

# Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Pathways

Fall 2023

## *In this Issue*

A Note from the State Conservationist p. 1  
New NRCS Tribal Liaisons p. 2  
USDA Announces 2024 Tribal Scholarship and  
Fellowship Opportunities p. 3  
Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 p. 4

Montana Leopold Conservation Award  
Seeks Applicants p. 5  
Registration Open for 2024 Montana Soil  
Health Symposium p. 6  
Tribal Conservation Advisory Council Meeting p. 6  
Tribal Field Office Directory p. 7

## *Important Dates to Remember*

### **December 2023**

USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program  
Apply by  
December 1, 2023

### **January 2024**

Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007  
Apply by  
January 13, 2024

### **February 2024**

2024 Montana Soil Health Symposium  
February 6-8, 2024

### **March 2024**

Montana Leopold Conservation Award  
Apply by  
March 1, 2024  
Montana State Technical Committee Meeting  
March 12, 2024

## **A Note from the State Conservationist**

Tribal producers, leaders, and partners,

This year, Sonny Moeckel painted the NRCS American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month poster. Sonny is Jicarilla Apache and Navajo, living in Washington state. He writes the following:

“This oil painting represents the essence of the American Indian. It doesn’t depict any specific individual, rather by stripping away the personal characteristics, I want the viewer to experience the spirit of the Indigenous people and the importance of working together in unison. The impressions of each individual brush stroke alone may not portray the whole portrait, but looking at the big picture, the brush strokes together complete the picture. I paint expressively, depicting the subject’s emotions through painterly lines and vivid colors. We belong together just as each stroke of paint belongs together to create something beautiful.” Sonny Moeckel, painter of “Indigenous Spirit”

I can’t help but agree with Sonny’s ideas of individuals working together, seeing the big picture, and making good things happen. In that light, I’m very happy to say that because Tribal leaders and producers shared with us the difficulties of hiring for NRCS positions, we listened and updated our strategy. That interaction means we have hired four Tribal Conservationists over the past few months. Most recently, Latrice Tatsey reported to the NRCS office in Browning early in November and Michael Kinsey will service the Fort Belknap Indian Community starting in December. I want to welcome both Latrice and Michael to NRCS! See their introductions in this newsletter. Our Tribal Conservationist positions are now fully staffed.



*Tom Watson, NRCS State  
Conservationist in Montana*

*[Continued on page 2]*

## A Note from the State Conservationist

[Continued on page 2]

That said, we are always hiring conservation planners across Montana. One way to get started with NRCS is to participate in opportunities for students. Currently, the 1994 Tribal Scholars Program is accepting applications. This scholarship provides full tuition, fees, books, a housing stipend, and paid workforce training with NRCS to students studying natural resources. After working with Tribal Nations to evaluate the program, a change was made this year to allow the scholarship to follow the student from a two-year associate program at a Tribal college to a four-year bachelor's degree program. Get more details from the article in this newsletter. If you or a student have any questions about the program, contact Trisha Cracraft at [trisha.cracraft@usda.gov](mailto:trisha.cracraft@usda.gov) or 406-596-0500.

Enjoy the fall weather we have had recently and all the best to you and your family through the holiday season.

Take care,  
Tom Watson, NRCS State  
Conservationist in Montana

## New NRCS Tribal Liaisons

### Michael Kinsey

Michael Kinsey is a new hire for the American Indian Tribal Liaison position at the Duty Location of Chinook, MT, in the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Services. Michael has an interest in gaining knowledge and has demonstrated this with his education, which includes an Associate of Science in Natural Resources Aaniiih Nakoda College, a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Montana State University-Northern, and a Master of Science in Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology from Colorado State University. Michael has previously worked as a Co-Director of the Buffalo Research and Education Center and the Water Center at Aaniiih Nakoda College, where he worked on several research projects focusing on prairie ecology and water quality on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Michael was also previously the Wildlife Biologist for the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department for the Fort Belknap Indian Community where he worked on the Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Project.

Michael is thrilled and excited to begin working as the American Indian Tribal Liaison, joining the team, and helping Tribes identify problems and finding solutions!



Michael Kinsey.

### Latrice Tatsey (In-niisk-ka-mah-kii)

Latrice Tatsey is currently an American Indian Tribal Liaison for the NRCS. Her office is in Browning, MT. She was raised on her families cattle ranching operation on Black-foot Nation in northwest Montana. Latrice graduated from Montana State University with her bachelor's degree in Natural Resources and Rangeland Ecology and completed her master's degree in Land Resources and Environmental Sciences. Latrice previously worked for Pikuni Lodge Health Institute where she worked with cattle producers on grazing practices that are influenced by cultural science and cultural relationships with the land. She wants to continue helping tribal producers get access to programs that will benefit their operations to help them be successful.solutions!



