346 snow survey and water supply forecasts were provided to more than 200 different users for snowpack indexing and streamflow forecast projections.*
- *In 2011, the Bridger Plant Materials Center (PMC) already has Foundation seed orders for more than 1,500 pounds of Foundation seed of PMC releases from growers in the western United States. The PMC is constantly being approached by other agencies like the Agricultural Research Service (Ft. Keogh and Logan, Utah stations) to partner on research and testing. The PMC will be involved in at least three collaborative efforts with them this year.*
- *Thirteen different partners have come forward to assist us in delivering assistance to ranchers with sage-grouse habitat.*
- *Through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, four land trusts have partnered to put 39,911 acres of agricultural land under long-term and permanent easements.*
- *NRCS not only develops and obligates more than \$50 million each year in new Farm Bill conservation contracts and easements, NRCS in Montana also processes approximately 340 payments per month to ag producers from existing and prior year contracts.*
- *All 60 conservation districts in Montana are assisted by NRCS everyday with technical information to conduct their own programs.*
- *RC&D measures created 410 jobs in 2010.*

In the highly unlikely circumstance that our doors are shut and we don't provide assistance, reports, designs, plans, or practice payments to our customers, our absence WILL BE FELT. The reality is this: if we are directed to close our doors, we will be legally prohibited from providing these services. While discussion in Congress continues, we need to keep our heads up and realize that the public is scrutinizing all government activities and behaviors. We share a confidence that our work is and will continue to be exemplary, meeting long-term needs that are irrefutable.

Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

It is a biological fact that we all need food. Let's apply this fact to our Montana State Legislature. They need a lot of food. There are 150 members of the Montana Legislature.

If each member followed the recommended diet outlined in the new USDA Food Pyramid, over the 90 days of the legislative session, they would collectively consume:

- *94,500 ounces of grain (about half of that should be whole grain)*
- *54,000 cups of vegetables*
- *27,000 cups of fruit*
- *81,000 ounces (that's 5,062 pounds) of beef and beans*
- *81,000 teaspoons of oil*

On any given day when the Montana Legislature is in session, there are as many as a thousand people in the State Capitol building. The amount of food provided in the Mountain Moose Deli, located in the basement of the Capitol building and a snack bar on the third floor, needs to be enough to feed as many as 600 of those folks on any given day. That doesn't take into consideration the amount of food consumed in Helena away from the Capitol building by Legislators, workers, visitors, and others.

Food is essential. The United States Department of Agri-

culture is leading an effort to develop a national conversation about food and agriculture and the importance of local and regional food systems. By developing our local and regional food systems, we can spur job growth in our communities and ultimately strengthen American agriculture.

Know your farmer, know your food. A healthy farm is a part of a healthy community. The Natural Resource Partnership of Montana encourages sustainable agricultural practices and systems so that Montana's natural resources - our soil, water, and air - will be available for generations to

come. The Partnership works daily to help today's producers conserve and protect those resources. It is interrelated: support local farmers, strengthen our communities, promote healthy eating, and protect our natural resources.

The next time you take a bite out of that burger think for a moment about the ranchers who provided the meat; the farmers who provided the wheat for the bun; the tomato for the ketchup; the vegetable grower providing the pickles; and—above all—the natural resources we need to conserve to keep quality food available to all.





Partnerships – 15 heads, 30 hands and 30 Legs Better than 1

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

They are often referred to as the four “C’s” of partnering: Communication, Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration. In Montana, there’s a renewed emphasis on partnering opportunities, especially with an eye on effective and frugal use of taxpayer dollars. Representatives of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Association of Conservation Districts, the Montana Association of Conservation District Employees Organization, Missouri River Conservation Districts Council, Montana Salinity Control Association, Montana Watershed Coordination Council, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Yellowstone River Conservation District Council recently put their heads together to discuss how to better inform Montana taxpayers of the value of conserving the state’s natural resources. To some Montanans the term “natural resources” relates to oil, gas and coal deposits. This group feels it needs to help more clearly define natural resources to include soil, air, water, plants, and animals.

