



Natural Resources Conservation Service Montana Report, 2016



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.

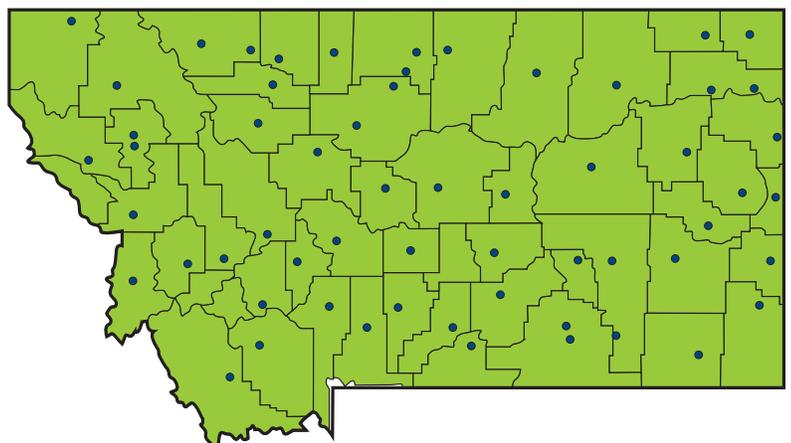
Our People

NRCS has soil conservationists, rangeland specialists, soil scientists, and other technical experts who work in Montana’s 60 field offices across the state providing technical assistance to private landowners.

Field offices – 60
Area offices – 4

Plant Materials Center - Bridger, Montana
State office – Bozeman, Montana

Montana NRCS Service Centers



Our Partners

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

Conservation Protects Greater Sage-Grouse



Just one year ago, the USFWS announced that Greater sage-grouse did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act following an unprecedented conservation partnership across the West that significantly reduced threats to sage-grouse. The NRCS continues to implement its' SGI 2.0 Strategy across all 11 states, including Montana. In FY 2016, Montana NRCS will obligate 20 new EQIP contracts, totaling approximately \$4 million. These contracts will facilitate the removal of threats to sage-grouse on more than 100,000 acres of rangeland in sage-grouse habitat. Prescribed grazing continues to be the foundation practice in Montana as we partner with ranchers to improve the health of rangelands to benefit both their bottom line and the habitat sage-grouse depend on.

For the first time, Montana NRCS set aside funds to address the invasion of conifers into the sagebrush rangelands. While this is not a huge threat to grouse across the majority of Montana, key areas have been identified around the state where strategic removal of conifers will

benefit grouse. Ongoing SGI research is looking into both the birds response to removal of the trees and the impact that juniper dominated landscapes have on the water availability in the system. As we move forward in Montana we will continue to focus on developing sustainable grazing systems with ranchers, while also looking for opportunities to improve sage-grouse habitat through conifer removal and the seeding of cropland back to perennials.

Upper Clark Fork River Drought Resiliency Project



In 2016, NRCS obligated \$1.7 million to the Upper Clark Fork River Drought Resiliency Project to improve water quantity through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, RCPP is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation.

The Upper Clark Fork basin offers a unique opportunity to restore water resources and aquatic habitat on a basin-wide scale while benefitting agricultural operations with diverse water-saving practices. This project will implement major water conservation projects such as piping

three leaky canals, constructing six new diversions, doubling the flow in a critical reach of the Clark Fork River, preventing entrainment of native fish, while also addressing the impacts of drought on forest and grazing lands in the upper watershed.

Deep Creek Watershed Focus of National Water Quality Initiative



NWQI work along Deep Creek is addressing problems with high sediment loading, elevated water temperatures, and low summer streamflow.

FY2016 is the third and final year for NWQI in the Deep Creek watershed in Broadwater County. In Deep Creek, Montana NRCS has invested approximately \$1.3 million in 23 contracts from 2014 to 2016 to help address the impairments that are negatively impacting the creek. This partnership effort with the Broadwater Conservation District, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation resulted in improved irrigation efficiency, restored stream flow for aquatic animals, and led to the removal of a DEQ-identified sediment impairment listing.



