



# Montana NRCS Conservation Update

June 2010 Quarterly Newsletter [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov)



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## Message from the State Conservationist

Joyce Swartzendruber

Montana NRCS has been extremely busy this quarter, and I think this edition of our newsletter illustrates the activities very well for you. We are in the second round of the 2008-authorized Conservation Stewardship Program signup, and offices have also been very busy with our regular funding programs, EQIP, WHIP, WRP, FRPP, and GRP. New to NRCS this summer is a special Sage Grouse Initiative through EQIP and WHIP, that is intended to help ranchers voluntarily provide better habitat for the species. This has become a very high priority for NRCS in 11 western states, to keep the Greater Sage grouse off of the Endangered Species List and keep our ranchers and ranches in business. I'm also very proud to announce that we have re-formed a watershed planning team in the state office, and it is now fully staffed with a biologist, economist, engineer, and resource conservationist. They have taken on a half-dozen planning projects already and we hope this effort can help conservation districts and producers across Montana take more advantage of some of the funding opportunities we have available in USDA.

## Range Days - A Successful 34th Year

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

An estimated 350 people participated in this year's Montana Range Days at Miles City. At least 16 Montana NRCS employees participated as instructors, judges and presenters. The oldest working truck in the entire fleet of the Natural Resources Conservation Service was on display along with NRCS videos and our 75th anniversary poster.



*Ecosystem Explorers bag and tag range plants at Montana Range Days.*

The Hall of Fame Award this year was presented to Jim Rose, FFA Instructor at Clyde Park, MT. Danny Pratt won two coveted scholarships, the Harold and Lillian Jensen Scholarship and the Bob Sitz Memorial Scholarship. The Montana Range Days Scholarship winner is Loni Blackman of Wolf Creek. The illustrated talk winners were Loni Blackman, First Place; Brandon Gold of Ulm, MT, Second Place, and Third Place went to Alexandria Nelson from Harlowton. Andrew Gold received the highest number of points but because he won the competition last year, he was not eligible to receive the First Place Award this year. NRCS State Conservationist Joyce Swartzendruber spoke at the banquet.

NRCS premiered its newest video *Been Around a Long Time* featuring historic photos and discussion with veteran conservationists Art Christianson and Byron Martinel from Beaverhead County.

# 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - A Peek at the Past Soil Conservation in the New Deal Congress

Office of History and Preservation, Office of the Clerk,  
U.S. House of Representatives  
[http://clerk.house.gov/art\\_history/highlights.html?action=view&intlID=463](http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/highlights.html?action=view&intlID=463)

April 27, 1935

On this date, as blistering heat sapped the American West of much-needed moisture, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. Throughout Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and the Dakotas during the early 1930s, high winds stirred the arid soil, loosened after years of rapid homesteading and commercial agriculture. Nearly 180 dust storms ripped across the southern plains during 1933, a prelude to the major storm of May 1934, which whipped an estimated 350 million tons of earth into the sky. It trapped people in their homes and suffocated cattle on the plains. Dust fell like snow in Chicago and eastern cities. Sailors on ships 300 miles off the Atlantic coast swept Kansas soil from their decks. Similar storms plagued America's center well into 1935. In response, western House Democrats introduced H.R. 7054, "to provide for the protection of land resources against soil erosion, and for other purposes." Unlike the ecological forces at work on the plains, John Marvin Jones of Texas explained, "the bill is simple and easily understood." Bill sponsor John Joseph Dempsey of New Mexico—whom colleagues described as a "soil erosion enthusiast"—argued that the measure was of national interest, and therefore vital. John Conover Nichols of Oklahoma, whose state dust storms hit particularly hard, noted that in uprooting its subsoil, the United States "[had] been living in a fool's paradise, with respect to the security of [its] most basic asset." With the understanding that such storms posed a national threat, the New Deal Congress approved the bill. The ambitious act established the Soil Conservation Service to combat soil erosion and to preserve natural resources, "control floods, prevent impairment of reservoirs, and maintain the navigability of rivers and harbors, protect public health, public lands and relieve unemployment." The Soil Conservation Act rewarded farmers who planted grasses and legumes to support the soil, rather than commercial crops which exhausted its nutrients—a difficult measure for many farmers to agree to during the Great Depression. The act, however, classified commercial harvests like wheat as a threat to the plain's soil, giving farmers a chance to wean their fields from surplus crops at the federal government's expense. While the act appropriated no money upfront, it left open the option to fund projects with "such sums as Congress may from time to time determine necessary." President Roosevelt's advisor, Rexford Tugwell, lauded the measure. "Under this plan," said Tugwell, "it will pay farmers, for the first time, to be social-minded, to do something for all instead of for himself alone."



