

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Pathways

Summer 2022

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Important Dates to Remember

September 2022

Crow Rancher and Farmer Workshop
September 13, 2022

2022 Fall Watershed Tour - Drought and Climate Resilience in the Blackfeet Nation
September 14-16, 2022

Fall Conservation Chat with NRCS
September 16, 2022

Fall Conservation Chat with NRCS
September 21, 2022

Conservation Innovation Grants - On-Farm Trials
Apply by September 22, 2022

GLCI Cooperative Agreements
Submit project proposals by September 22, 2022

Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Partnership
Submit project proposals by September 23, 2022

Fall Conservation Chat with NRCS
September 27, 2022

October 2022

USDA Wetland Mitigation Banking Program
Apply by October 10, 2022

Conservation Innovation Grants - Classic
Apply by October 11, 2022

EQIP, CSP, RCPP Programs in Montana
Apply by October 28, 2022

A Note from the State Conservationist

Greetings Tribal producers and partners,

I'd like to take this opportunity to make sure you all know about our recent announcement of the application date for our current program funding cycle. NRCS takes applications year-round, but applications for this current round of funding must be submitted to your local NRCS office by **October 28, 2022**.

This date applies to the following programs and initiatives. For more information about each opportunity, visit your local USDA service center.

You can also find information on the NRCS Montana website at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov and click on Programs or What's Available in My County. Historically underserved producers may be eligible for the HU payment rate.



Pathways student, Leah Fisher (left), with State Conservationist, Tom Watson (right).

Conservation Incentive Contracts:

Conservation Incentive Contracts are an option under EQIP, with a focus on climate-smart forestry and agriculture and drought resilience management practices. EQIP-CIC provides financial assistance to adopt conservation activities on working landscapes. This opportunity will focus on socially disadvantaged producers or entities that are members of a socially disadvantaged group, including American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics.

Community Agriculture:

Building on the high tunnel initiative available in the past, the community agriculture initiative offers an expanded set of conservation practices tailored to the conservation needs of small-scale ag producers.

Joint Chiefs' Partnership Restoration Projects:

The U.S. Forest Service and NRCS are working together to improve the health of forests and reduce wildfire threats to communities where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. There are currently four projects in Montana, including the Connecting Fuels Treatments in the Salish Mountains and Whitefish Range Project, Fire Adapted Bitterroot Project, Gallatin Valley Forest Resiliency and Watershed Health Project, and the Libby Surround Project.

[Continued on page 2]



A Note from the State Conservationist

[Continued from page 1]

National On-Farm Energy Initiative:

Agricultural producers work with NRCS-approved technical service providers to develop agricultural energy management plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS may also provide assistance to implement recommended measures identified in the energy audit through the use of conservation practice standards.

National Organic Initiative:

Producers currently certified as organic, transitioning to organic, or National Organic Program exempt will have access to a broad set of conservation practices to assist in treating their resource concerns while fulfilling many of the requirements in an Organic System Plan.

National Water Quality Initiative:

This initiative focuses assistance in small watersheds to improve water quality where this is a critical concern. With the help of partners at the local, state and national level, NRCS identified priority watersheds in Montana where on-farm conservation investments will deliver the greatest water quality benefits. The two projects in Montana are located in the Lower Gallatin watershed (Camp and Godfrey Creeks) and the Shields River watershed.

Sage Grouse Initiative:

Producers can work with NRCS on three different components to improve sage-grouse habitat. One is a general category to implement prescribed grazing management practices. The others are to seed cropland back to perennial species to improve the connectivity for sage-grouse that depend on large, intact landscapes and the removal of conifers to increase nest success rates.

Targeted Implementation Plans:

Montana NRCS targets its investments in very specific areas to achieve clearly defined natural resource goals as identified by local partners. This approach harnesses the power of multiple producers in one area undertaking similar conservation projects to achieve a regional or landscape-scale result. There are nearly 100 local projects currently available in fiscal year 2023.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program:

The RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Currently, there are three RCPP land management projects in Montana, including the Big Game Habitat Improvement Project, Northern Great Plains Grassland Conservation Project, and the Gallatin Valley Land Trust project.