StrikeForce Targets Funds to Beginning Farmers and Tribal Resource Concerns



In its first year as a StrikeForce state, Montana NRCS received an initial allocation of \$500,000 in Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds. These funds were used to contract five applications in four counties: Glacier, Golden

Valley, Hill (2), and Lake. Four of the applications will address tribal resource concerns: Blackfoot Tribe on the Blackfoot Reservation, the Chippewa Cree Tribe on the Rocky Boy's Reservation (2), and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. Specifically, NRCS contracted 4,000 acres of grazing land improvements on the Blackfoot Reservation, 9,700 acres of grazing land improvements in Golden Valley County for beginning farmers and ranchers, 1,614 acres of farmland improvements for the Chippewa Cree Tribe on the Rocky Boy's Reservation, and 80 acres

of irrigation improvements on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. These 5 projects totaled \$516,882.

Montana also received additional funding for two special projects in the EQIP StrikeForce effort. One project will improve an 860-acre Crow Reservation irrigation system in Big Horn County and the other will improve grazing management on 29,750 acres on the Fort Peck Reservation in Roosevelt County. These two initiatives funded six contracts for a total of \$1,619,927.

Our Progress

NRCS worked with Montana farmers and ranchers in 2016 to implement conservation practices on more than 2.7 million acres:

1. Conservation on cropland to improve soil health - 188,535 acres
2. Conservation to improve water quality and quantity - 814,664 acres
3. Conservation on to improve grazing land health - 1,316,850 acres
4. Conservation to improve fish and wildlife habitat - 355,247 acres
5. Conservation to improve forest land health - 53,691 acres