President Franklin D. Roosevelt

At this year's Montana Range Days in Miles City, NRCS premiered its newest video, *Been Around a Long Time*, featuring historic photos and discussion with veteran conservationist Art Christianson and Byron Martinel from Beaverhead County.

Copies of the DVD can be ordered at

[MT-nrcs-publications@one.ussda.gov](mailto:MT-nrcs-publications@one.ussda.gov)



# Buffalo Rapids ARRA Project Tour

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

An irrigation project funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act at Buffalo Rapids, near Terry is near completion. State Conservationist Joyce Swartzendruber joined representatives of the Buffalo Rapids Irrigation District 1 and District 2 and members of the news media for a project tour. George Jordan of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service briefed the group on plans to install large fish screens (shown below) in the Yellowstone River in an effort to restore the population of Pallid Sturgeon,



*Fish screen to help restore pallid sturgeon in the Yellowstone River*

The group also visited an area where the work was completed. A large pivot system was installed and pipeline was buried at the site to improve delivery of irrigation water. The project cost was \$203,000 and is expected to improve irrigation water quality and quantity. The primary purpose is water conservation. All water for the project is diverted from the Yellowstone River through five pumping plants and one re-lift plant. The amount of energy needed to power the pumps is expected to decline. It is estimated 600 acre-feet per year will remain in the river as a result of this project.



*New center pivot system*



*Buffalo rapids tour group*

By installing new pivot irrigation systems and burying pipes to carry water, the flow of the Yellowstone will increase, benefiting the pallid sturgeon and an estimated 450 residents who live in the project area and will benefit from a cost reduction for pumping the water. On-farm efficiency for producers will also improve.

Partners in this Buffalo Rapids Irrigation project included the Buffalo

Rapids Irrigation District, the Custer County Conservation District, the Prairie County Conservation District, the Dawson County Irrigation District, the U.S. Department of the Interior-Bureau of Reclamation and NRCS.





The People's Garden crew plants and waters the new garden at the USDA Service Center in Chester, Montana.

## Montana Responds to People's Garden Challenge

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

People's Garden projects are now underway in every state. In Montana, there is a garden project underway at the Chester FSA-NRCS Office location. Vegetables and pollinator friendly plants are growing in a garden at the office. In Sheridan, a garden is now planted on land donated by a local couple for the project. That is the Jackson Community Garden. NRCS personnel volunteered to help with that project. Produce from the garden will be offered to volunteers and local non-profit food suppliers. Volunteers are also working in Sheridan to incorporate schools into the effort. At Glasgow, NRCS and Valley County Extension Service's Master Gardener program volunteers are planting a garden that features native trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs. The garden, located at Sullivan Park, has been planted with trees and shrubs - grasses and forbs to follow. While not meeting the national goal of providing fresh vegetables to the needy, the Glasgow project is an effort to demonstrate how native gardens provide a good alternative to typical flower gardens because they use less water, require less fertilizer and will still attract birds and pollinating insects. The Extension Agent, Master Gardener students and NRCS employees have donated more than \$200 to purchase tree and shrub trees not available from the Bridger Plant Materials Center and have donated limited fencing materials. NRCS volunteers will provide what is needed to ensure the plants will survive.

Last year the People's Garden campaign was launched at the USDA headquarters in Washington D.C. with the planting of a garden. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has issued a challenge to all USDA Agencies to create a

People's Garden at every USDA facility. Over the past year more than 400 gardens have been created across the country. USDA is partnering with hundreds of organizations at the local level.