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. In Montana, historically underserved participants, including limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

The CSP is for working lands. For farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, CSP can help find new ways to meet resource and operation goals. All of the land in a producer's agricultural operation must be enrolled to be eligible for CSP.

This year, the Conservation Planning Workbook will be a required part of the CSP application package. Request a printed copy of the workbook from your local USDA service center.



If you are interested in NRCS's technical or financial assistance for conservation, I recommend you start working with your local office as soon as possible. Find contact information at farmers.gov/contact. Staff can help you to get started with planning and with the application process.

Your local Tribal conservationist or planner and I look forward to working with you to work toward your goals for your operation.

Take care,

Tom Watson

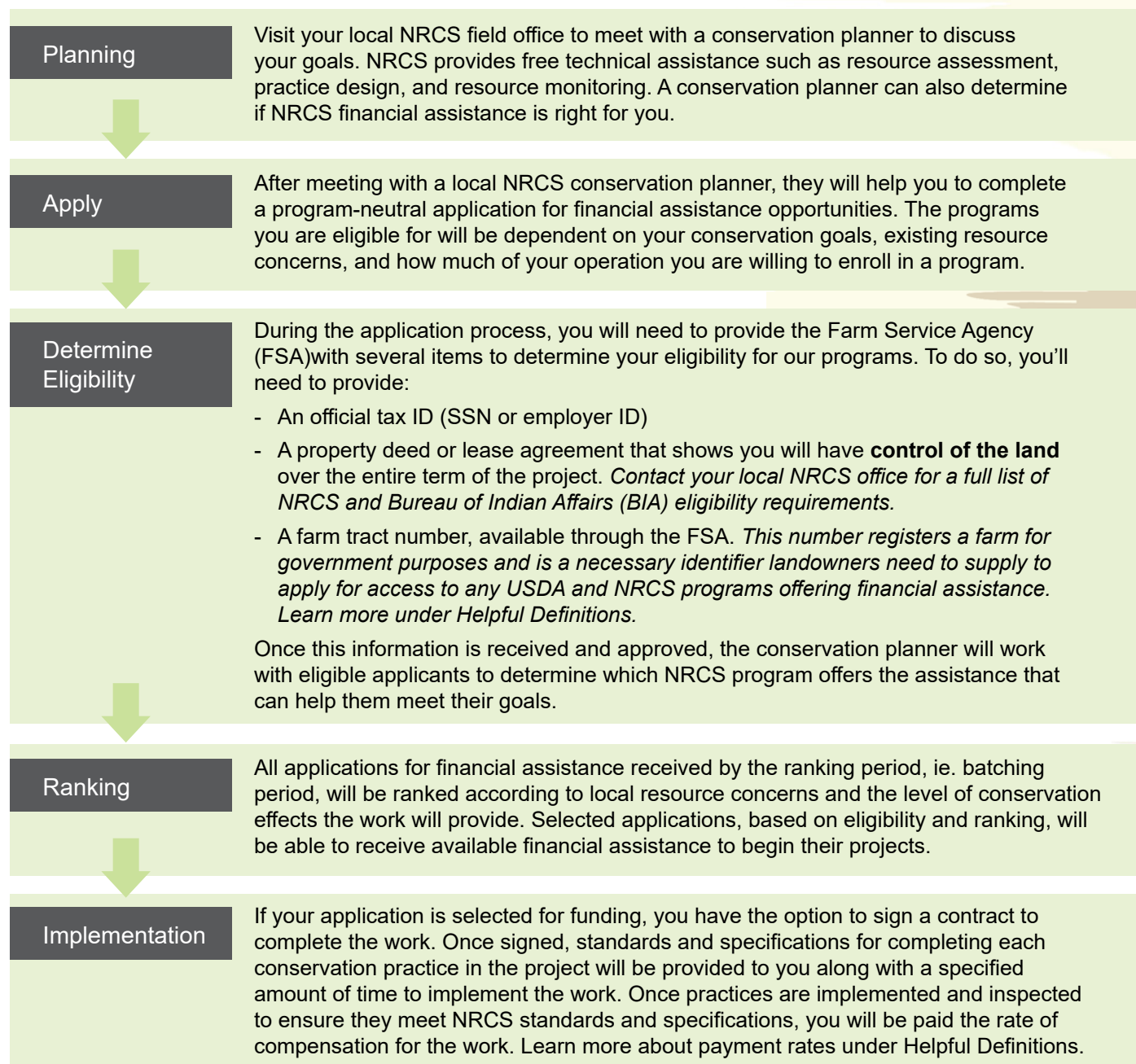
NRCS State Conservationist in Montana



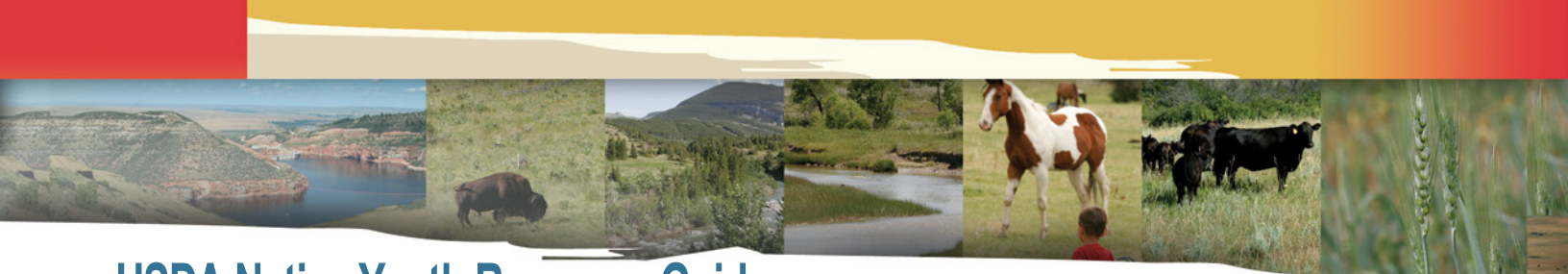
Getting Started with NRCS

Interested in getting involved with NRCS for technical and financial assistance on your working lands but unsure where to start? The diversity of assistance options available and program terminology can be overwhelming to sort through. Below is a flowchart that breaks down the essential steps involved in the process of getting NRCS assistance, across all our program options.

