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Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Montana Perspective

2014 NASCA Annual Meeting
Whitefish, Montana
September 7-10, 2014

Joyce Swartzendruber
Montana State Conservationist

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Partnerships



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Forest Health

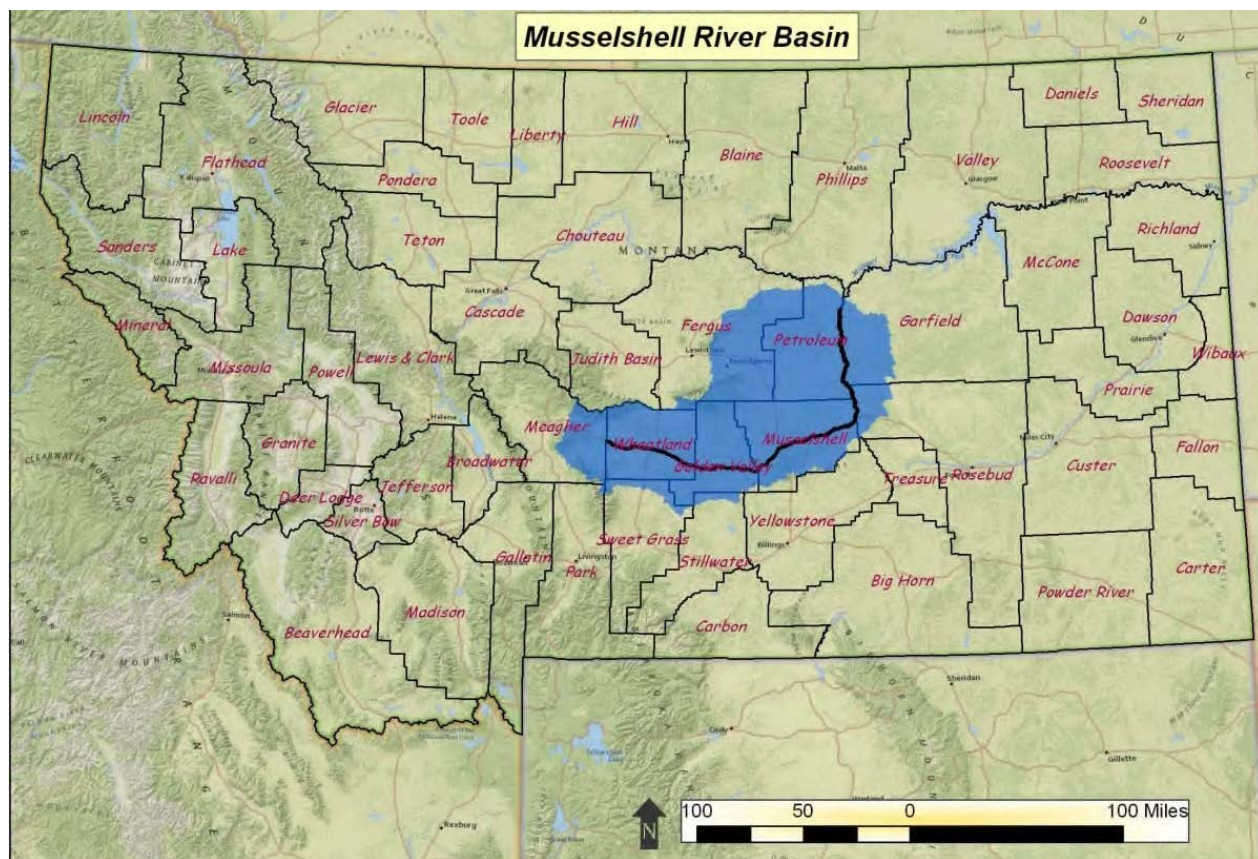
- ✓ Fuel Break Initiative
 - An EQIP-funded initiative. NRCS and DNRC partnered to reduce the impacts of forest fires.
- ✓ Technical Assistance Thru Agreement with DNRC Forestry
- ✓ Two Chiefs Partnership Project
 - DNRC, NRCS and the Forest Service are working together to restore the Tenmile Watershed-Red Mountain Flume/Chessman Reservoir.
 - The watershed contributes 80 percent of the water supply for Helena, Mont.
 - Restoration will mitigate wildfire threats, protect water quality and water supply.





Fire and Flood Recovery

- ✓ 2011 Musselshell Flood
 - ✓ Damage to irrigation infrastructure, roads, bridges, residential structures and productive agricultural fields.
 - ✓ DNRC, MTFWP and NRCS were a part of the River Assessment Triage Team (RATT).
- ✓ Cottonwood Regeneration
 - ✓ After the floods, cottonwood tree seedlings emerged from the new sediment deposits.
 - ✓ NRCS provided technical assistance, helping people plan for cottonwood regrowth and riparian area management.





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Soil Health

- ✓ Sponsor six annual soil health workshops and field tours with the MACD.
- ✓ Website includes various resources about soil health in Montana.



Drought Resilience

- ✓ The National Drought Resilience Partnership was announced by the White House in 2013.
- ✓ An effort to improve long-term drought resilience in Montana
- ✓ NRCS and DNRC are working together—focusing on the Upper Missouri River Basin.



Arctic Grayling

- ✓ Arctic grayling was not listed as an endangered species
- ✓ NRCS, USFWS, FWP, DNRC, worked with landowners in the Big Hole Watershed to implement voluntary conservation projects.
- ✓ Conservation projects include:
 - riparian fencing
 - irrigation flow reductions
 - improved irrigation infrastructure
 - fish ladders
 - improved stock water systems
 - both passive and active stream restoration.
- ✓ Habitat quality has improved and grayling populations have more than doubled since the CCAA began in 2006.





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Sage-Grouse

- ✓ Sage-Grouse
 - ✓ Since 2010, NRCS in Montana has invested more than \$9.5 Million to help private landowners improve and enhance sage-grouse habitat and the sustainability of working ranches and farms.
 - ✓ SGI and SWAT employees hired by MACD.
 - ✓ Worked with all of our partners to mark fences for sage-grouse
 - ✓ MFWP and NRCS collaborate through jointly funded positions as well as through a cooperative study of grazing management to determine the program's effectiveness.





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Conservation Update

- ✓ A quarterly newsletter from NRCS that keeps our partners informed on topics, such as the Farm Bill, program activities, education and information campaigns, current conservation issues, and other items of interest.

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Montana Conservation Update

July 2014 Quarterly Newsletter www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov

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- ❑ Soil Health, A Montana Perspective
- ❑ New State Resource Conservationist to Join Montana NRCS Staff
- ❑ John Olestad Wins Unsung Hero Award
- ❑ Pollinator Poster Features Native Pollinators
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- ❑ NRCS Talks Soils at Hill County Youth Ed Day
- ❑ Upcoming Events

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 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!

Helping People Help the Land

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