### The People's Gardens should:

- ❑ Benefit the community by creating spaces for leisure or recreation for the public, provide a harvest of food for a local food bank or charitable cause, provide a wildlife friendly landscape, be a rain garden to absorb storm water run-off and protect the soil from erosion.
- ❑ Be collaborative – an effort between volunteer groups, neighbors or community organizations and partnerships.
- ❑ Incorporate sustainable practices by including gardening methods that mature, maintain and protect the environment with practices such as:
  - o Capturing rainwater in rain barrels
  - o Composting and mulching
  - o Planting native species
  - o Encouraging beneficial insects that feed on destructive plants

For more information on People's Gardens: [www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden](http://www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden) or find real-time updates at [twitter.com/peoplesgarden](https://twitter.com/peoplesgarden) or on the USDA Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/USDA](https://www.facebook.com/USDA) for photos go to [www.flickr.com/photos/usda.gov](https://www.flickr.com/photos/usda.gov)

# Successful Sage-Grouse Training Concurrently in 11 States

Wendell Gilgert and Stacy Mitchell, NRCS Portland, Oregon

What do you do when you have a new Initiative to protect and provide habitat for sage grouse in 11 states and the training materials must be put together and delivered to the field office professionals in those states in approximately 2 months? You look to technology. That is just what Wendell Gilgert, wildlife biologist at the NRCS West National Technology Support Center did. Working with WNTSC rangeland management specialist, Pat Shaver, he pulled in a core group of people from each of the 11 involved states, determined the 10 best sites across those states, brushed up on ‘my meeting’—a software program that allows Internet linkage to multiple sites and allows materials at the sites to be uploaded for viewing by everyone—and picked the training days. While some things did not go as smoothly as hoped, the attendees were pleased they were meeting deadlines and were learning good lessons.

Almost 500 NRCS conservationists and partners concurrently received the

same 2 ½ days of classroom and in-field training to help farmers and ranchers in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming take steps to enhance and preserve sage-grouse habitat as well as sustain working ranches and farms in the western United States.

The sage grouse is a sage-steppe dwelling bird that’s found at elevations of 4,000 to 9,000 ft. in the 11 referenced states. The sage grouse population has declined significantly over the last



Three buses carried participants to a sage-grouse habitat area for the field portion of the Montana training.



several years, primarily because of the loss of sagebrush. An NRCS initiative to protect the bird and its habitat providing funding help through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is underway. The use of the two programs will allow a targeted approach that will provide landowners and managers with more alternatives for providing and protecting the bird’s habitat.

The training was not without its issues. Working around inadequate bandwidth, unstable Internet connections and server issues tested people’s patience at several of the training locations. In addition, weather affected field training and some sites were relocated due to accessibility. Despite these annoyances, partners and NRCS employees were pleased to hear sage grouse experts present the details of the bird’s habits and habitat needs. The general response was that “This was great training.”

Given the large number of people who needed to receive the training, the dispersed geographical nature of the delivery area, and the short time-frame to prepare, the training was a great success. The concerted effort by the NRCS State wildlife biologists, rangeland management specialists, and resource conservationists who made the local arrangements and led their local sessions made it work. One state specialist captured the upshot of the proceedings by stating: “All in all it was very good training. Now we just need to plan and implement.”

“After the last net trainings concluded, we talked for another hour and a half. Good stuff.”

# Grazing Management: Save the Grouse, Improve Grazing Land

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

Dennis Mercer and family are well-known ranchers in Montana and Wyoming. In 2007 Dennis made a decision to take greater control over his grazing land by developing a management plan. Dennis says there are now clear and positive results. The Mercers operate the Paint Rock Angus Ranch and he views the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Sage Grouse Initiative as a “win-win” – a win for producers and a win for the Sage Grouse whose habitat will be enhanced thanks to improved grazing management.

Dennis says it requires consistency and patience to stick with a management plan and give it the time needed to produce visible results. He says he is already seeing those results, especially in critical grass improvement on his ranch. He believes 8 to 10 years down the road he will have solid proof that grazing management practices have improved his grasses and his cattle. He also supports enhancing the habitat of the sage grouse by carefully managing grazing land and grazing patterns.