Latrice Tatsey.



# USDA Announces 2024 Tribal Scholarship and Fellowship Opportunities

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced two tribal higher education opportunities to train the next generation of agricultural professionals and strengthen ties with tribal higher education institutions. The USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program offers a fast-track career path with USDA, and the Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Faculty Fellowship engages tribal college faculty with USDA resources and research. These programs reflect USDA's commitment to advance equity and remove barriers to service for tribal nations and encourage tribal workforce development. Today's announcement also marks the 29th anniversary of the day legislation was signed to give tribal colleges land-grant status.



*"Tribal land-grant colleges are central to empowering a workforce that better reflects our clients in agriculture, nutrition, food, development — and at USDA. USDA is committed to making USDA programs and services more accessible to tribal colleges and universities and their students and faculty."*

*- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.*

## New Four-Year Tuition Coverage for Tribal Scholars Program

The USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program provides full tuition, fees, books, a housing stipend, and paid workforce training to any interested and eligible student pursuing degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines at a tribal college or university. New this year, the tuition coverage can follow the student from a two-year associate program at a tribal college or university (TCU) to a four-year bachelor's degree program (at a TCU or another land-grant institution). When the student has completed the scholarship requirements, including a paid internship, USDA may convert the student to a permanent USDA employee without further competition. Eligible applicants include graduating high school seniors, full-time students currently enrolled at a 1994 land-grant tribal college or university, or recent TCU associate degree graduates. For FY 2024, 27 scholarship slots are available at: Agriculture Research Service, Farm Service Agency, Farm Production and Conservation, Forest Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The application deadline is December 1, 2023. Visit the [USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program](#) or email [1994@usda.gov](mailto:1994@usda.gov) for further information.

## Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Faculty Fellowship Program

This Faculty Fellowship program seeks to strengthen tribal college and university research capacity, and introduce TCU faculty and staff to USDA programs and services. In June 2024, the Faculty Fellows will spend a week in

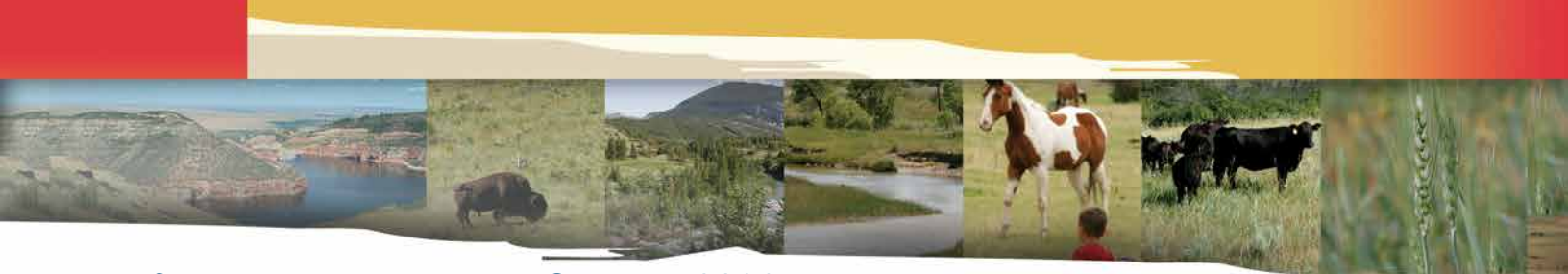
Washington, D.C. to meet with USDA program leads, identify areas for collaboration, and learn more about USDA resources. During a second week, they are placed at a USDA research facility that aligns with their academic research interests. This year's research collaborations will take place with USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The Faculty Fellows return to their institution with new knowledge to benefit their community, cooperative research opportunities, and advance their tribal college land-grant mission of research, education, and extension. The application deadline is December 1, 2023. Learn more at USDA's Tribal College Program website.

## USDA and Tribal Colleges and Universities

There are 36 federally recognized tribal colleges and universities designated as land-grant institutions through the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994. See what college partners are in Montana. They are centers of culture, education, and community for tribal nations. USDA works with tribal colleges to help ensure equitable participation in USDA programs and services. These efforts include support for scholarships, internships, fellowships, research, classroom education, and extension (training and informal education with agricultural professionals and local communities).