One of the first orders of business was to analyze the mission statements of each participating group and determine what is the partnership’s common purpose.

Excerpts from each organization’s individual mission statement focus on the common purpose:

“Helping to ensure Montana’s land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations”

“To empower conservation districts in achieving their natural resource goals...”

“To represent natural resource and environmental interests on the Missouri River...”

“To improve long term productivity and quality of soil and water resources...”

“To enhance conserve and protect natural resources...”

“To provide science-based conservation assistance for the management and use of natural resources...”

“To provide local leadership, assistance, and guidance the wise use and conservation of the Yellowstone River Corridor’s natural resources...”

The accepted definition of collaboration provides the best explanation of the partnership’s intent:

“A mutually beneficial and clearly defined relationship that involves people from different agencies or sectors of the community working together to achieve a common mission. The result is a shared endeavor for which participants commit as much to the ultimate mission as to the specific interest or goals of their own organization.”

Although “wordsmithing” as to the best definition is a continuing process, the group agreed the focus is to educate and inform Montanans about the value and benefits of conserving natural resources.

In the Montana partnership, there are 15 committee members each contributing by writing informative blogs for social media, scheduling face to face visits to local newspaper editors and their staffs, and similar outreach and communication efforts. While some might argue “too many cooks spoil the soup,” in this case each of the cooks agree on the ingredients.

The benefits of this collaboration are clear – an informed and supportive audience representing a broad range of stakeholders who are getting an important and unified message from a variety of organizations sharing a common mission. Getting the word out doesn’t necessarily require spending large amounts of stakeholder money, especially during tight economic times. In terms of simple numbers, 15 heads means 30 hands and 30 legs sharing the same tasks on the same path. Odds of success must be high.

Saving Sage-Grouse Project Update

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

Montana ranchers are supporting the effort to save the dwindling number of sage-grouse.

Two years ago, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) brought together several Montana agencies and organizations to develop a strategy to address declining populations of the Greater Sage-Grouse, a species that is slated to be listed as an endangered species. That same group met in Helena on March 10 to review progress and work on future projects.

“Early on, Montana recognized the need to come together to address sage-grouse issues,” said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana. “Many of the groups in this room began working on sage-grouse issues more than a decade ago. NRCS is proud to be part of this effort; an effort that is good for the sage-grouse, for our natural resources, and for Montana ranchers.”

Specialists agree that sustainable ranching practices on Montana’s private and public lands can benefit both the rancher and the sage-grouse.

“We have to recognize that sustainability also includes economic viability,” said Carl Mattson, Montana Stockgrowers Association. “Ranchers are in the business to make money, but that can go hand-in-hand with the environmental benefits they provide.”

Montana has about 27 million acres of sage-grouse habitat. To target limited funds and staffing, NRCS identified 13 core areas in Montana, areas that provide 75 percent of the habitat for sage-grouse in the state.



Dave Wood, left, Bureau of Land Management; Ron Nadwornick, center, NRCS; and David Naugle, right, associate professor of wildlife biology at the University of Montana participate in a sage-grouse partnership meeting in Helena, Montana, March 10.

Initially, NRCS turned its attention to core area 4 near Roundup in central Montana. “When we looked at core area 4, we knew the best value for our efforts would come from working with ranchers to increase residual grass height as we know that increases sage-grouse nesting success,” said Joe Fidel, NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative Coordinator for Montana.

In 2009, NRCS signed contracts with ranchers to implement prescribed grazing on 90,000 acres in core area 4. On 74,000 of those acres, Fidel said ranchers were willing to “rest” areas of their rangeland, or not graze it, in nest habitat areas.

“Ranchers see the importance of this practice and are willing to do it,” Fidel said. “Taking areas out of production shows a commitment to this effort.”