For nearly four years Dennis has worked with a grazing management plan. He says he’s encountered absolutely no negatives. He says a good management plan provides enough flexibility to quickly deal with any problem that may occur. He does suggest producers plan ahead, especially with an eye toward the Montana winter weather. It is critical, he suggests, to prepare your water sources for winter to assure cattle will have ample water through the cold winter months.

Many Montana ranchers, like Dennis are ahead of the game. Stephanie Downs and her husband are relatively

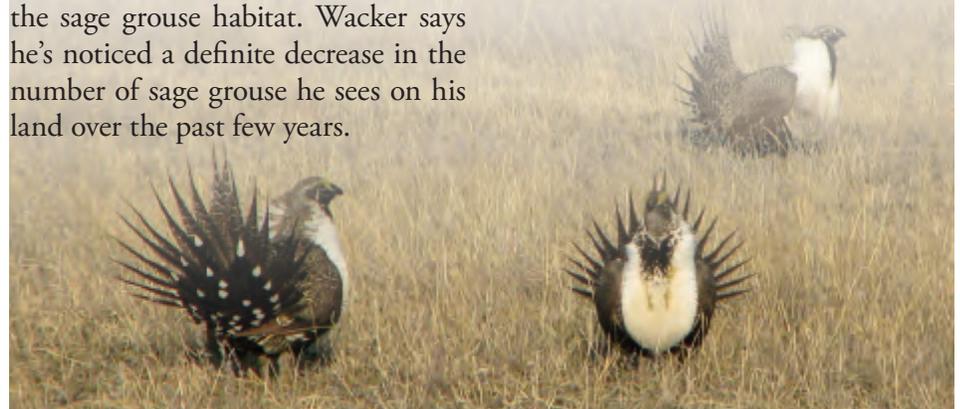
new to ranching. They operate a cow-calf and wheat operation north of Roundup. Stephanie says participation in the initiative has been especially helpful, allowing them to bring water to a dry pasture and install badly needed fencing. Stephanie says she is learning about the different types of grasses in Montana and the value of rotating those grasses. She agrees participation in the program is a “win-win” for the sage grouse and for their ranch. She says she’s already seeing improvements in the pasture although the measurement was somewhat clouded by a serious grasshopper infestation. She says she and her husband are very confident there will be positive long term benefits. She feels development of a grazing plan and the technical expertise provided by NRCS is putting their operation on the right path.

Roundup area rancher Duane Wacker, like the Downs, applied and received funding to obtain badly needed water for his pastures. Duane says managed grazing is improving the grass on his pastureland. Wacker signed on for a six year program and says when it is completed he has little doubt the pastureland improvement will be significant and long lasting. He favors taking action to protect the sage grouse habitat. Wacker says he’s noticed a definite decrease in the number of sage grouse he sees on his land over the past few years.

The sage grouse is one of seven species of grouse in North America. It is known as the Greater Sage Grouse and its very survival is of increasing concern to scientists. The Greater Sage Grouse is a permanent resident, still surviving in Montana, Wyoming, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nevada, Utah, Western Colorado, Eastern California and the Canadian Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Greater Sage Grouse currently occupy 258,000 square miles of the sagebrush ecosystem in the 11 Western states. In Montana there is about 27 million acres of sagebrush steppe capable of providing habitat for sage grouse. Because a significant amount of Montana sagebrush habitat is privately owned, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) NRCS is a key partner for sage grouse conservation.

In recent years, the Greater Sage Grouse has lost 44 percent of its habitat. It is estimated the sage grouse population 100 years ago numbered more than 16 million. Today it is estimated total numbers range from 150-thousand to 200-thousand. Several other sagebrush-dependant wildlife species are experiencing population declines. These include the Brewer’s sparrow,



Males “strut their stuff” at Montana lek site.

Sage-thrasher, Pygmy-rabbit, and Sagebrush-vole.