For more information on USDA's 1994 Tribal Scholarship Program, scan





## Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007

On July 7, USDA and its partner vendors announced the opening of the application period for Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which directs USDA to provide financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. The opening of the application process is an important step in delivering on USDA's commitment of providing financial assistance to those who have faced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs. The application process is open now and will close on January 13, 2024. Borrowers will have the option to apply for assistance online via [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov) or through a paper-based form.

Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov). The website includes an English and Spanish language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program. Applicants can also call the free call center at 1-800-721-0970 or visit one of several dozen brick-and-mortar offices the program has set up around the country. Locations are provided on the program website and vendors will update the local events schedule with more information as it becomes available. It is important to note that filing an application is FREE and does not require a lawyer.

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination by USDA in its farm loan programs prior to January 1, 2021, and/or are currently debtors with assigned or assumed USDA farm loan debt that was the subject of USDA discrimination that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, are eligible for this program.

Under the planned timeline, applications will be reviewed in November and December, with payments reaching recipients soon thereafter. Importantly, applicants should know that the application process is not on a first come, first served, basis.

**All applications received or postmarked before the January 13, 2024, deadline will be considered.**

In standing up this program, USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about the discrimination assistance process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information. The official application process and filling out an application is free and does not require a lawyer.

### More Information

For more information, please visit [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov). If you want to get weekly updates on the program's events and progress, there's a button there to subscribe to a weekly newsletter.

To support producers throughout the application process, USDA is ensuring that organizations with extensive experience conducting outreach to farm organizations are able to support individuals who may be eligible for the program. These groups include:

- AgrAbility
- the Farmer Veteran Coalition
- Farmers' Legal Action Group
- Federation of Southern Cooperatives
- Intertribal Agriculture Council
- Land Loss Prevention Program
- National Young Farmers Coalition,
- Rural Coalition





## Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants

Nominations and applications are now being accepted for the 2024 Montana Leopold Conservation Award®.

The \$10,000 award honors ranchers, farmers and forestland owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land.

Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust present the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 27 states. In Montana, the award is presented with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Montana Rangeland Resources Committee.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement. In his influential 1949 book, “A Sand County Almanac,” Leopold called for what he called “a land ethic,” an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage.

Award nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may nominate themselves. The application can be found at [www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA](http://www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA).

The Montana Leopold Conservation Award was made possible through the generous support of the American Farmland Trust, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Rangeland Resources Committee, Sand County Foundation, Sibanye-

Stillwater, AgWest Farm Credit, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, C Lazy J Livestock, Ducks Unlimited, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, McDonald’s, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, Soil and Water Conservation Society, Western Landowners Alliance, Western Sustainability Exchange, and World Wildlife Fund.

“These award recipients are examples of how Aldo Leopold’s land ethic is alive and well today. Their dedication to conservation shows how individuals can improve the health of the land while producing food and fiber,” said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and CEO.

“Farmers, producers, and forestland owners have a rich heritage and connection to the health and wellbeing of land across Montana. We hope that recognition of their dedication helps others implement such impactful practices on their own land,” said Amanda Kaster, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Director.

“As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation’s Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of farmers, ranchers and forestland owners,” said John Piotti, AFT President and CEO. “At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three.”

### LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

### AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.8 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families. [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

### SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. [www.sandcountyfoundation.org](http://www.sandcountyfoundation.org)

The application deadline is **March 1, 2024**. Applications can be emailed to [sbarta@mt.gov](mailto:sbarta@mt.gov) or postmarked by March 1, 2024, and mailed to:

Leopold Conservation Award  
c/o Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation  
P.O. Box 414  
Clyde Park, MT 59018

Applications are reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders. Last year’s recipient was Kurt and PJ Myllmaki of Stanford.

# Registration is Open for the 2024 Montana Soil Health Symposium

The Montana Association of Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service will be hosting the 2024 Montana Soil Health Symposium on Feb. 6-8 at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center.

The symposium will feature Kelsey Scott of the DX Ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, Anne Bikle who wrote *What Your Food Ate: How to Heal the Land and Reclaim our Health*, and Dr. Jon Lundgren of the ECDYSIS Foundation and CEO for Blue Dasher Farm. The additional pre-conference workshop on Feb. 6 brings Joshua and Tara Dukart of First Seek Ranch near Bismark to Montana to present Holistic Management.

The Soil Health Symposium provides an opportunity for farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and technical specialists from all different landscapes, generations, and levels of experience to network and share their stories, successes, and lessons learned in the pursuit of soil management. Topics will range from virtual fencing for pasture management and winter grazing to making



your own compost for large scale acreages and geothermal greenhouses and community agriculture. Adding to these speakers are eight Montana producers covering topics relevant to farmers, ranchers, and gardeners of all sizes working to produce healthy, nutritious foods using the soil health principles.