Across the state, Fidel said ranchers are signing up. In 2010 alone, NRCS reported that 70,000 acres were placed under contract, which included 30 acres of herbaceous noxious weed control, 37 miles of fence marked to prevent sage-grouse from colliding with fences, 44 wildlife escape ramps in livestock water tanks, and 883 acres of perennial grass planted on cropland acres.

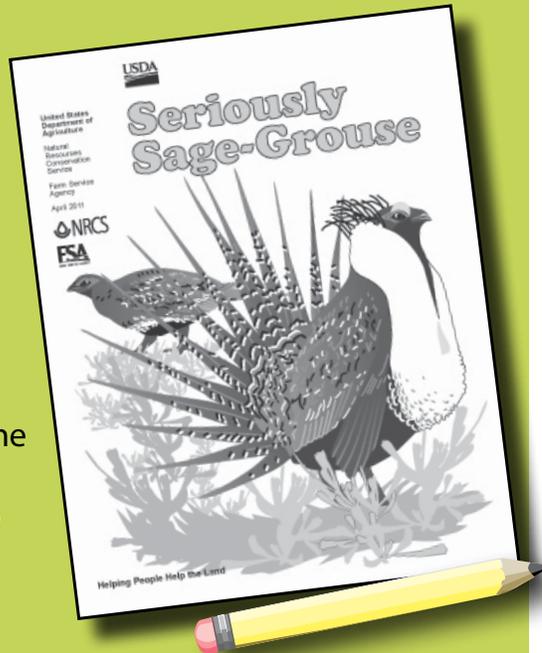
Ranchers who have contracts with NRCS receive partial funding to implement conservation practices through the agency’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program or Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

The sage-grouse is a permanent resident in 11 western states, making it a national issue for the NRCS. In 2010, NRCS provided \$18.5 million nationally for conservation practices beneficial to the sage-grouse. The agency is providing additional funding in 2011.

NRCS, in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, completed a conference report providing certainty to landowners who implement conservation programs through the NRCS. By implementing NRCS conservation practices, landowners can rest assured that they can continue normal operations even if the Fish and Wildlife Service lists sage-grouse as a federally threatened or endangered species. The report includes a suite of 40 conservation practices that were amended to ensure they were either benign or beneficial to sage-grouse, including upland habitat management, prescribed grazing, and brush management for juniper removal.

New Activity Book for Kids

"Seriously Sage-Grouse" is a fun booklet that helps educate children about sage-grouse. This booklet includes information, activities, and word games written for a fourth-grade education level. Younger children might need help with the reading, but can enjoy coloring or painting the pictures on their own.



Download a copy at <http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/about/education.html> or contact MT-nrcs-publications@one.usda.gov.

Chief White Receives Prestigious Award for Sage-Grouse Initiative

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

NRCS Chief Dave White has been honored by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). The award is the highest honor the organization bestows. At

the Association's annual meeting in Arizona, White was presented an exact replica of a Remington Bronze statue. It replicates an award given to President Teddy Roosevelt which is now displayed in the Oval Office at the White House. The Association's Directors called the Sage-Grouse Initiative "the Conservation Initiative of the Century" drawing a parallel between the actions taken by "The Conservation President," Roosevelt, and Chief White and the NRCS. White received a standing ovation while accepting the award.



Shown are, from left to right, Tom Remington, State Director, Colorado Division of Wildlife, NRCS Chief Dave White, and San Stiver, WAFWA Sage Grouse Coordinator.

Rangeland Utilization Monitoring DVD

"Rangeland Utilization Monitoring - A Rancher's Perspective" discusses the benefits of rangeland utilization monitoring. Montana Ranchers demonstrate the utilization monitoring process and talk about why monitoring and evaluation are important tools for managing their rangelands.

The DVD can be requested by e-mail from MT-nrcs-publications@one.usda.gov. Be sure to include the title of the DVD and your mailing address with your request.



Winter rye and winter peas coming up in Jacob Cowgill's seasonal high tunnel near Great Falls, Montana, March 25, 2011. Photo courtesy Jacob Cowgill.