There are multiple causes of the habitat decline. The number of fires and the total area burned in those blazes have increased over the past 20 years. Cheat-grass and other exotic plants have invaded lower-elevation sagebrush habitats. At higher elevations juniper and pinion woodland invasions have altered habitat disturbances. Land conversions have separated habitat patches. Sagebrush habitats that were once continuous are now separated by agriculture, urbanization, and development. A growing network of roads, power lines, railroads, and communication towers have had an impact. Over time the landscapes have become highly fragmented surrounding sagebrush ecosystems.



*Flat-topped posts make a handy stalking point for sage-grouse predators like this golden eagle.*

In the Malta area, ranchers have been concerned for some time about the declining numbers of sage grouse in the West. Several have expressed the belief that there is a relationship between sustainable ranching operations and sage grouse survival. Rancher Leo Barthamus is known to have championed the effort to stop the decline in the number of sage grouse and to take conservation measures to protect the birds, the sagebrush and enhance grazing land for Montana ranchers. Barthamus won the coveted Montana Environmental Stewardship Award in 2004. Fellow Malta area rancher Dale Veseth joined other leaders in the industry supporting the sage grouse

strategic plan drafted by NRCS in Montana. Veseth says he too feels the sage grouse initiative does offer a “win-win” strategy for the sage grouse and for private landowners in the state.

NRCS Montana developed a Greater Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy to maintain and enhance sage grouse habitat and populations. Each of the 11 affected states are developing state specific strategies.

### The NRCS Montana strategy involves five steps:

- *Identify core areas where the largest benefit for sage grouse conservation can be attained.*
- *Expand NRCS sage grouse public education and outreach.*
- *Provide long-term protection through conservation easements of the best remaining habitat to prevent conversion to other uses.*
- *Improve health and habitat values associated with sagebrush communities through management and structural improvements.*
- *Develop and implement a comprehensive monitoring.*

Thirteen core areas have been identified in Montana that provide habitat for 75% of all birds in the state. The complete Montana strategy can be found on our website at [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov).

USDA NRCS is providing \$16 million this fiscal year for a national sage grouse initiative. Montana is allocated more than \$2 million. In Montana priority is given applicants who have an approved grazing plan and are located in a sage grouse populated section of the state. Improving sage grouse habitat promotes the overall

health of grazing land and the sustainability of working ranches. Financial and technical aid is being provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

### The primary goal is to saturate identified core areas with conservation:

- *that removes identified threats to the sage grouse,*
- *offers alternatives that maximize habitat quality,*
- *improves the long-term sustainability of the ranches.*

There is a close collaboration among many stakeholders in the 11 involved states, including state fish and wildlife agencies. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar have signed a far-reaching agreement to support the conservation of greater sage grouse and sage grouse eco-systems. NRCS Chief Dave White and Rowan Gold, Acting Director of Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service, have signed a partnership agreement to work together to protect the sage grouse habitat. Each affected state is to complete its strategic plan by the end of this year.

Site-specific plans are being developed with each participating landowner.

Dennis Mercer says he sees a very definite relationship between implementation of a good grazing management plan and the effort to protect sage grouse habitat

With patience and perseverance Mercer’s prediction that the next 8 to 10 years will bring proof positive that managed grazing is a win-win for livestock and for sage grouse will be right on target.

# Wibaux Cattlemen's Workshop

*Katrina Johnson, Wibaux District Conservationist*

The Wibaux Conservation District and the Wibaux Natural Resources Conservation Service hosted a 2 day Cattlemen's Workshop, on June 2 & 3. The event was held at the Wibaux Fairgrounds in Wibaux, Montana. The District and the NRCS would like to give special thanks to the Montana DNRC and the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative for grants received to host this workshop.

Speakers at the workshop were Curt Pate, speaking on low-stress livestock handling, Roland Kroos, speaking on holistic resource management and Beth Burritt, speaking on why animals choose to eat what they do. There were 55 people registered for the workshop which included both indoor sessions and also live animal demonstrations. This was a very edu-

cational session and the participants were very impressed with the speakers.