Steps to Assistance



A "Getting Started with the NRCS" document that outlines the above information along with other essential details is now available for download on the NRCS website. You can find the document at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov under Programs (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/programs/>), or by contacting your local NRCS office. Find contact information at farmers.gov/contact.



USDA Native Youth Resource Guide

The USDA Office of Tribal Relations has recently posted a Native Youth Resource Guide that provides information for Tribal youth on USDA scholarship opportunities, internship programs, cultural summer camps, afterschool activities, and resources for employment in the federal government. The resources provided are supported by many different agencies within USDA, including the Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Links to all the opportunities are provided in the guide, along with a brief explanation of their purpose.

A link to the full guide is attached here: [USDA Native Youth Resource Guide](#)

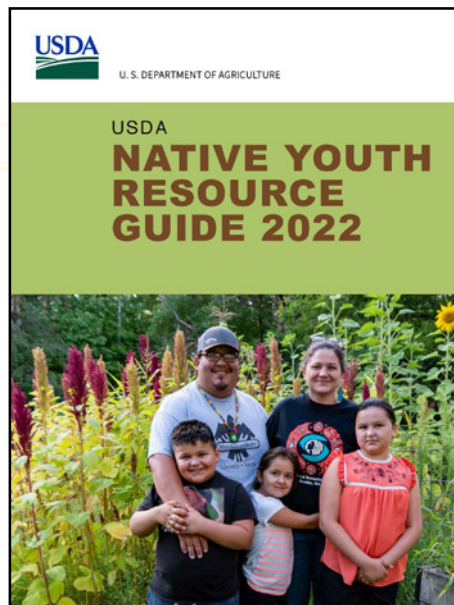
You can also find it at <https://www.usda.gov/tribalrelations/usda-programs-and-services> along with other resources for students.