Seasonal High Tunnel Update

Patrick Hensleigh, Agronomist

Producers may now use a double layer of inflated polyethylene, in addition to ventilation systems, for the high tunnel revised interim practice (NB_450_11_5). There is no additional money in the cost list for the double layers, but producers can install it and meet NRCS standards and specs.

Dramatic No-Till Findings in USDA Wheat Study

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

The *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* reports a research study led by USDA hydrologist John Williams concludes no-till production by wheat farmers in Oregon and Washington significantly reduced soil erosion and protected water quality. Research plots were established in two small drainage areas of a watershed located in northeast Oregon. For three years, the scientists measured run-off and sediment levels at the mouth of each drainage channel after each rainfall occurred. They reported erosion was generated by 13 rainfalls from tilled fields, but only three rainfalls caused erosion in no-till fields. The report also concluded there was 70% more run-off and 52 times more eroded material from conventionally tilled fields than from no-till fields.

Here in Montana, USDA Research Agronomist Bart Stevens reports studies he's conducted on the use of strip-tilling for sugar beets indicate reduced soil erosion and lower fuel costs, but found the practice made it more difficult for the plant to make use of applied nitrogen. Stevens works at the Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory in Sidney. He said that strip tilling prepares the seedbed in a single pass using an implement that tills just the part of the soil where the beets are to be planted. He also said that his study has been underway for six years. He explained that the plant residue stays, reducing the loss of moisture from the soil, and protecting the seedlings from wind damage and blowing soil.

Federally Funded Study Concludes No-Till Farming Reduces Greenhouse Gas

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

Researchers at Purdue University have released the findings of a federally funded study that indicate farmers can more efficiently use nitrogen-based fertilizers by practicing no-till farming. The study concludes no-till practices slow the break-down of fertilizers in the soil. The study, which focused on fields where corn and soybeans were alternated each year, found no-till fields released



57% less nitrous oxide than chisel tilling and 40% less gas than fields tilled with moldboard plows.

The study findings are published in the January-February issue of the *Soil Science Society of America Journal*.

Soil Health and Functionality

Patrick Hensleigh, Agronomist

The Soil Health Training Workshop was held in Billings on Feb 15th -17th, with approximately 40 people attending. The focus was on soil health with speakers giving presentations on soil health principles, soil biology and microbial processes, using cover crops to improve soil health, grazing systems for soil health, no till systems, legume research, and cover crops species for Montana. Participations were provided with facts, demonstrations, case studies, resources and other information on how to improve soil health. There was much interaction between speakers and NRCS staff with great—and at times somewhat lively—discussions on soil health and other topics.



Jon Stika, Cropping Systems.



Dr. Kris Nichols, Soil Biology.

Chief Plenty Coups Cottonwood Tree Cuttings

Jeremy Not Afraid, District Conservationist, Crow Agency

On February 15th, Chief Plenty Coups State Park welcomed students from Little Big Horn College (LBHC) and NRCS employees from both the Bridger Plant Materials Center (PMC) and the Crow Agency field office. The shared mission of the day was to get cuttings from the native cottonwood trees at the Park and from the cottonwood trees Chief Plenty Coups planted at his home more than 100 years ago.

Chief Plenty Coups State Park is situated on the Crow Reservation near the town of Pryor, Montana, and was the home to the last chief of the Crow Tribe, Plenty Coups. As a young boy, Plenty Coups fasted in the Crazy Mountains and received a vision that showed him many things to help him throughout his life.

In one part of these visions, Plenty Coups was shown three springs in the Pryor area and he chose a spring that came out from the base of a cottonwood tree. Near this Sacred Spring is where he later built his home on the Crow Reservation.