The pre-conference workshop will be on Holistic Management with Joshua and Tara Dukart, held on Feb. 6. Holistic Management provides a framework for decision-making that is rooted in

the fundamentals of ecosystem processes. It also provides a suite of planning procedures that includes planned grazing, land planning, financial planning, and ecological monitoring. This registration is separate from the symposium and space is limited.

Early bird registration for the symposium ends November 30, 2023, so register soon! Special pricing is also available for students and interns enrolled in educational agriculture programs.

Learn more, get the agenda, and register at [mtsoilhealth.org](https://mtsoilhealth.org).

## Tribal Conservation Advisory Council Meeting

### *Report from Trisha Cracraft, NRCS State Tribal Liaison*

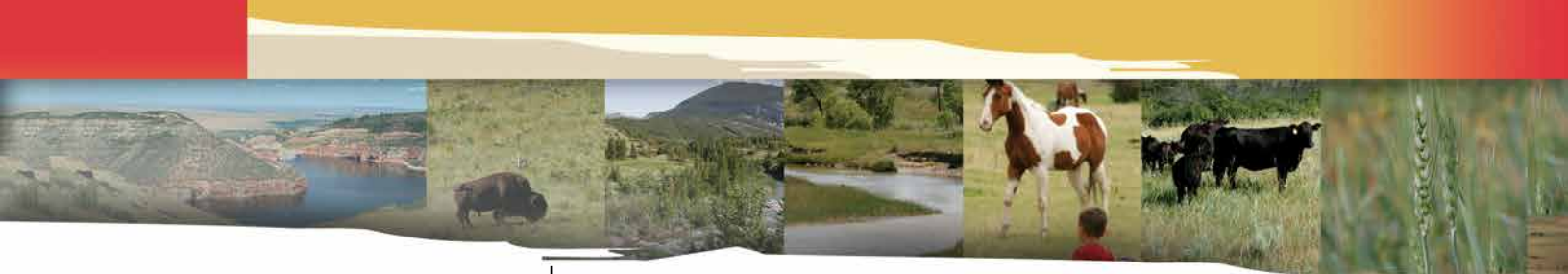
The second Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (TCAC) meeting in 2023 was held on October 11 at the Holiday Inn in Great Falls. Tribal Delegates were present from Fort Belknap, Rocky Boy's, Fort Peck, Blackfeet and Northern Cheyenne alongside with representatives from Intertribal Ag Council (IAC), NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The meeting was kicked off with Delegates sharing success stories and all were pleased to hear about all the great work getting accomplished on the reservations. BIA then provided a presentation on the general Right of Way (ROW) process. Throughout that presentation several tribes identified struggles with obtaining ROW permits, triggering the need for further

discussions with each tribe individually and the appropriate BIA representatives. NRCS has reached out to BIA to schedule additional meetings with the delegates that are interested in continuing these conversations.

NRCS presented on the final 528 Tribal Land Prescribed Grazing Implementation Requirement (IR) that was developed and recently released in response to input from several tribes. NRCS welcomed the opportunity to partner with each tribe to provide workshops for tribal members and producers to help get the word out on the changes. Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's gave an update on the progress of their Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) Environmental Quality Incen-

tives Program (EQIP) projects. Then the group moved into a discussion about the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) where NRCS asked for assistance in identifying additional barriers to the program now that the 528 Tribal Land IR could be the base practice for any of the 528 enhancements.

The afternoon rounded out with Farm Service Agency gave an update on several CRP/CREP discussions going on in Montana as well as a few other general updates. The next meeting will be in April or May in Billings. Any questions or comments on this or future TCAC meetings can call or email Trisha Cracraft, State Tribal Liaison, at [trisha.cracraft@usda.gov](mailto:trisha.cracraft@usda.gov) or 406-596-0500.



*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](mailto: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:*

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## 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* – Latrice Tatsey  
Email: [latrice.tatsey@usda.gov](mailto:latrice.tatsey@usda.gov)  
Phone: (406) 338-3153 ext. 100

### **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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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* - Austin Allen  
Email: [austin.allen@usda.gov](mailto:austin.allen@usda.gov)  
Phone: (406) 768-3964

### **Poplar Field Office**

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

*Tribal Conservationist* - Paul Finnicum  
Phone: (406) 768-3964  
Email: [paul.finnicum@usda.gov](mailto:paul.finnicum@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* - Lucas Head  
Email: [lucas.head@usda.gov](mailto:lucas.head@usda.gov)  
Phone: (406) 265-6792 ext. 3  
Cell: (406) 879-3348

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