The Wibaux Conservation District and the Wibaux NRCS would like to thank the following for making this workshop possible: Bank of Baker, Stockman Bank, Glendive Livestock Exchange, First State Bank of Beach and Golva, Community First Bank of Glendive, Lost in Time Ranch, Ray Banister, Wibaux Vet Clinic, Golden Valley Soil Conservation District, Bank of the West, J&S Feeds of Glendive, Tastee Hut, Corner Market, Shamrock, Ranch and Farm of Glendive, Rainbow, Amslers Convenience Store, Prairie Lumber, Wibaux Frame Shop, Wibaux Coop Oil Co, Dakota Farm Equipment, West Plains Implement, Wibaux General Store, Miske



Ranch, Nelson Livestock Co, Weyer Salers, Petermann Ranch, Runnings of Baker, Fallon Co Vet Service, Bill Pelton, Northern Ag Network and the Wibaux Extension.

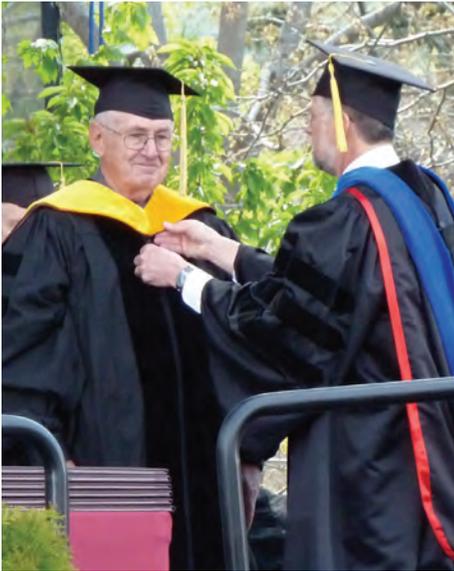
## The Andrew and Anne Laszlo Family Win 2010 National Wetlands Award – One of Six in Nation!

The Environmental Law Institute is honoring a Montana family. The Institute announced that six citizens from across the country are recognized for their exceptional and innovative contributions to wetlands conservation. The Andrew and Anne Laszlo family has permanently protected more than half of their 14,000-acre ranch—making it the largest wetland and stream restoration project of its kind in the state of Montana. Over the past five years, they have worked with federal, state, and private conservation partners to protect and restore a major portion of the O'Dell Creek headwaters in Madison County, part of an 8,000-acre wetland complex. The area was drained for grass production back in the 1950s, but since 2004, the restoration effort has filled or plugged 16,000 feet of drainage ditches, restored more than 500 acres of wetlands, and created 35,000 feet of stream channel and adjacent riparian habitat. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of bird species increased from 11 to 90. The Laszlo family sees the restoration effort as part of a broader vision that supports sustainable cattle ranching and provides habitat for fish and wildlife. The commitment and dedication of the Laszlo family has inspired local conservation organizations, agricultural producers

“Once again, ELI is proud to have worked with a team of leading experts to choose the winners of the national wetlands awards,” stated ELI President Leslie Carothers. “With our partners from six federal agencies, we look forward to an awards ceremony that showcases the remarkable contributions the winners have made to a healthy and productive environment.” These award winners have restored, researched, and protected thousands of acres of wetlands nationwide. Their examples should inspire individual citizens to act and make a difference to protect and improve these vital natural resources.

# John Hollenback, Rancher at Gold Creek Receives Honorary Doctorate University of Montana

Carla Lawrence, Beartooth RC&D



On May 15th, 2010, during the commencement ceremony at University of Montana, John Hollenback, rancher at Gold Creek, was one of four recipients that were awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the College of Arts and Sciences.

In 1957, John graduated from Powell County High School in Deer Lodge, and after the death of his father, he was unable to attend college because he was needed at the ranch. John was honored “for the people and resources of Montana that have benefitted from his many contributions to the conservation of natural resources and his many years of public service and leadership” and received his award during graduation ceremonies in May. John has been a long-time advocate for rangelands, Montana’s largest natural resources, which is evidenced by his continued service on the Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and the Governor’s Rangeland Resources Executive Committee (RREC), as well as the local conservation district and weed council. Congratulations John, you are very deserving!

