



United States Department of Agriculture



# Natural Resources Conservation Service Montana Conservation Update

July 2014 Quarterly Newsletter [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov)

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## Greetings from the State Conservationist

*Joyce Swartzendruber, State Conservationist*

One new program from the 2014 Farm Bill is coming to the public this summer. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program was enacted to allow a wide variety of conservation partners the opportunity to compete for financial assistance funding for a geographic or other area of concern to address critical conservation issues. The Announcement of Program Funding (APF) on [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) provided 45 days to submit pre-proposals, due July 14, and it has been a race-to-the-finish as we meet with a long list of groups who seek a formal partnership with NRCS to address their needs.

Applications for this program will be competing for 2014 and 2015 fiscal year funds, so the pot has doubled to nearly \$400 million. We anticipate \$98.7 million for state-level agreements, \$157.9 million for national (multi-state) agreements, and \$138.2 million for the Secretary's designated Critical Conservation Areas. Approximately two-thirds of Montana is included in the Prairie Grassland Critical Conservation Area.

National resources of concern are water quantity, water quality, soil health, at-risk species habitat and air quality. In Montana we added wildlife habitat, grazingland health, salinity and forest health to the list of eligible concerns. The applicants can select which conservation programs they want to use and how much funding they seek for each. They could put forth applications that include Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and the two reformed easement programs, Agricultural Land Easements and Wetland Reserve Easements.

The ranked and selected applications can be approved for up to five years. The APF specifies that ranking will be based on Contributions, Innovation, Solutions, and Participation. Partners are expected to specify how the results of their actions are quantified at the end of the project.

I have been amazed at the steady stream of interest in this program. As the potential applicants sit down with me to visit about their ideas, I always remind them that the programs will end up being delivered out of their local NRCS Field Office, and I encourage them to meet with their local district conservationists to get their ideas about participation levels and implementation. By the end of July we should know how many projects are pre-approved for Montana, and will provide more training for our field staff this summer.

If I've been dealing with a stream of people, Chief Weller has had a flood of interested parties in his office, ever since the farm bill was finalized in late January. Everybody wants to know how this will work and how they can participate. With \$400 million at stake, it's clear to me that we want this program to be successful!



## NRCS Funds Deep Creek under National Water Quality Initiative

NRCS will provide \$550,000 in assistance to Montana farmers and ranchers in the Deep Creek Watershed near Townsend who voluntarily apply conservation measures to their land to improve water quality.

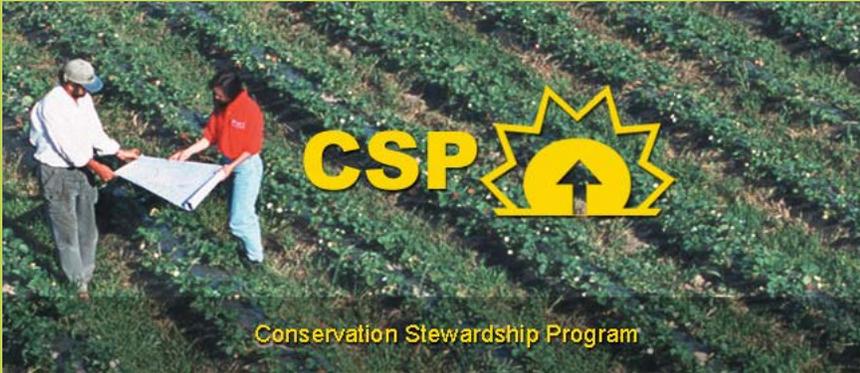
The National Water Quality Initiative provides financial assistance for installing conservation systems that help avoid, trap and control run-off. Conservation practices may include nutrient management, cover crops, conservation cropping systems, and filter strips. Practices are not limited; all conservation practices on all land uses are available for consideration for technical and financial assistance.

“This targeted approach provides a way to accelerate voluntary, private lands conservation investments to improve water quality and to focus water quality monitoring and assessment funds where they are most needed,” said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS state conservationist for Montana. “When farmers take action in one area, one watershed, it can make a difference.”

With the help of partners at the local level, NRCS identified priority watersheds within states where on-farm conservation investments will deliver the greatest water quality benefits. State water quality agencies and local partners also provide assistance with additional dollars and planning assistance, along with outreach to farmers and ranchers.

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis. Check with the NRCS office in Townsend at 406-266-3146 ext. 103 if you would like more information or visit the NRCS Montana website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mt/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=stelprdb1254232>.





## First Participants in Conservation Stewardship Program Can Renew for Five More Years

The first participants in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) have from July 11 until Sept. 12, 2014, to renew their contracts and make decisions on additional conservation activities that will benefit priority natural resource issues.

CSP is offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and is the Farm Bill program that helps farmers and ranchers take conservation investments to the next level.

