The Montana Civil Rights Advisory Committee (MCRAC) is a sixteen-member employee committee that advises and assists Montana NRCS leadership with the objectives of the Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity (CR/EEO) programs. The committee also supports staff throughout the state with civil rights reviews, trainings and participation in a wide variety of outreach activities.

The MCRAC is composed of a representative from each area, a state office representative, a Senior Leadership Team representative, a Beginning Farmer Rancher representative, two advisors, and eight Special Emphasis Program Managers that represent American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; Black Emphasis; Disability Employment; Federal Women; Hispanic; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender; and Veterans. This report is a condensed summary of the MCRAC’s actions and accomplishments for 2021. For more information on how to participate in MCRAC activities or how to serve on the Committee, please visit the Montana Civil Rights Advisory Committee web page.

Projects and Accomplishments

- Developed and filmed recruitment videos titled “Why Montana” to aid at recruiting events and social media.
- Posted 12 NRCS job announcements (including direct hiring positions that accounted for 50+ new hires) on the website, Handshake with distribution to over 50 colleges in the U.S.
- Area Representatives regularly apprised their respective field offices and area office staff of important updates and policy changes relating to CR/EEO matters.
- Updated the MT Civil Rights Committee SharePoint site with the Biden/Harris USDA Civil Rights Policy.
- Updated the MT Civil 230 Civil Rights SharePoint website to improve functionality, remove outdated materials, and improve layout.
- Updated the MCRAC webpages to reflect the most up-to-date membership, CR/EEO statements, employee assistance sources, and policy requirements.
- Maintained the on-boarding folder containing documents of importance for new MCRAC members.
- Collaborated with Montana NRCS Public Affairs staff to update outreach materials.
- Improved informational materials to be given to individuals interested in Pathways internships.
- Developed a How-To guide on setting up alerts for Jobs on USAJobs.
- Assisted field offices throughout the state in updating their mandatory CR/EEO posters.
- Developed and discovered materials that can be used to instruct job applicants on how to apply for positions on USAJobs, including tips for resume writing and how to set up an alert notification.
- Developed a consistent email to be sent to field staff that encourages D.C.’s and other employees to contact agricultural programs and FFA advisors at local high schools and local 4H groups, in an effort to recruit future Pathways students.
- Developed a consistent email to send to new NRCS employees to inform them on Civil Rights and EEO policy.
- Assisted five field offices with CR/EEO appraisals.
- Submitted a MT NRCS news article directing NRCS staff where to Civil Rights Information on the SharePoint site.

Montana Civil Rights Advisory Committee Members for 2021

Austin Allen, Chair & Black SEPM
Brooke Johns, Vice Chair & Miles City Area Representative
Rebecka Ayre, Secretary & American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM
Kristine Handley, Missoula Area Representative
Sierra Berry, Bozeman Area Representative
Matti Osterman, Great Falls Area Representative
Kristi Nile, Federal Women’s SEPM
Zoe Sherman, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender SEPM
John Bowe, Veteran SEPM
Camille Waters, Hispanic SEPM
Susan Tallman, Disability SEPM
Karen Hoffman, Asian American/Pacific Islander SEPM
Kerri Bilbo, Senior Leadership Team Representative
Shelby Doherty, State Office Representative
Faith Hill, Beginning Farmer Rancher Representative
Kris Berg, Advisor
Jerry Shows, Advisor
Projects and Accomplishments (continued)

- Attended the MT State 4H Virtual meeting speaking on careers within NRCS.
- Spoke to MSU’s Introduction to Land Resources class on NRCS careers and our Pathways Internships.
- Developed a list of various college/university contacts to send emails to regarding available jobs and internships within the NRCS.
- Finalized the 2021 MCRAC Business Plan and updated accomplishments throughout the year.
- Developed the 2022 MCRAC Business Plan in preparation for the new fiscal year.
- Administered the Montana State Civil Rights Awards process.

Outreach

- Maintained a list of employment and civil rights outreach events occurring in Montana for 2021
- Promoted Pathways internship opportunities through Handshake.com to over 50 schools across the western U.S. as well as all Montana colleges and universities
- Posted Montana NRCS job announcements to Handshake.
- Attended the MT state 4H virtual event speaking on NRCS careers and internship opportunities.
- Developed a list of college contacts for universities that may not participate in Handshake job posting
- Montana SEPMs regularly interacted with their national counterparts to inform them of Montana’s activities and gain insight concerning national level policy and trends.
- Made contact with several HBCU colleges to develop long-term relationships for potential job/internship opportunities.

Training

- Participated in the Montana NRCS New Employee Orientation event.
- Developed CR/EEO and MCRAC training materials to be presented at the 2022 Montana NRCS All Employee Meeting.
- MCRAC Members authored and posted 36 educational Montana NRCS News articles this year.
- Participated in the national Beginning Farmer Coordinator Program.

Workshop and Event Attendance

The MCRAC regularly participates in workshops, college and community job fairs, and CR/EEO specific functions throughout the year. Attendance at such events supports several of the Committee’s mission goals including participating in recruitment practices and ensuring under-represented groups are aware of NRCS employment opportunities. This year, however, participating in such events proved challenging at best due to the COVID pandemic. Many of the historically attended events were postponed indefinitely or canceled this year. Nevertheless, MCRAC members were still able to find events to attend, often remotely through the aid of modern technology. The virtual events are listed below.

- Attended the national Beginning Farmer virtual conference.
- Attended a town hall meeting with Sec. Vilsack and USDA Asian/Pacific Islander employees on employee and retention issues.