



Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Pathways

Summer 2014

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Important Dates to Remember

July 2014

Montana Natural Resources Youth Range Camp
 July 13 2014 - July 18, 2014; Greenough, Montana
 For more information:
 406-243-2775

Bitterroot Valley Pasture Walk - Walter Lujan
 July 15, 2014; Stevensville, Montana
 For more information:
 406-363-5010 ext. 110

Farm Tour and Workshop, Toole County
 July 16, 2014; Toole County, Montana
 For more information:
 406-494-8636

Rangeland Monitoring Roundup
 July 16, 2014; Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
 For more information:
 406-454-0056

Horse Owners Workshop
 July 16, 2014; Grow Agency, Montana
 For more information:
 406-665-3442 ext. 101

Yellowstone Conservation District Tour - Marc and Michelle Shaules
 July 22, 2014; Billings, Montana
 For more information:
 406-657-6135 ext. 118

Yellowstone Conservation District Tour - Ryan Erickson's and Auer Grain LLC
 July 23, 2014; Billings, Montana
 For more information:
 406-657-6135 ext. 118

Pasture Walk - Jerry Laskody
 July 29, 2014; Lake County, Montana
 For more information:
 406-676-2841 ext. 111

more important dates on page 9

A Note from the State Conservationist

Greetings from Bozeman.

It is a very busy time at NRCS. The new farm bill passed and was signed into law by President Obama on February 7, 2014. The programs have changed somewhat, but our core financial assistance opportunities for farmers and ranchers still remain. Funding is more limited due to the overall decrease in federal budget appropriations and sequestration, but conservation is still a robust part of the farm bill.

Our staff is busy contracting the top-ranking Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications. We are also contracting the new 2014 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts and reenrolling the 2010 CSP contracts this summer and again later in the fall. Easement programs have taken some new twists, but the Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) option for Tribes is still available as 30-year rental agreements.

The new farm bill program which is garnering a lot of attention is the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). RCP is a competitive funding opportunity, available to entities such as Tribes, water districts, state governments, conservation districts and nonprofit groups. Successful applicants will show a diversity of groups involved as well as at least a significant financial contribution to match NRCS funds. The funding will be targeted to our farm bill programs for conservation contracts, but some opportunities exist for agreements to pay for the technical assistance needed to deliver the programs on the farms and ranches. The first round of funding applications is due July 14, but there will be future opportunities next year.

I hope to see some tribal applications for RCP and certainly some applications where the tribal communities are party to other applications. This is a good way to focus efforts to improve water quality, water quantity, wildlife habitat, grazing land health, soil health, salinity, and forest health. Please reach out to our tribal offices if you have any questions about our programs.

Thank you for all your conservation efforts. Have a great summer.

Joyce Swartzendruber
 NRCS State Conservationist in Montana



Conservation Programs and the 2014 Farm Bill

Erik Suffridge, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Bozeman



2014 Farm Bill

The 2014 farm bill, officially the Agriculture Act of 2014, made some significant changes to NRCS conservation programs. Among these changes were the elimination and consolidation of some programs.

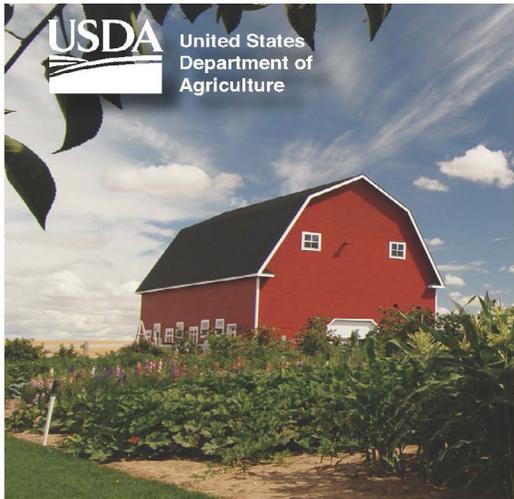
The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) were eliminated. The major purposes of WHIP were rolled into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) received only minor changes. AWEP was rolled into a new program called Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). RCPP will provide funding to entities or groups who work to implement other NRCS conservation programs on a wide scale. A simple example would be an irrigation district that wants to make irrigation water efficiency improvements to their system which could include on-farm improvements as well as canal improvements. The proposal could use any of the NRCS conservation programs or a combination of programs.

Three former NRCS easement programs were rolled into a new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Those former programs are Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve program (GRP), and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Under ACEP, WRP became the Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) option and retains many of the former WRP requirements. FRPP and GRP became the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) option under ACEP. ALE will retain many of the former FRPP requirements and incorporate some of the GRP aspects. Under ACEP, 30-year easement contracts are available on tribal lands.