The afternoon started off inside the park's visitor center with students from LBHC. A prayer and brief history of Chief Plenty Coups and his home site was provided by Vincent Goes Ahead, Jr. Mr. Goes Ahead, a Crow Tribal member, is a resident of Pryor and a member of the "Friends of Plenty Coups" organization. Following Mr. Goes Ahead, Joe Scianna and Susan Winslow

from the Bridger PMC gave an overview of the process of getting cuttings from the cottonwoods at the Park and how they will be prepared at the PMC for replanting in the spring of 2012. Unlike plants grown from seed, Scianna explained, trees grown from cuttings will be virtual genetic matches of the trees that Plenty Coups planted at his home and of the cottonwood at the Sacred Spring near Plenty Coups' house.

Now it was time for the students to get to work. Almost 200 cuttings were collected from the site with the goal of 100 "Plenty Coups" cottonwood trees to be planted in 2012. The group was fortunate to have a 50-degree day in February to collect the cuttings.

The Crow Tribe has expressed interest in planting some of the "Plenty Coups" cottonwood trees at the 180-acre Tribally-owned Cline's Island. Cline's is an island within the Big Horn River, from which 20 acres of Russian olive and saltcedar were removed in 2009 through the EQIP Russian Olive/Saltcedar Special Initiative.

The remaining cuttings from the "Plenty Coups" cottonwood trees will be distributed back to Chief Plenty Coups State Park, Little Big Horn College, and various schools on the Crow Reservation.



Facts Regarding Lightning

Scott Oviatt, Hydrologist

Lightning is often overlooked as a danger in our jobs and while recreating on our leisure time. It is important to keep in mind that lightning is very dangerous and claims many lives each year. There were:

- 29 lightning fatalities in 2010
- 34 lightning fatalities in 2009
- 28 lightning fatalities in 2008

Lightning Safety on the Job

Some workers are at greater risk than others.

People who work outdoors in open spaces, on or near tall objects, or with conductive materials such as metal have a large exposure to lightning risks. Workers in these occupations are among those with the most risk:

- Logging
- Explosives handling or storage
- Heavy equipment operation
- Plumbing and pipefitting
- Construction and building maintenance
- Farming and field labor
- Telecommunications field repair
- Power utility field repair

When thunderstorms threaten, don't start anything you can't quickly stop.

Pay attention to the daily forecasts so you know what to expect during the day. Also pay attention to early signs of thunderstorms: high winds, dark clouds, rain, distant thunder, or lightning. At this point, do not start any new task that you can't quickly stop.

Assess your lightning risk and take precautionary action.

During thunderstorms, no place out-

side is safe, but you can minimize your risk by assessing the lightning threat and taking the appropriate actions. Count the number of seconds from when you see the lightning flash until you hear the thunder. If you hear thunder, lightning is close enough to strike you. Stop what you're doing and seek safety in a substantial building. If a substantial building is not available, a metal-topped vehicle with the windows up is your next best choice.

Objects and equipment to avoid during thunderstorms.

- Stay off of and away from anything tall or high, including rooftops, scaffolding, utility poles, ladders, trees, and large equipment such as bulldozers, cranes, backhoes, track loaders, and tractors.
- Do not touch materials or surfaces that can conduct electricity, including metal scaffolding, metal equipment, utility lines, water, water pipes, and plumbing.

Personal Lightning Safety Tips

1. PLAN in advance your evacuation and safety measures. When you first see lightning or hear thunder, activate your emergency plan. Now is the time to go to a building or a vehicle. Lightning often precedes rain, so don't wait for the rain to begin before suspending activities.

2. IF OUTDOORS...Avoid water. Avoid the high ground. Avoid open spaces. Avoid all metal objects including electric wires, fences, machinery, motors, power tools, etc. Unsafe places include underneath canopies, small

picnic or rain shelters, or near trees.