## Young Farmers and Ranchers Express Concerns but Show Optimism

Rebecca Colnar, Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Profitability, increasing government regulations and the impact of activist groups are the top concerns of America’s leading young farmers and ranchers, according to a national survey conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Despite the challenges, 80 percent of those responding to AFBF’s 18th annual survey of young farmers and ranchers say they are more optimistic than they were five years ago, while 82 percent say they are better off than they were five years ago.

The informal survey shows young farmers and ranchers have a high level of apprehension about government climate change regulations, with 79 percent of those surveyed expressing high or very high concern.

“I think all young farmers and ranchers in Montana are watching the current climate change discussion in Washington,” notes Montana Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Rancher Chair Peter Taylor. “It has the potential to add another major hurdle to our operations. Input cost have skyrocketed in the last few years. Any regulations that have the potential to make those cost, i.e. fuel, fertilizer and equipment, increase even more is of major concern to our longevity as farmers and ranchers.”

A huge majority of those surveyed expressed concern about the impact of anti-animal agriculture activist groups on their farm and ranch operations. A total of 85 percent were concerned or very concerned about activist groups. Only 7 percent expressed little or no concern.

“From my point of view activist groups are emerging as the single biggest threat to agriculture in the United States. The budgets behind many of these organizations are by any standards enormous,” explains Taylor, who ranches in Kirby, Montana. “A lot of people do not realize is that with those huge budgets they are not only hoping to change public opinion about agriculture but they want to adopt legislation that aims at putting us out of business.”

Taylor goes on to say that everyone interested in helping agriculture needs to be vocal, both in their communities and on the internet. The survey shows the Internet is an important tool for young farmers and ranchers. Nearly 99 percent said they have access to and use the Internet, with the vast majority, 72 percent, saying they have access to a high-speed Internet connection. Only 20 percent rely on slower dial-up connections and 8 percent turn to more costly satellite connections.



## Full Leadership Team Training Meeting

Larry Cooper, Public Affairs

NRCS Supervisors and Program Managers from throughout the state gathered in Bozeman in April for three days of information-packed meetings. We would like to share with you some of the highlights:

Historian Hal Stearns addressed a luncheon celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. He talked about the tremendous economic loss and impact that hit Montana in the 1900s. Drought resulted in catastrophic crop losses in Montana in 1919. The drought, the depression and the 1930s dust bowls resulted in a mass migration out of the state. An estimated 50-thousand families forced from their farms fled Montana. An estimated 100-thousand Montanans found themselves jobless and living in poverty. That was nearly one-fifth of the entire population of the state at that time. During the Depression 214 banks in the state of Montana collapsed and

many small towns disappeared from the state. Today, said Stearns there are 81 banks remaining in Montana. Stearns said twice in the 1900s huge dust clouds blocked the sun from Montana skies.

Lane Price, the leader of the NRCS Streamlining Initiative Team detailed the process, the structure and the goals of the team. He said 11 sub-teams are

working to eliminate “stove piped” processes, policies and unnecessary tools. He said the effort should result in field personnel spending as much as 75% of their work time in the field working directly with producers and far less time on administrative tasks. Price said the culture of the agency will shift and conservation delivery will be simplified and streamlined.

He said the focus is on identifying resources and standardizing financial assistance requirements. More investment will be directed toward providing uniform and functional computer technology. Price said the team itself will continue to function as a permanent entity in the future.



**There were more than 30 posters displayed, produced by each field office. The winners of the post contest were Kyle Tackett of the Dillon Field Office and Don Feist of the Plains Field Office.**



## Neal R. Svendsen – Missoula, Montana

After a career covering more than 36 years, Neal Svendsen, Resource Soil Scientist/Wetland Specialist for the Missoula Area in western Montana retires on July 2, 2010.

Neal, a native of Hogeland and Chinook, Montana, graduated from Montana State University with a degree in Soil Science in 1976. He worked as a student trainee soil scientist with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in Chinook and Lewistown, Montana during the summers of 1974 and 1975.