About 20,000 CSP contracts are reaching the end of their initial five-year contract period and may be renewed for an additional five years if participants agree to take additional conservation measures.

The program provides opportunities for farmers and ranchers who are already established conservation stewards, helping them improve water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat.

“CSP farmers are conservation leaders and go the extra mile to conserve our nation’s resources,” said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS

State Conservationist for Montana. “The 2014 Farm Bill continued that strong commitment and heightened the program’s focus on generating conservation benefits.”

Since CSP began in 2009, more than 58 million acres have been enrolled in the program – an area the size of Indiana and Wisconsin combined. CSP participants boost their operations’ conservation benefits by installing new conservation activities that make positive changes in soil, water, air and wildlife habitat.

“This program allows land-owners to reach the next level of conservation and opens the door to trying new conservation activities.”

- Joyce Swartzendruber,  
NRCS State Conservationist,  
Montana

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through CSP, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/FarmBill](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/FarmBill) or visit your local USDA service center.

## National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health Presentations Now Online

Videos of all the presentations delivered at the National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health, held Feb. 17-19, 2014, in Omaha, Neb., are now online. The conference brought together 300 agricultural leaders and innovators to explore how American agriculture can be more sustainable through improved soil health. Attendees represented the agricultural industry, farm community, academia, government, and commodity and conservation organizations.

<http://www.sare.org/Events/National-Conference-on-Cover-Crops-and-Soil-Health/Presentations-from-General-and-Breakout-Sessions/Complete-List-of-Presentations>.



## Soil Health, A Montana Perspective

“Soil Health, A Montana Perspective,” is an interview series featuring Montana farmers and ranchers detailing how they have worked to improve soil health. While the project is not complete, several farmers are currently featured on the Montana NRCS website. Listen to their stories here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/mt/soils/health/>



Kale Gullett.

## New State Resource Conservationist to Join Montana NRCS Staff

Kale Gullett has accepted the NRCS state resource conservationist position and will join the state office staff in late August. Gullett grew up in western South Dakota and attended the University of Wyoming, receiving a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries biology and management (1994) and a master's degree in rangeland ecology and watershed management/water resources (hydrology, 1996). After a year with the Forest Service and a private consulting firm in Fort Collins, Colo., Gullett spent 4½ years working with the Yakama Nation in Washington State and 4½ years as a senior habitat biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration based in Washington working on regional issues across Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. He has been with NRCS at the East National Technical Service Center since 2005 and has spent the last 20 months serving as science lead for USDA in the natural resource damage assessment of the Deepwater Horizon incident.

He and his wife, Jennifer, have two little girls, Hallie (9) and Mira (6), and a dog named Murphy (3). They enjoy all outdoor activities, but mostly skiing, rafting, fishing, camping, and going to the beach.

## John Oiestad Wins Unsung Hero Award

John Oiestad, NRCS district conservationist in Harlowton, is the recipient of a 2014 Unsung Hero Award presented by the Organization of Professional Employees of the USDA (OPEDA) in partnership with the USDA. Oiestad was recognized at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., on May 7.

Unsung Hero awards are given to our USDA employees who have demonstrated extraordinary effort in performing tasks, who have unselfishly shared time and expertise, and consistently and willingly extended a helping hand.

Oiestad has served America for 41 years, beginning with the U.S. Army in Vietnam, where he was a squad leader. He was largely responsible for the safety of his squad, which depended on him to detect enemy threats before they could harm the troops. "This kind of competent, unselfish leadership has been a hallmark of his career," said Chuck Roloff, NRCS district conservationist in Big Timber, who nominated Oiestad for the award.

During his NRCS career, Oiestad has worked "in the field," helping private landowners identify their natural resource concerns, providing them information and helping them implement solutions. He has worked closely with the local Upper Musselshell Conservation District and many other entities to accomplish voluntary natural resource conservation on private lands. Oiestad has many successes on his resume, including developing sustainable grazing systems for native rangeland, assisting Hutterite colonies to move their large animal confinement operations away from local streams and rivers, and helping the community recover from severe flooding.

"John has earned the respect of the agricultural community in Wheatland County, Montana. He is valued and respected by his peers for his calm, competent, positive approach to his work, providing a role model that many of us look up to, leading by his example," Roloff said. "He shuns the limelight, letting the results speak for themselves."



John Oiestad.

## Pollinator Poster Features Native Pollinators

The 2014 pollinator poster printed by the Pollinator Partnership features native orchids and their need for pollinators. Beautiful and diverse orchids found throughout North America, many of which are threatened or endangered, rely on pollinators for survival of their species. If you would like copies of the poster, please send your request via email: [MT-nrcs-publications@one.usda.gov](mailto:MT-nrcs-publications@one.usda.gov).