Where possible, find shelter in a substantial building or in a fully enclosed metal vehicle such as a car, truck or a van with the windows completely shut. If lightning is striking nearby when you are outside, you should:

A. Crouch down. Put feet together. Place hands over ears to minimize hearing damage from thunder.

B. Avoid proximity (minimum of 15 ft.) to other people.

3. IF INDOORS... Avoid water. Stay away from doors and windows. Do not use the telephone. Take off head sets. Turn off, unplug, and stay away from appliances, computers, power tools, and TV sets. Lightning may strike exterior electric and phone lines, inducing shocks to inside equipment.

4. SUSPEND ACTIVITIES for 30 minutes after the last observed lightning or thunder.

5. INJURED PERSONS do not carry an electrical charge and can be handled safely. Apply First Aid procedures to a lightning victim if you are qualified to do so. Call 911 or send for help immediately.

6. KNOW YOUR EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS.

For more information and statistics on lightning go to the following link: <http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/more.htm>.



Mary Meier, registered clinical exercise physiologist and manager/owner of Health Balance in Bozeman, discussed nutrition and healthy lifestyles at the State Safety Conference.



Montana Highway Patrol Trooper Pat McLaughlin opened the State Safety Conference with an entertaining presentation about driving safely.



Bart Huber, NRCS State Administrative Officer for Montana, discussed safety policy issues and solicited input from employees on safety ideas at the State Safety Conference.



All-Employee Safety Conference

Lori Valadez, Public Affairs

Approximately 260 Montana NRCS employees attended a State Safety Conference, Jan. 12-13, 2011, at the Holiday Inn, Bozeman. "We are having this training because I think the subject of safety is very important," said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana. "We need to make safety a priority for the agency; integrate it into our culture." The day and a half training included sessions on defensive driving, occupational and outdoor safety, hazardous materials, office ergonomics, healthy lifestyles and CPR.

Flood Preparation Tips

With Spring approaching, now is the time to start preparing for the possibility of flooding.

FEMA suggests you consider purchasing flood insurance. In Montana, the cost is around \$600 and there is usually a one-month waiting period before it takes effect. Since 1978 Montana residents have collected more than \$5.5 million in insurance reimbursements.

Make sure downspouts carry water several feet from your house in a well drained area – about 2500 gallons of water will come from a 1,000 sq foot roof with one foot of snow depth across the roof.

Move snow on the ground away from the house to prevent a wet basement. If the ground is sloped 1 inch per foot near the house, moving the snow just 3-5 feet will reduce problems.

Clean and examine your sump pump if you have one. Test your sump pump by pouring water into the pit. Make sure the discharge pump carries water several feet away from the house.

Remove snow from rural yards to minimize soft wet soil conditions.

Anchor any fuel tanks to prevent them from being torn free by floodwaters.

Have a licensed electrician raise electrical components at least 12 inches

above your home's projected flood elevation.

Place your furnace and water heater on masonry blocks or pressure treated lumber.

Plan and practice a family evacuation route.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be the "family contact" in case your family is separated during a flood.

Visit www.FloodSmart.gov to learn more about potential flood risks, flood insurance and how to prepare for floods.





Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. staff and board members meet with Senator Jon Tester for a Saturday breakfast at Owl Café, in Laurel, MT. Pictured from left to right: Lisa Skriner, Joel Bertolino, Chris Mehus, Jillann Knutson, Senator Jon Tester, Katie Callahan, and daughter standing in front; seated left to right, chairman, Chuck Egan and Vice-chairman, Marvin Carter.

The National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils Announces Award to Beartooth RC&D Council

Carla M. Lawrence, Beartooth RC&D Coordinator

The National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils is pleased to announce that Beartooth Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council of Joliet, Montana, has been awarded membership into the national Circle of Diamonds program.

In becoming a member of the Circle of Diamonds, Beartooth RC&D Council has demonstrated its positive impact on the quality of life within its local area. Like other Circle of Diamonds members, it strives to always follow sound management principles and recognizes that its community accountability directly relates to its organizational structure, the processes it uses, and the outcome it attains.

In earning the Circle of Diamonds membership, Beartooth RC&D Council has shown its ability to main-

tain the specific benchmarks sets forth in the program guidelines. This mark of excellence shows its transparency, integrity, and strong commitment to the RC&D mission.