Highlighted below are two examples of Native youth resources discussed within the Guide:

USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program

The USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program seeks to increase the number of American Indian and Alaska Native students studying agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, and related disciplines.

USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program is an employment program that offers a combination of work experience and academic study leading to career positions within USDA. Students participating in this program may receive full tuition, a paid internship with employee benefits, books, and room and board each year for up to 4 years while they pursue a degree at a 1994 tribal land-grant institution that culminates in a bachelor's degree at a tribal college or other university.



The program is designed to integrate classroom study at 1994 land-grant institutions with paid work experience; to increase the number of students studying and graduating in food, agriculture, natural resources, and other related fields of study; and to develop the pool of scientists and professionals to annually fill 50,000 jobs in the food, agricultural, and natural resources system.

Scholars accepted into the program will be eligible for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent appointment with USDA upon successful completion of their degree requirements by the end of the agreement period. (5 CFR 213.3202) (Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 - Section 12519)

If selected, scholars must commit to at least one year of service to USDA for each year of financial assistance provided. The details of this requirement will be outlined in the service agreement for the scholar, their university, and the USDA sponsoring agency.

For more information on this program, go to <https://www.usda.gov/partnerships/1994-program> or you can contact the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement at 202-720-6350 or 1994@usda.gov.

Indigenous Food and Agriculture Summer Leadership Summit

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), through an agreement with the University of Arkansas School of Law, supports the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Summer Leadership Summit. The summit brings together tribal students (high school and early college aged) from Indian Country for focused learning, hands-on training, and technical assistance in topics essential to their future success as food and agriculture business owners, Indian landowners, and conservationists. It also prepares them for leadership on these issues within their own communities.

The summit is open to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students who are passionate about and likely already engaged with their family, communities, and Tribes in food, agriculture production, subsistence, and conservation efforts. Students live on the campus throughout the summit and are taught by nationally recognized faculty on topics unique only to Native students and their unique land tenure status. USDA programs and services are included in the training curriculum.

For more information, go to <https://indigenousfoodandag.com/resources/native-youth-summit/>, or contact your local USDA service center.



USDA Boosts Conservation on Grazing Lands and Support for Farmers and Ranchers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing up to \$12 million in partnerships that expand access to conservation technical assistance for livestock producers and increase the use of conservation practices on grazing lands. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting proposals through its Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) until September 22, 2022.

"Privately owned grazing lands cover more than 40 million acres of Montana's landscape, which means we have a tremendous opportunity to address climate change and conserve natural resources through voluntary, private lands conservation. NRCS enlists a wide variety of conservation practices to help livestock producers. These partnerships will also help us expand the footprint of conservation on grazing lands and could help better reach historically underserved producers."

- Tom Watson, Montana State Conservationist

Project proposals for GLCI Cooperative Agreements will identify and address barriers to accessing grazing assistance for producers. These partnerships are encouraged to include outreach and support for reaching historically underserved producers. Projects must address one or more of the following priorities:

- Address local natural resource concerns.
- Use climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices and principles.
- Encourage existing and new partnerships through emphasizing equity in advancing the resource needs of underserved communities.
- Identify and implement strategies to quantify, monitor, report on and verify conservation benefits associated with grazing management systems.

Through GLCI, NRCS will leverage the partnerships to increase availability of technical assistance for farmers and ranchers engaged in grazing activities and act as navigators for grazers seeking additional resources. The opportunity encourages knowledge and expertise in working with historically underserved producers, with a desired outcome of strong participation by historically underserved producers in new and existing grazing coalitions. GLCI intends to expand and establish new peer-to-peer networks for grazers and direct financial support for grazing mentors working with new, beginning, or transitioning grazers.