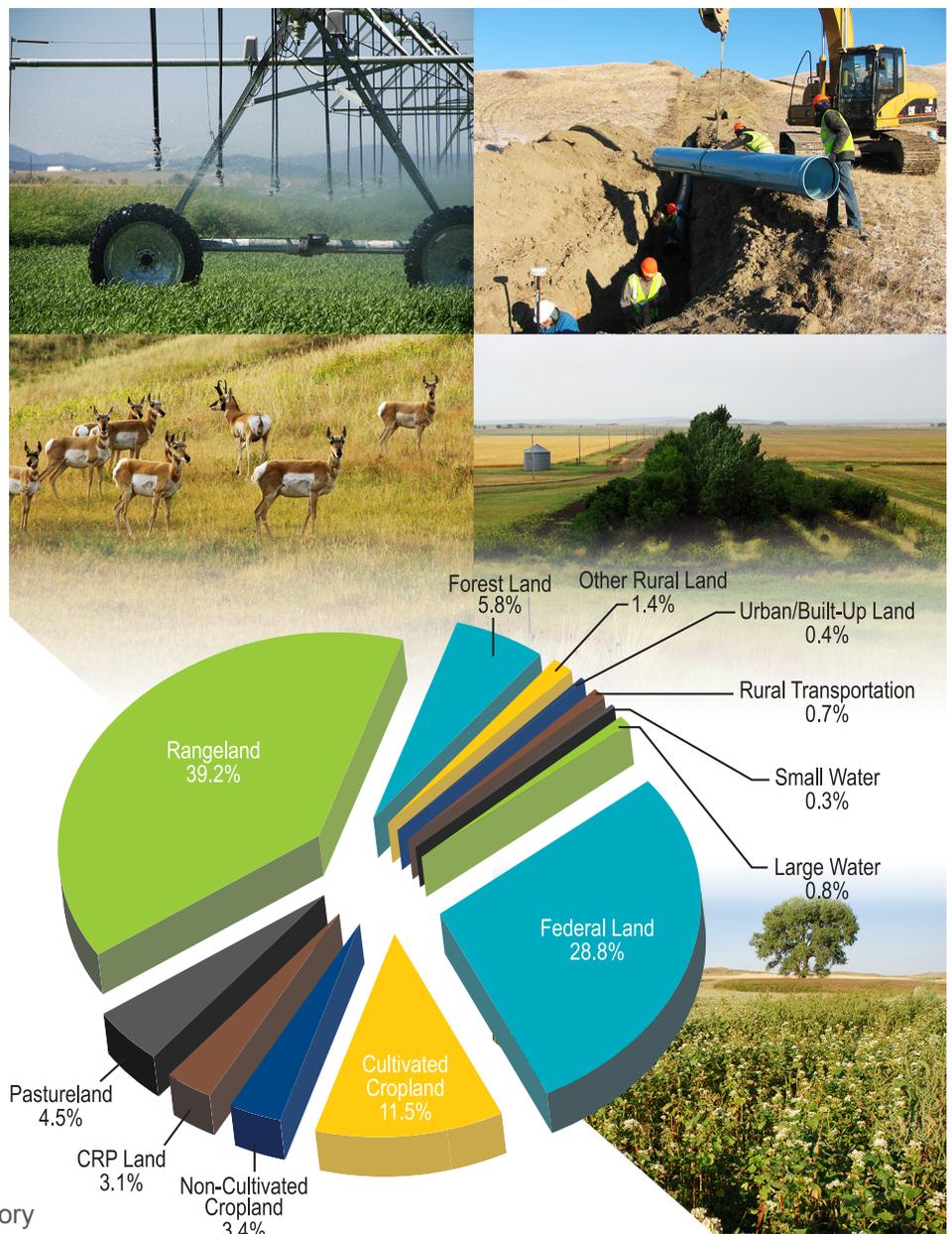
Our Land

Montana Land Use: Total Surface Area by Broad Land Cover/Use

Estimates from the 2010 National Resources Inventory show Montana surface area in 2010 was comprised of

- Rangeland = 39.2%,
- Federal Land = 28.8%,
- Cultivated Cropland = 11.5%,
- Forest Land = 5.8%,
- Pastureland = 4.5%,
- Non-cultivated Cropland = 3.4%,
- CRP = 3.1%,
- Rural Land = 1.4%,
- Large Water Bodies = .8%,
- Transportation = .7%,
- Urban/Built-up Land = .4%, and
- Small Water Bodies = .3%.

Source: 2010 National Resources Inventory



Our Programs

Conservation Technical Assistance is the core approach NRCS has used successfully for 80 years to reach out to American farmers and ranchers to provide technical assistance needed to care 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 Programs

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF CONTRACTS/ EASEMENTS	ACRES	OBLIGATIONS
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program			
Agricultural Land Easements	13	50,995	\$13,957,164
Wetland Reserve Easements	4	646	\$1,120,800
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)			
Conservation Stewardship Program (new contracts)	148	553,950	\$3,937,362
Conservation Stewardship Program (renewals)	176	730,296	\$5,016,614
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (all fund codes)			
AFO/CAFO	5	4,686	\$1,043,293
Beginning Farmer and Rancher/Socially Disadvantaged (incl. tribal)	35	42,596	\$2,334,517
SFI Special Projects: Big Horn Irrigation Improvement & Fort Peck Grazingland Improvement (tribal)	6	29810	\$1,655,809
Drought in the Missouri Headwaters Basin	12	2,186	\$1,126,285
Heart Butte Fire Recovery (tribal)	9	22,780	\$345,974
High Tunnel	28	87	\$213,329
Honey Bee Pollinators	24	2,476	\$615,308
National Water Quality Initiative (Deep Creek)	10	19,660	\$347,159
On-Farm Energy	15	4,483	\$308,965
Organic	4	3,311	\$250,456
Prairie Pothole Wetlands and Grasslands Retention Project	24	7,011	\$1,071,055
Sage-grouse Initiative	20	119,851	\$3,863,560
Two Chief's Landscape Restoration Partnership (Tenmile)	20	334	\$223,378
Regional Conservation Partnership Program			
Missouri Headwaters and Lower Gallatin Basin Project	1	475	\$13,338
TOTAL	648	1,684,884	\$44,535,984

Data Sources: Protracts 10/14/16. NEST: 10/14/16.

Montana

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



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