Deadlines: In order to manage workload, NRCS sets program application cut-off dates that we refer to as deadlines. For EQIP, the 2014 and 2015 deadlines have passed. However, special EQIP initiatives will be announced throughout 2015. For CSP, the 2014 application deadline was Feb., 2014. Producers with expiring CSP contracts have from July 11 until Sept. 12, 2014, to renew and add conservation activities that will support their natural resource improvement activities and fine-tune their conservation plans. A 2015 sign-up will be announced sometime this coming fall or winter. For all programs, an application submitted after a cut-off deadline will be held until the next sign-up period.



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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Your guide to the new Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Below is a quick summary of changes made to conservation programs in the new Farm Bill, enacted on February 7, 2014. These programs are administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The new Farm Bill streamlines conservation programs that enable farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to get assistance.

To get started with NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or visit your local USDA service center.

	Previous Farm Bill	vs.	New and Streamlined Farm Bill
Financial Assistance	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	}.....▶	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program		Conservation Stewardship Program
	Conservation Stewardship Program		Agricultural Management Assistance
Easements	Wetlands Reserve Program	}.....▶	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
	Grassland Reserve Program		
	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program		
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program▶	Healthy Forests Reserve Program
Partnerships	Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative	}.....▶	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
	Agricultural Water Enhancement Program		
	Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative		
	Great Lakes Basin Program		
Other	Technical Service Providers	}.....▶	Technical Service Providers
	Conservation Innovation Grants		Conservation Innovation Grants
	Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program		Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program
	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program – administered by Farm Service Agency		Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program
	<i>Emergency Watershed Protection Program*</i>		<i>Emergency Watershed Protection Program*</i>
	<i>Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*</i>		<i>Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*</i>

*EWP and Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program are not Farm Bill programs but are offered by NRCS; Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program was funded through the 2014 Farm Bill.

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A Look at Flood Damage and Repair on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation

Cliff Merriman, American Indian, Alaska Native Special Emphasis Program Manager, recently toured the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation with Leon LaSalle, NRCS civil engineering technician in Havre, Mont. The Rocky Boy's Reservation had been ravaged the last several years (2010, 2011 and 2013) with torrential floods. Merriman and LaSalle looked at how NRCS helped the Tribe repair damage through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Mother Nature can be unpredictable, bringing on torrential rainfall and huge snow loads that can lead to ravaging floods. However, thanks to NRCS's passion for helping people help the land, dedication and expertise, the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation can be better prepared to withstand the next flood on Box Elder Creek.



Riprap (designed and cost-shared by the NRCS) was installed to armor the bank for the next flood. The Tribe has a quarry within the boundaries of the reservation. NRCS assisted them in sampling the rock to ensure it would make good riprap material. NRCS was also present during the construction phase to ensure quality control. 5/30/2014.



Box Elder Creek took out the road and threatened to take out a house and other structures. 6/15/2011.



Box Elder Creek washed out a road, which is the only entrance to a residence and barn. 6/18/2013.



Box Elder Creek threatened to take out a residence and a paved Bureau of Indian Affairs highway adjacent to residence. 6/25/2011.



The channel has been restored and the bank has been armored with riprap and a seeding will protect the structure. 5/30/2014.



A barn and a corral were threatened by a raging and flooding Box Elder Creek. 6/18/2013.



The bank armor protects the residence from additional erosion. 5/30/2014.



This site showcases a riprap job, which will protect the residence from potential damage during the next flood event. This also armors a paved Bureau of Indian Affairs highway adjacent to this residence. (completed in October 2011)



The red ovals show some of the successful willow clump plantings used to stabilize the creek bank. 5/30/2014.



First Participants in Conservation Stewardship Program Can Renew

The first participants of 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.

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 landowners to reach the next level of conservation and opens the door to trying new conservation activities,” Swartzendruber said.

For more information visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill or visit your local USDA service center.

Hardin Field Office Participates in Career Fair at Chief Dull Knife College

The Hardin Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office participated in a career fair at Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, Mont. on February 4, 2014. Evan Van Order, soil conservationist, Travis Caudle, soil scientist, and Seanna Torske, district conservationist, visited with students about career

opportunities with NRCS, how to apply for job vacancies and also discussed the EarthTeam Volunteer Program. The career fair was filled with high school and college students from Lame Deer, Crow Agency, Busby, Forsyth, as well other area schools. The Hardin Field Office had a great time visiting with the students and educating them about the goals and mission of the NRCS.



Students at Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, Mont. participated in the career fair on February 4, 2014. NRCS employees spoke with students about careers with NRCS.

Montana USDA 2014 Tribal Outreach Forum and Tribal Meetings

Jennifer Perez Cole, Farm Service Agency, Public Affairs Specialist, Bozeman

Agency leadership from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD) hosted the Montana USDA Tribal Outreach Forum in Bozeman April 10-11 with tribal community outreach partners. The tribal forum was held in conjunction with the annual powwow celebration at Montana State University, April 11-12.

