

# Rolling River Trailers



Loaded with several hundred pounds of sand and a self-contained tank for pumping and re-circulating water, bright blue utility trailers are ready to provide water education to Montanans. The **Rolling River** is a five by ten-foot utility trailer with a six-inch deep trailer bed that is filled with sand (actually recycled plastic granules).

A meandering river or two is scooped out running from one end to the other. Small figures of cows, horses, houses, a barn, corral and a parking lot with cars and farm equipment placed on top, form a simulated village. Trees, foliage and a few rocks line the riverbank. When water is turned on at the top of the watershed, it flows through the river and can be used to demonstrate a variety of water lessons including:

- **River energy:** Sprinkle a handful of alluvium at the top of the "watershed" and watch it be carried along in the water.

- **Riparian areas:** With the vegetation in place along the riverbank, the banks remain stable. Remove some of the foliage, and **erosion** occurs as water cuts into the banks. Turn the water on full force as in a flood situation and the riverbank begins to break down and collapses even faster. This demonstrates the principles of healthy versus unhealthy riparian areas.

- **Non-point pollution:** Rain (from a sprinkling can) on the parking lot above the river demonstrates how pollution is carried into streams.

- **Effects of diversion:** Using PVC pipe to create irrigation ditches slows down the speed of the water. Stopping the water entirely by creating a dam effects other changes.

The **Rolling Rivers** Trailers were designed and initially used in Colorado.

The Montana program is based on a very successful effort in New Mexico. The Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) purchased the trailers under a grant from the Bureau of Reclamation.