Eligibility for this opportunity is limited to the following entity types based in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands):

Nonprofit organizations having a 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (other than institutions of higher education)

- Farmer or rancher organizations
- State and local conservation governmental agencies
- Agricultural Extension Services
- Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)
- Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments)
- Land grant universities including 1890 or 1994 land grant institution (7 U.S.C. 3222 et seq.), Hispanic-serving institution (20 U.S.C. 1101a), or other minority-serving institution, such as a historically Black college or university (20 U.S.C. 1061), a tribally controlled college or university (25 U.S.C. 1801), or Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving institution (20 U.S.C. 1059g)

For more information and to apply, visit the funding opportunity on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). **Applications are being accepted now through September 22, 2022.**

About GLCI

GLCI was developed as a coordinated effort to identify priority issues, find solutions, and effect change on private grazing land, enhancing existing conservation programs. GLCI also provides support to the National Grazing Lands Coalition to help state grazing coalitions boost participation from historically underserved producers; host a Triennial National Grazing Lands Conference; and to act as navigators for grazers seeking additional resources.

For more information about NRCS's grazing lands efforts, visit the NRCS website.

No-Till Gardening Workshop May 23, 2022

By: Zoe Craft, Soil Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Hardin Field Office

The Hardin and Crow Agency NRCS field offices hosted a workshop for no-till gardening and high tunnels May 23rd in Hardin. Evan VanOrder, Tribal Conservationist, discussed the five principles of soil health with attendees and how they relate to home gardening. Through mimicking nature, gardeners can reduce water use, and reduce the use of fertilizer and pesticides.



Zoe Craft, Soil Conservationist, talked about high tunnels and their benefits for maintaining more moderate temperatures and extending the growing season. High tunnels are metal framed structures with a plastic covering that allows for passive heating from the sun. Attendees were welcomed to tour the two high tunnels that Evan VanOrder installed through the EQIP High Tunnel Initiative from NRCS. NRCS has financial assistance available for those interested in installing a high tunnel to improve their gardening operation; contact your local NRCS Field Office for more information.

The five principles of soil health are:

1. Keep the ground covered

Keep any bare soil covered with straw, mulch, or other residue or covering to reduce moisture loss, lower soil temperatures, and minimize weed pressure in beds.

2. Minimize disturbance

Instead of using tillage or turning over soil in Spring/Fall, limit the amount of ground disturbance when planting. Tillage breaks down the soil aggregates that provide habitat for soil microorganisms and pathways for water and nutrients to get to the plants. Examples include Jang seeder, Jab planter, Bulb planter, Pizza cutter, etc.

3. Maximize diversity of plant species

Rotate where you plant crops to limit disease and minimize pest pressure. Diversity above ground and below ground are important, both in plant type and root structures. This helps to maximize the diversity of microorganism life and the nutrients shared amongst plants and microbes living in the soil.

4. Keep living roots in the ground

Roots provide sugars to microorganisms living in the soil and in turn, the microorganisms give back nutrients to the plant. Keeping living roots in the soil helps to feed the microbes during the entire growing season, providing nutrients and reducing disease and pest pressure on plants. Cover crops can be used to keep a living root in the soil through Fall, keep the ground covered in Winter, and provide additional plant diversity to your garden.

5. Implement grazing animals (if possible)

Grazing animals can provide hoof action, nutrients (urine/manure), and can use the garden 'leftovers' for forage. Maximizing diversity of animals and plants promotes a more resilient operation.





Blackfeet Natural Resource Conservation District

See the Blackfeet Natural Resource Conservation District page on Facebook (search @BNRCD) for information about this active conservation district dedicated to the livestock producers of the Blackfeet Nation. This organization hosts informational, community-based meetings and issues a bi-weekly newsletter. To receive the newsletter, contact Tierra Iron Shirt.