RC&D Councils lead community action to sustain and improve the quality of natural resources and community life in their council areas. Councils are composed of volunteers who serve their communities in all 50 states and U.S. territories. The Circle of Diamonds program acknowledges that RC&D Councils are fulfilling the requirements laid out for the RC&D program and adhering to sound management guidelines.

More information is available on the National Association of RC&D Councils' website at <http://www.rcdnet.org>.

Ladies Ag Night in Hardin a Success!

Seanna Sparks, District Conservationist, Hardin Field Office

The Hardin NRCS Field Office, Big Horn County Farm Service Agency (FSA), and MSU Extension hosted a Ladies Ag Night on January 20th, 2011 at the MSU Extension Office. There was no charge to attend the meeting and a free supper was provided, as well as some fun door prizes. Over fifty women (and one little cowgirl) were in attendance. Afterward, everyone had great things to say about the meeting and the quality of the speakers.

Mary Rumph, an Extension Agent and rancher from Broadus, Montana, was the first speaker of the evening. Her topic was "The Role(s) of Women in Agriculture." She had some great suggestions about how to manage everyday farming and ranching issues, and also had some funny life experiences to share. Seanna Sparks, District Conservationist for the Hardin Field Office, made a presentation about plant identification, covering a number of different plants that are common to Big Horn County. Keshia Lind, the County Executive Director for the Big Horn County FSA, discussed the different programs that are provided through the FSA.

What the organizers of the meeting were most proud of is how much local support was provided. All of the sponsors for the meeting were local businesses and organizations. All of the door prizes donated for the meeting were from area businesses, too. We are looking at making Ladies Ag Night in Hardin an annual affair. If anyone has suggestions for future meeting topics, please let us know!

USDA Notice to Women and Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers: Compensation for Claims of Discrimination

Bozeman - March 11, 2011 - If you are a female farmer or rancher or a Hispanic farmer or rancher and you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000 because you are female, or because you are a Hispanic, you may be eligible to apply for compensation, the USDA State Food & Agriculture Council (SFAC) in Montana announced in joint news release issued today.

You might be eligible if:

- you sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing from USDA during that period; and
- the loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
- you believe these actions occurred because you are female or Hispanic.

“We want all producers who may be eligible to be aware of this claims process for female and Hispanic farmers and ranchers, as well as the recent settlements with Native American and African American farmers and ranchers, so they can come forward and participate in these processes,” said Matthew Jones, State Director of Rural Development (RD) in Montana, who serves as this year’s chair of the SFAC. The SFAC is comprised of State-level agency heads of the three USDA partner agencies - RD State Director Matthew Jones, Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Bruce Nelson and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Joyce Swartzendruber - with membership from other USDA agencies in Montana.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims package in the female and Hispanic farmers claims process, you can call the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the Website: www.farmerclaims.gov.

In 2011, a Class Administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or Website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process. In order to participate, you must submit a claim to the Claims Administrator by the end of the claims period.

The claims process offers a streamlined alternative to litigation and provides at least \$1.33 billion in compensation,

plus up to \$160 million in farm debt relief, to eligible Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers.

The claims process provides up to \$50,000 for each women or Hispanic farmer who can show that USDA denied them a loan or loan servicing for discriminatory reasons for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000. Hispanic or female farmers who provide additional proof and meet other requirements can receive \$50,000. Successful claimants may also be eligible for funds to pay the taxes on their awards and for forgiveness of certain existing USDA loans. There are no filing fees or other costs to claimants to participate in the program. Participation is voluntary, and individuals who opt not to participate are not precluded by the program from filing a complaint in court.

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination against USDA or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination by USDA, you should contact your counsel regarding your claims process. USDA cannot provide legal advice to you. You are not required to hire an attorney to file a claim, but you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community for additional guidance.