## Human Resources Report

### Promotions

- Eric Watson, District Conservationist, Cut Bank
- John Collins, Soil Conservation Technician, Culbertson
- Jared Worthington, Soil Conservationist, Scobey
- Joe Little, Natural Resource Specialist to Soil Conservationist, Bozeman
- Bob Peterson, Cartographer, Miles City
- Holly Taylor, Soil Conservation Technician, Cut Bank, to Soil Conservationist, Fort Benton
- Doug Jones, Engineering Technician, Glasgow
- Kyle Tackett, District Conservationist, Dillon
- Grant Petersen, Rangeland Management Specialist, Lewistown, to Dillon Soil Survey Office
- Stephanie King, Soil Conservationist, Rushville, NE, to Soil Conservationist, Bozeman
- Lucas Zukiewicz, Hydrologist to Natural Resource Specialist, Bozeman
- Dan Durham, Soil Conservationist to District Conservationist, Sheridan

- Ben Mispagel, Agricultural Engineer, Statesboro, GA, to Civil Engineer, Great Falls
- Jeanne LaSorte, Soil Conservationist, Conrad, to Program Specialist, Bozeman

### New Student Employees

- Courtney Lester, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Big Timber
- Heidi Fleury, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Shelby
- Daniel Garza, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Sheridan
- Alyssa Leach, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Forsyth
- Bobbi Sinks, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Jordan
- Raylene Kerney, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Kalispell

### New Permanent Employees

- Jessie Fischer, Soil Conservationist, Deer Lodge
- McKenna Brown, Soil Conservationist, Havre
- Jason Saari, Soil Conservationist, Deer Lodge
- Mary Ann Quinn, Office Assistant, Bozeman
- Ashley Kiehl, Soil Conservationist, Circle
- Ernie Haglund, Soil Conservationist, Shelby

### Reassignments

- Reba Ahlgren, Soil Conservation Technician, from Roundup to Winnett
- Kale Gullett, Biologist, Greensboro, NC, to State Resource Conservationist, Bozeman
- Cliff Merriman, District Conservationist, Chinook to Soil Conservationist, Malta
- Ryan Mar, Rangeland Management Specialist, Newcastle, WY, to Soil Conservationist, Townsend
- Scott Brady, District Conservationist, Havre, to Rangeland Management Specialist, Havre Soil Survey Office
- Ann Ross, Civil Engineer, Big Springs, TX, to Civil Engineer, Miles City
- Shanna Huckins, District Conservationist, Joliet, to Resource Conservationist, Miles City
- Cedar Magone, Soil Conservation Technician, White Sulphur Springs, to Soil Conservationist, Columbus

### Employees that Transferred to Other States

- Trisha Cracroft, District Conservationist, Sheridan transferred to Idaho
- Carolyn Edenbo, Soil Conservationist, Harlowton transferred to Washington
- Greg Cironi, Soil Conservationist, Chinook transferred to Oregon
- Amy Kaiser, Soil Conservationist, Chinook transferred to Oregon

## NRCS Talks Soils at Hill County Youth Ed Day

This past spring, the Havre NRCS field staff participated in the Hill County Conservation District Youth Education Day. At the NRCS station, fifth graders learned about basic soils, got to feel the difference between clayey and sandy soils, and learned about soil health and the soil food web. The other stations covered noxious weeds, fish and fish sampling, and building proper compost piles.

*Scott Brady, NRCS rangeland management specialist, Havre, describes the soil food web to students at the Hill County Conservation District Youth Education Day.*



*Kailee Bickford, NRCS soil conservationist, Havre, and Scott Brady, NRCS rangeland management specialist, Havre, teach students about soil texture at the Hill County Conservation District Youth Education Day.*

## Upcoming Events

For up-to-date conservation and agriculture-related events and activities in Montana, visit

<http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov>.

### July 2014

- ❑ Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp, July 13-18, 2014, Greenough
- ❑ Bitterroot Valley Pasture Walk, July 15, 2014, Stevensville
- ❑ Farm Tour and Workshop, July 16, 2014, Toole County
- ❑ Rangeland Monitoring Roundup, July 16, 2014, Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
- ❑ Horse Owners Workshop, July 16, 2014, Crow Agency
- ❑ Yellowstone Conservation District Tour - Marc and Michelle Shaules, July 22, 2014, Billings
- ❑ Yellowstone Conservation District Tour - Ryan Erickson's and Auer Grain LLC, July 23, 2014, Billings
- ❑ Pasture Walk - Jerry Laskody, July 29, 2014, Lake County

### August 2014

- ❑ Bitterroot Valley Pasture Walk - Alan Maki, August 5, 2014, Corvallis
- ❑ No-Till Gardening Workshop, August 6, 2014, Hardin
- ❑ Farm Tour and Workshop, August 16, 2014, Whitefish

### September 2014

- ❑ Governor's Range Tour, September 4-5, 2014, Ronan
- ❑ Women Stepping Forward for Agriculture Symposium, September 23-25, 2014, Billings

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