USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

Montana NRCS
Impact Report 2017

Our Purpose

Since 1935, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has helped America's private landowners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources. NRCS provides technical assistance based on sound science and offers financial assistance for many conservation activities.

NRCS is the leader in helping land managers make sound choices for healthy land and water. Through voluntary, incentive-based programs, NRCS works one-on-one with Montana farmers and ranchers to provide technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on private lands.

Our People

Soil conservationists, rangeland specialists, soil scientists, and other technical experts work in NRCS field offices across Montana providing assistance to private landowners.

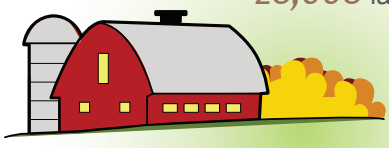
There is an NRCS field office in every county and on every reservation.

That's 60 offices ready to help you!

Our Land

59.8 million acres in production ag

28,008 farms/ranches



2,134 acres average size of farm/ranch

$4.2 billion total ag production market value

Top Commodities by Sales

1. Grains/oilseeds/dry beans/dry peas
2. Cattle and Calves
3. Other Crops and Hay

Source: 2012 National Ag Statistics Service Census

Our Partners

Our partnerships expand the reach and depth of conservation on the land.

The federal, state and nonprofit groups that comprise our conservation partnerships have a diversity of expertise in discipline, location and focus.
While our partners are diverse and many, our earliest partner was the local conservation district. Born of the Dust Bowl era like NRCS, conservation districts operate at the local level with NRCS getting conservation on the ground. Administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Conservation and Resource Development Division and represented by the Montana Association of Conservation Districts and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana, conservation districts are local units of government responsible for the soil and water conservation work within their boundaries. They work hand-in-hand with NRCS to increase voluntary conservation practices among farmers, ranchers and other land users.

Our Planning

Yellowstone Region Agricultural Sustainability Project

Earlier this year, a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) proposal led by MillerCoors was accepted by NRCS. Through RCPP, NRCS and local partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities on regional or watershed scales. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved.

NRCS and partners will provide $1.21 million in funding, up to five years, beginning in 2018.

The Yellowstone Regional Agricultural Sustainability RCPP project will fund conservation in Big Horn, Carbon, and Yellowstone counties.

The RCPP project will promote conservation for farmers using beet or barley crop rotations including documentation of irrigation water usage. Through the project, records will be collected pertaining to irrigation water management and usage, nutrient and pest management, cover crops, yields, and timing. Projects will also serve as demonstration sites and field day locations.

Bridger Plant Materials Center

In 2017, the Montana-Wyoming Plant Materials program continued to provide technical support to NRCS field staff and landowners, produce and distribute Foundation seed, and conduct research studies. Foundation seed allocations were up this year, as commercial seed growers plan for a variety of potential future demands, including post-fire revegetation. Cover crop and soil health research continued at the Bridger Plant Materials Center with several varietal and mixture studies. Bridger participated in a national cover crop study testing 58 varieties of 8 species.

Area and state office staff completed studies with mung bean, cow pea, and fava bean, among other species. Staff conducted research on pollinator habitat enhancement and increased seed of 11 species for future testing and possible release. Established studies with bur oak and plains cottonwood grown in deep containers under dryland conditions were completed in 2017. Twenty-six field planting projects testing plant species and planting technologies were evaluated and results can be applied to future conservation plantings.

Ronan Earth Team Volunteer Earns National Award

Kristi D'Agati was selected as the 2016 National Earth Team Volunteer of the Year. Kristi served with the Ronan field office from Jan. through Oct., 2016.

National Earth Team Volunteer of the Year served 1,100 hours.

In her time with NRCS, Kristi worked as a conservation planner and assisted in soil analysis, range monitoring and planning, pasture improvements, forestry inventory, and wetland analysis. Her work focused on field trials in Lake County looking for low-cost, workable solutions to common, local, natural resource issues that producers can easily implement on their own operation. In 2016, Kristi implemented five field trials on 12 ranches. She seeded 37 plots totaling more than 90 acres. Monitoring is ongoing.

Conservation Protects Greater Sage Grouse

NRCS continues to implement its' Sage Grouse Initiative 2.0 Strategy across 11 states, including Montana.

In 2017, Montana NRCS obligated 35 new EQIP contracts, totaling more than $5 million.

Prescribed grazing continues to be the foundation practice as we partner with ranchers to improve the health of rangelands, benefitting both their bottom line and the habitat sage grouse depend on. NRCS, landowners, and land trust partners also:

- addressed the invasion of conifers into sagebrush rangelands on approximately 1,000 acres in key areas.
- collaborated to bring an unprecedented number of easement applications to the table, addressing threats to sage grouse in areas at high risk of cropland conversion or exurban development. NRCS received approval on over 90,000 acres of easements in sage grouse habitat totaling around $22 million.
- piloted projects in southwest Montana with the Beaverhead Conservation District to keep water on the landscape longer to improve wildlife habitat and potentially improve livestock forage and build drought resiliency.
- Built sage grouse conservation capacity at the field level with continued support from SWCDM for four positions.

From Snow Survey to Water Supply Forecasting

The Montana Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program operates 131 SNOTEL (SNOwpack TELemetry) stations across the mountains of Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota to collect data to issue monthly water supply forecasts. During the winter of 2016/2017, NRCS issued long-duration monthly seasonal volume forecasts for 98 stream gauges across Montana from January through June.

NRCS forecasts help producers and water managers make early decisions about surface water availability from April to September. The monthly Water Supply Outlook Reports provide information on snowpack, precipitation, reservoir storage and other climate information useful for monitoring the evolving conditions through the water year.