Audio and video public service announcements in English and Spanish from Secretary Vilsack and downloadable print and web banner ads on the Hispanic and women farmer claims process are available at: <http://www.usda.gov/PSAs Print and WebBanner Ads.xml>. For more information, contact the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the following Website: www.farmerclaims.gov.

This announcement follows the Obama Administration’s settlement of litigation brought by Native American farmers and ranchers and African American farmers. Any Native American farmer or rancher who was denied a Farm Loan or Loan Servicing by the USDA between Jan. 1, 1981 and Nov. 24, 1999, may be eligible for benefits from a Class Action Settlement. To request a Claims Package or for more information, call 1-888-233-5506 or visit www.IndianFarmClass.com. African-American farmers who submitted a request to file a late claim on or between October 13, 1999 and June 18, 2008 under the 1999 settlement in the earlier class action known as *Pigford v. Glickman* (“Pigford”) and who did not receive a merits determination of their discrimination claim should call 1-866-950-5547 or 1-866-472-7826 or visit www.blackfarmercase.com.



Malta Area Ranchers Demonstrate Conservation Values

For generations ranchers in the Malta area have demonstrated their commitment to conservation practices and good rangeland management. This area is a key habitat for prairie land bird species. Three ranchers located in that area continue to actively implement new conservation practices: Kevin Ross of the Mule Tracks Ranch, Leo Barthelmess of Barthelmess Ranch, and Dale Veseth of Veseth Ranch. Each have consistently implemented conservation practices through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Programs (EQIP) and have implemented additional EQIP programs in the past five years for livestock watering and rangeland management practices. All three are participating in Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) programs with the NRCS to enhance practices on their grazing land. These ranchers have also taken advantage of the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). Leo Barthelmess is planning to participate in another CCPI contract for 2011 that will support burning and additional fencing. Approximately 70,000 acres of ranchland are under NRCS-related conservation contracts in this area. The actions of these ranchers speak loudly. They fully support conservation of Montana's natural resources.

Human Resources Report

New Employees

- Heather Higgs, Office Assistant, Bozeman State Office
- Chad Miller, Civil Engineering Technician, Missoula Field Office
- Brian Domonkos, Natural Resource Specialist (Water Supply Specialist), Bozeman State Office
- Jacob Monson, Office Assistant, Bozeman Area Office
- Stacy Pease, Soil Conservationist, Hamilton Field Office
- Lindsay Wilsey, Rangeland Management Specialist, Dillon Field Office
- Deborah Perry, Office Assistant, Choteau Field Office

Promotions

- Wanda Rouwhorst, Office Assistant, Big Timber Field Office
- Kailee Bickford, Soil Conservationist, Deer Lodge Field Office
- Eva Muller, Senior Regional Soil Scientist, Bozeman State Office
- Rebecca Wolenez, District Conservationist, Ekalaka Field Office
- Rebecca Ahlgren, Soil Conservationist Technician, Roundup Field Office
- Ken Scalzone, Soil Scientist, Dillon MLRA Soil Survey Office
- Ted Nelson, Soil Conservationist, Columbus Field Office
- Kate Norvell, Agronomist, Bozeman Area Office
- Bryan Fitzgerald, Soil Conservationist Technician, Jordan Field Office

USDA-NRCS
 10 E. Babcock St., Rm 443
 Bozeman, MT, 59715
www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov
 406-587-6971

Upcoming Events

For up-to-date conservation and agriculture-related events and activities in Montana, visit <http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/news/events.html>.

April 2011

- ❑ Implementing Early Detection and Rapid Response Using INVADERS Database Workshop, April 8, Bozeman
- ❑ Montana Envirothon, April 18-19, Lewistown
- ❑ Earth Day, April 22

June 2011

- ❑ Montana Range Days, June 13-15, Deer Lodge
- ❑ Montana Youth Range Camp, June 27-July 1, Jordan

July 2011

- ❑ Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp, July 17-22, Lubrecht State Forest



"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audio-tape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."