Approximately 50 people, including representatives from all seven Indian reservations, attended the event. Ross Racine, executive director of the Intertribal Agriculture Council, sponsored and participated in the forum. Presenters included: RD State Director Tony Preite, FSA State Executive Director Bruce Nelson, NRCS State Conservationist Joyce Swartzendruber and state specialists, as well as Eric Sommer, state statistician of

the Montana Agricultural Statistics Service; Gary Adams, state plant health director of the Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service; Joel Clairmont, deputy director of the Montana Department of Agriculture;

April 29 in Crow Agency. Approximately 300 people attended the community meetings co-hosted by representatives from tribal colleges, extension, land and natural resources offices. Meetings were held at the Wolf Point campus of Fort Peck Community College on the Fort Peck Reservation, Stone Child College on the Rocky Boy Reservation, Hays-Lodgepole School on the Fort Belknap Reservation, Blackfeet Community College on the



Blackfeet Reservation, Leon Community Hall on the Flathead Reservation, Chief Dull Knife Community College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, and Little Big Horn College on the Crow Reservation.

State USDA officials and local agency representatives provided the latest information on farm bill implementation during the meetings and also fielded questions. The Intertribal Agriculture Council and the Little Big Horn College 2501 Outreach Project partnered with USDA, assisting with the presentations and providing funds for meals at the events.

While on the road conducting the Community farm bill Meetings, USDA representatives also met with tribal councils in tribal chambers across Montana. Ongoing meetings are held to update tribal officials on USDA programs and services and to seek tribal input on how USDA agencies can better serve the tribal governments and communities on the seven Indian reservations in Montana.

Jason Smith, director of Indian Affairs for Governor Steve Bullock and Casey Lozar of the Montana State Tribal Economic Development Commission.

The forum was designed to provide tribal outreach partners with agency updates on the 2014 farm bill. Following the farm bill forum, an afternoon workshop on "How to Start and Expand a Food Bank and Soup Kitchen in Your Community" was held.

Montana USDA leaders also hosted USDA Community Meetings on the 2014 farm bill at all seven Indian reservations in Montana. The first meeting was held February 26 in Wolf Point and seventh was held on

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 name and mailing address to:

USDA-NRCS
Attn: Conservation Pathways
230 Ohio Street
Chinook, MT 59523-0189
Or Email:
clifford.merriman@mt.usda.gov



Important Dates to Remember

August 2014

Bitterroot Valley Pasture Walk - Alan Maki
August 5, 2014; Corvallis, Montana
For more information:
406-363-5010, ext 110

No-Till Gardening Workshop
August 6, 2014; Lane, Hardin, MT
For more information:
406-665-3442 ext. 101

Farm Tour and Workshop
August 16, 2014; Whitefish, Montana
For more information:
406-494-8636

September 2014

Governor's Range Tour
September 4-5, 2014; Ronan, Montana
For more information:
406-676-2842 ext. 102

Women Stepping Forward for Agriculture Symposium
September 23-25, 2014; Billings, Montana
For more information:
406-587-6786

Tribal Field Office Directory

Browning Field Office

Phone: 338-3153; FAX: 338-3529
Blackfeet Tribal Headquarters
P.O. Box 1169
Browning, MT 59417-1169
Serves: Blackfeet Reservation

District Conservationist- Anne Stephens
Email: anne.stephens@mt.usda.gov

Crow Agency Field Office

Phone: 638-9102; FAX: 638-9101
8645 South Weaver Drive,
Student Union Building (SUB), Room 205
P.O. Box 699
Crow Agency, MT 59022

District Conservationist- Jeremy Not Afraid
Email: jeremy.notafraid@mt.usda.gov

Fort Belknap Field Office

Phone: 353-8488; FAX: 353-2228
158 Tribal Way, Suite D 353+last 4
Harlem, MT 59526

District Conservationist- Scott Morton
Email: scott.morton@mt.usda.gov

Soil Conservation Technician- Blake Stiffarm
Phone: 353-8350,
Email: blake.stiffarm@mt.usda.gov

Lame Deer Field Office

Phone: 477-6494; FAX: 477-8431
East Boundary Drive
P.O. Box 330
Lame Deer, MT 59043-0330

Tribal Conservationist- Kathy Knobloch
Email: kathy.knobloch@mt.usda.gov

Pablo Field Office

Phone: 675-2700; FAX: 275-2804
Tribal Land Department
42487 Complex Boulevard
Pablo, MT 59855-0871

Tribal Conservationist- Herb Webb ext. 1245
Email: herb.webb@mt.usda.gov

Poplar Field Office

Phone: 768-3566; FAX: 768-3373
500 Medicine Bear Road
Box 1027
Poplar, MT 59255-1027

*Fork Peck and
Turtle Mountain Tribal Liaison-*
Paul Finnicum, Phone: 768-3964
Email: paul.finnicum@mt.usda.gov

Rocky Boy's Field Office

Phone: 352-3138; FAX: 352-8005
P.O. Box 27
Box Elder, MT 59521
Serves: Chippewa Cree Tribe

Acting District Conservationist-
Dawn Wickum
Email: dawn.wickum@mt.usda.gov

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