Landowners Utilize NRCS Fire Recovery Assistance

More than 1 million acres burned across Montana during 2017. A multitude of Federal, State, County, and local agencies helped fight the blazes. In the aftermath, NRCS is helping landowners to assess damage to their property and plan for recovery in a way that works for the people, livestock, wildlife, and land. NRCS made funding available for conservation practices associated with fire recovery. The initiative resulted in 24 contracts on almost 110,000 acres for more than $2.2 million. Funded conservation practices helped farmers and ranchers to remove and replace burned fence, replace stock water facilities, and defer grazing on and implement a grazing plan when returning to burned rangeland.

72,937 acres (114 mi²)
of prescribed grazing contracted

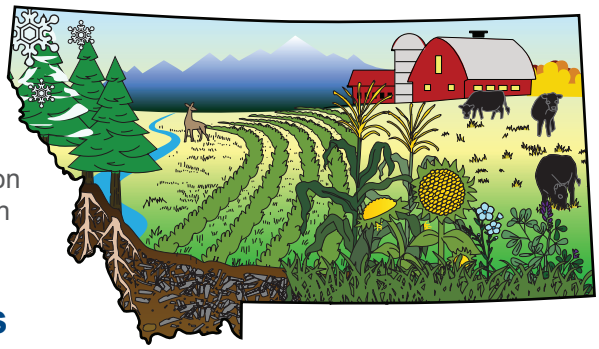
880,745 feet (167 mi)
of fence installed

National Initiative Improves Water Quality in Gallatin County

In 2017, the National Water Quality initiative (NWQI) in Gallatin County resulted in four contracts improving water quality and soil health on 800 acres in the Camp Creek and Godfrey Creek Watershed. The Gallatin Conservation District also received $20,000 through a Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 223 grant to help landowners throughout the watershed implement conservation practices. Additionally, Montana Department of Environmental Quality is sponsoring 319 grants administered by the Greater Gallatin Watershed Council to improve water quality on selected reaches of Camp Creek. This diverse partnership developed a sampling analyses plan and began monitoring flow and water quality data in May of 2017. This effort will continue for the duration of the NWQI. The goal of the 2017-2019 NWQI is to reduce sediment, agricultural related nutrient loads, and E. Coli and improve riparian function of Camp and Godfrey Creeks. To date, the initiative has relocated a feedlot away from the creek, improved irrigation efficiency, installed off-creek stock water, and applied soil health practices on cropland.

Our Progress

NRCS worked with Montana farmers and ranchers in 2017 to implement conservation practices on more than **1.6 million acres** for:



grazing land health 594,333 ac

water quality/quantity 412,432 ac

fish, wildlife, pollinator habitat 387,189 ac

cropland soil health 271,553 ac

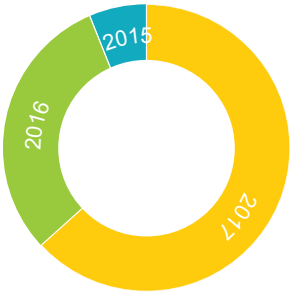
forest land health 2,869 ac

Our Programs

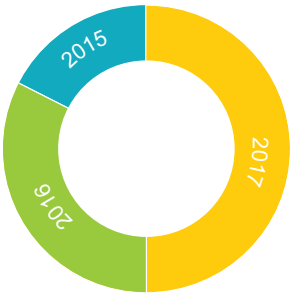
Conservation Technical Assistance is the core approach NRCS has used successfully for 80 years to reach out to the American farmers and ranchers caring for the Nation's private lands. NRCS employees provide conservation options, recommendations, planning, and engineering assistance to individual farmers, ranchers, local governments, and urban landowners. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding to implement conservation plans.

FARM BILL PROGRAM	CONTRACTS/ EASEMENTS	ACRES	OBLIGATIONS
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program			
Agricultural Land Easements	20	92,512	$21,903,257
Wetland Reserve Easements	11	10,125	$7,641,670
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)			
Conservation Stewardship Program (new contracts)	98	288,670	$1,805,619
Conservation Stewardship Program (renewals)	114	547,357	$3,289,934
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (all fund codes)	274	523,851	$21,307,211
2017 Fire Recovery	24	109,994	$2,239,129
AFO/CAFO	6	7,428	$1,795,686
Beginning Farmer and Rancher/Socially Disadvantaged (incl. all Tribal)	33	59,947	$2,085,510
Tri-County Fuels Reduction	17	895	$414,891
Headwaters Drought	7	21,758	$1,009,907
High Tunnel	24	118	$188,993
Honey Bee Pollinators	5	163	$83,499
NWQI - Deep Creek	1	131	$83,819
NWQI - Camp Creek and Godfrey Creek	4	799	$596,927
On-Farm Energy	6	506	$53,340
Organic Certified	3	721	$76,347
Organic Transition	1	1,209	$67,446
Sage-grouse Initiative	35	146,815	$5,180,384
Regional Conservation Partnership Program			
Missouri Headwaters and Lower Gallatin Basin Project	3	661	$296,022
TOTAL	520	1,463,176	$56,243,713

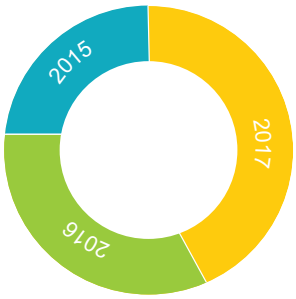
Total ACEP Acres



Total EQIP Acres



Sage-grouse Initiative Acres



Data Sources: Protracts 9/29/17. NEST: 10/12/17.