Tierralyn Iron Shirt

Hi,

My name is Tierralyn Iron Shirt, some call me Tierra. I've been hired by the Blackfeet Natural Resource Conservation District as the Program Support Specialist on May 9, 2022. I was born and raised on my family ranch on the Blood Tribe Reservation in Farm Four Alberta, Canada. When my father, Joe Iron Shirt passed away, I moved to Browning, Montana in 2012 to meet my mom's side of the family here on the Blackfeet Reservation. My fiancé's name is John Monroe Jr., together we have a one year old baby boy, named Grayson Monroe. I plan on going back to school to get my bachelor's degree in Business Management of Agriculture. I look forward to staying in Blackfeet agriculture and gaining more knowledge about the Blackfeet Reservation.

Email: t.ironshirt@blackfeetnation.com
Phone: 406-338-7521 Ext. 6370

Sincerely,
Tierralyn Iron Shirt



Craig Iron Pipe

Hello,

My name is Craig Iron Pipe. I was hired by the Blackfeet Natural Resource Conservation District May 9, 2022, as a soils conservation technician.

I am a sixth generation rancher born and raised on the Blackfeet Reservation. My wife is Billie Jo Iron Pipe together we have kids now adults, Tommy Iron Pipe and Angie (Iron Pipe) Monroe. Together we run the family ranch. The ranch has been in the family since the lands were allotted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs 1887.

E-mail: c.ironpipe@blackfeetnation.com
Phone: 406-338-7521

Craig Iron Pipe



2022 Fall Watershed Tour

Drought and Climate Resilience in the Blackfeet Nation

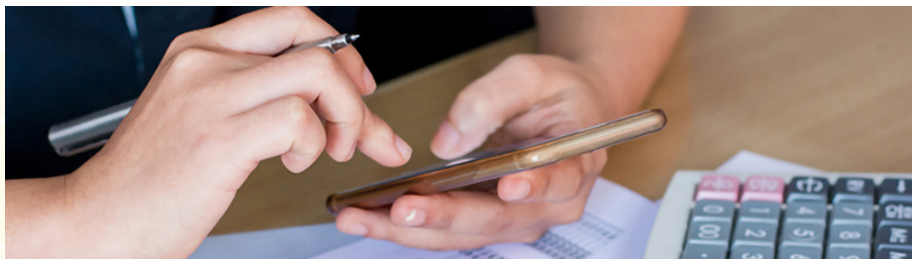
September 14-16, 2022

Join the Montana Watershed Coordination Council and our Blackfeet Nation partners September 14-16, 2022, for a Fall Watershed Tour along the Rocky Mountain Front. The Blackfeet (Amskapi Piikani) have developed unique ways of building partnerships and working with the land that are informing their responses to drought and other effects of climate change. The tour will feature some of the partnerships, programs, and projects the Blackfeet have developed to foster a more resilient landscape. There will also be opportunities for connecting, storytelling, and sharing ideas. To learn more about Blackfeet conservation and relationships with the land, check out the documentary [Life in the Land – Amskapi Piikani – Blackfeet Nation](#).

Get more information about the conference and register at mtwatersheds.org.



Agriculture and Taxes



Tax season might seem like a long way away, but there is information out there to help you navigate taxes and USDA programs. Go to Farmers.gov/taxes to find a collection of resources, fact sheets, and recorded webinars. Did you have to sell cows due to drought? Check out the video called “Weather-Related Sales of Livestock: Income Tax Management Issues” for some helpful information.

Follow the links below to watch the webinars or go to farmers.gov/taxes to find more information. Check back regularly as more resources become available.

[Tax Webinar An Introduction to Ag Taxes: What New Farmers Should Know](#)

[Tax Webinar Video - Disaster and Casualty Losses: Related Income Tax Rules](#)

[Tax Webinar Video - Weather Related Sales of Livestock: Income Tax Management Issues](#)

Fall Conservation Chats with NRCS

Big Horn County USDA-NRCS Field Office staff will be available at the locations and dates below to answer any questions you might have about addressing resource concerns on your ag operation.