Neal began his career with SCS in 1972 working two field seasons as an Engineering Aid in Chinook, Montana. During this time he assisted the Field Office with surveying and design for stockwater dams and pits, and land leveling projects along the Milk River.

After graduation in 1976 he started on the soil survey for Powell, Granite, and Deer Lodge Counties, Montana. In 1979 he accepted the Soil Survey Party Leader position (they were called Party Leaders in those days) in Fort Benton, Montana. Neal did a winter soil mapping detail to Levy County, Florida in 1988 and completed the 2.5 million acre soil survey of Chouteau County, Montana in 1992. After two years finishing the Phillips County Area, Montana Soil Survey, Neal accepted the area Resource Soil Scientist position in Missoula, Montana in 1994.

During his career in Missoula Neal provided on-site soil information for a variety of planning including irrigation water management and wetland determinations. He was instrumental in planning and installing erosion and re-habilitation measures following the major fires in the Bitterroot Valley in 2000, and assisted with fire damage assessments and re-habilitation for several years in western Montana since 2000.

Neal has provided soil education and outreach to students and other groups in most western Montana counties and schools over the past 16 years. Some of the most rewarding educational experiences were teaching high school Envirothon Team members that remembered him from their 6th grade outdoor classrooms, and even some who later became NRCS employees.

He helped numerous western Montana Counties develop criteria and lists for Locally Important Farmlands and has provided assistance to several local units of government, consultants, and other groups in understanding how to use soil survey information and apply Farmland Classifications.

Neal provided GIS, GPS, NRI, other technical support, and planning and contracting assistance to Field Offices in the Missoula Area for 16 years.

Neal plans to re-learn his golf swing, continue bowling, and maybe do some volunteer work with organizations involved with conservation. He will remain in Missoula, at least for a few years.



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## Madison Conservation District Launches Web Site



The Madison Conservation District, based in Ennis, has launched a new website at [www.madisoncd.org](http://www.madisoncd.org). The Madison Conservation District serves the majority of Madison County, excluding the areas served by the Ruby and Jefferson Valley Conservation District Offices.

The new site provides information on Madison Conservation District programs, projects, and the resources available to residents within the Madison Conservation District area. The website also contains complete information on the 310 law- the Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act. This law requires that any private individual or corporation proposing to undertake a project or construction activity in a perennial stream must first apply for a permit from the local conservation district. Permit applications, deadlines and information on the review process are all available at [www.madisoncd.org](http://www.madisoncd.org).

For additional information, please contact Sunni Heikes-Knapton, Madison Watershed Coordinator at (406) 682-3181 or [mwc@3rivers.net](mailto:mwc@3rivers.net).

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## 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>.

### Montana NRCS 75th Anniversary Events

- ❑ July 21-25, Gallatin County Fair, Bozeman; Includes a showing that is part of the NRCS's 75th Anniversary Celebration
- ❑ July 23, NRCS will host Conservation Day at the Gallatin County Fair
- ❑ July 24, NRCS Conservation Movie Matinee at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman
- ❑ July 30, Fort Belknap Milk River Days Powwow Parade
- ❑ July 30-August 7, Montana State Fair, Great Falls; NRCS Hosts Conservation Day
- ❑ July 31, Helena Last Chance Stampede Parade
- ❑ August 1, Townsend Parade
- ❑ August 6 & 7, Media and VIP tour of the Lower Birch Creek ARRA Project- NRCS Chief Regional Deputy, Robert Apodaca to join the tour
- ❑ August 10-15, Western Montana Fair, Missoula
- ❑ August 20, Northwest Montana Fair Parade, Kalispell
- ❑ August 21, Manhattan Potato Festival Parade

### July 2010

- ❑ 16-20, Montana Natural Resource Youth Camp, Lubrecht Experimental Forest
- ❑ 16-20, NACD 2010 Summer Legislative Conference, Washington, DC
- ❑ 18-21, 65th International Annual SWCS Conference

### August 2010

- ❑ 1-7, National Envirothon Competition, Fresno, California
- ❑ 9, MACD Board Tele Conference, for more information contact Jan Fontaine (406-443-5711)
- ❑ 13-15, Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering, Lewistown