- **September 16th, 2022,**
9 am to 11am -
Chief Plenty Coups State Park Parking Lot, Pryor, MT
- **September 21st, 2022,**
1 pm to 3pm
Afterbay Ranger Station Parking Lot, Fort Smith, MT
- **September 27th, 2022,**
9am to 11am
Lodge Grass Post Office Parking Lot, Lodge Grass, MT

If you have any questions regarding these visits, or if you require special accommodations, please contact the Hardin NRCS Field Office by calling: (406) 665-3442, ext. 3, or email seanna.torske@usda.gov.

Access or print the conservation chat flyer at [here](#).



Crow Rancher & Farmer Workshop

Save the Date!

September 13th, 2022, 1pm-5pm

Location:
Little Big Horn College Library Conference Room

Dinner, snacks, & refreshments will be provided!

For more info contact: Zane Not Afraid (406) 665-5394 or Craig Harry (307) 349-7469



If you or anyone you know would like to be added to the mailing list for the Montana NRCS' Conservation Pathways Newsletter, please send your email address to mt-nrcs-publicinfo@usda.gov. Subject: Conservation Pathways.

If you require a hard copy of the newsletter, send your mailing address to the email address above or:

USDA-NRCS
Public Affairs
Attn: Conservation Pathways
10 E Babcock St, Rm 443
Bozeman, MT 59715

USDA-NRCS
10 E. Babcock St., Rm 443
Bozeman, MT, 59715
www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov
406-587-6811

USDA is an equal opportunity provider,
employer, and lender

Tribal Field Office Directory

Browning Field Office

Serves: Blackfeet Reservation
Blackfeet Tribal Headquarters
640 All Chief's Rd.
Browning, MT 59417
Phone: (406) 338-3153

Tribal Conservationist - Cassie Powell
Email: cassie.powell2@usda.gov
Phone: (406) 338-3153 ext. 100
Cell: (406) 224-5112

Crow Agency Field Office

Serves: Crow Reservation
Hardin Service Center
205 13th West Street
Hardin, MT 59034-0205
Phone: (406) 629-3228

Tribal Conservationist-
Evan Van Order
Email: evan.vanorder@usda.gov
Phone: (406) 629-3228
Cell: 551-3952

Fort Belknap Field Office

Serves: Fort Belknap Reservation
Currently serviced by the
Chinook Service Center
228 Ohio St.
P.O. Box 189
Chinook, MT 59523-0189

Supervisory District Conservationist -
Kailee Calnan
Email: kailee.calnan@usda.gov
Phone: (406) 357-2320 ext 117

Lame Deer Field Office

Serves: Northern Cheyenne Reservation
Phone: (406) 477-6494
19 W. Chief's St.
P.O. Box 330
Lame Deer, MT 59043-0330

Tribal Conservationist- Kathy Knobloch
Email: kathy.knobloch@usda.gov
Phone: 477-6494

Pablo Field Office

Serves: Flathead Reservation
Phone: 675-2700
Tribal Land Department
42487 Complex Boulevard
P.O. Box 871
Pablo, MT 59855-9700

Tribal Conservationist- Herb Webb
Email: herb.webb@usda.gov
Phone: 675-2700 ext. 1245

Poplar Field Office

Serves: Fort Peck Reservation
Phone: (406) 768-3964
500 Medicine Bear Road
Box 1027
Poplar, MT 59255-1027

Tribal Conservationist- Paul Finnium
Phone: (406) 768-3964
Email: paul.finnium@usda.gov

Rocky Boy Field Office

Serves: Chippewa Cree Reservation
Currently serviced by the
Havre Service Center
206 25th Ave. W., Ste. 1
Havre, MT 59501-6008

Tribal Conservationist- Elizabeth Ballou
Email: elizabeth.ballou@usda.gov
Phone: (406) 265-6792

Supervisory District Conservationist -
Kailee Calnan
Email: kailee.calnan@usda.gov
Phone: (406) 357-2320 ext 117