



MONTANA

Rangeland Resources Program

MONTANA RANGELAND RESOURCES ACT | 1947

2019-2020 Report

“A program of rangeland management whereby: The importance of Montana’s rangeland with respect to livestock, forage, wildlife habitat, high-quality water production, pollution control, erosion control, recreation and the natural beauty of the state is recognized.”

RANGELAND RESOURCES PROGRAM

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I have had the pleasure of serving on the Rangeland Resources Committee (RRC) since it was created in 1979, while many things have changed since then, a lot still remains the same as that is the purpose of the Rangeland Resources Program—advocate for the rangeland resource, the largest on Montana’s landscape.

The committee provides program direction and guidance to DNRC on all matters related to rangelands. This includes working with NGOs, stakeholder groups, agencies and the universities. Over the years the RRC and the program have provided oversight for the Range Improvement Loan Program, coordinated 28 Range Tours across 33 counties, co-hosted hundreds of workshops and seminars, started Montana Youth Range Camp in 1984, educating 1,200 plus students over the years,

creating a Working Lands Internship Program for college students, coordinating Rangelands in the Rotunda during legislative years, and most recently introducing the Leopold Conservation Award to Montana.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of serving on the committee has been to see the great conservation and stewardship being done by those out making a living on the range and the relationships that often result from working towards a common goal for a resource that we all care about very deeply—rangelands.

2020 has posed many challenges for gatherings and travel, with many meetings and events being held virtually. I look forward to days when we can meet again in person.

John Hollenback – Gold Creek, MT



PURPOSE

- To increase public understanding that Montana’s rangelands are a renewable source of important consumer products and environmental values.
- To provide, coordinate, and disseminate information about economic and ecological aspects of rangeland management practices.
- To promote public support for livestock grazing on Montana’s rangelands.
- To promote responsible rangeland stewardship.
- To advocate balanced use of rangeland resources.

MONTANA RANGELAND

70% of Montana is Rangeland

68,000,000 acres

Providing habitat for wildlife, forage for livestock, and a host of ecosystem goods and services for the state.

Rangelands in Montana provide watershed services worth \$14/acre including water collection, groundwater filtration, and aquifer recharge.

Rangelands support wildlife*:

550,200 deer

158,000 antelope

138,500 elk



*Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks 2019

The Rangelands Resource Program **provides opportunities to bring people together** who care to learn from one another and collaborate on common goals. The program serves as a **credible source of information**, unbiased, trusted, honest, and non-political as well as welcoming to everyone who cares about rangeland. The program **builds relationships with diverse groups** and shares perspectives and ideas while creating positive relationships proactively working together with other groups.

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



WORKING LANDS INTERNSHIP

This is an opportunity for students not from a ranching or agriculture background to experience life as a producer. This partnership effort with Montana USDA NRCS allows students to stay with host ranches, helping with any aspect of ranch life. The internship purpose is to give students pursuing a degree in Natural Resources an opportunity to learn how a ranch works, improve or develop their communication skills and gain an on-the-ground perspective for working agricultural lands in Montana.

MONTANA RANGE TOUR

MRT works closely with Conservation Districts, NRCS, agency personal and landowners. MRT highlights and visits many conservation projects such as watering systems, grazing systems, stream restoration, conservation easements, cover crops, fencing, wildlife habitat improvements and AFO/CAFOs.

RANGELAND ROTUNDA DAY

The first Rangeland Day at Capitol Rotunda was held on February 17, 2017. This event is supported by rangeland stakeholders in celebration of Montana's largest natural resource through education and awareness. This is an opportunity for stakeholders to visit with the legislative body to showcase rangelands economic, social and environmental importance to the state.

406 RANGE FORUM

The Forum brings together private and public land stakeholders and decision-makers to discuss some of the major issues involving rangelands in Montana. The forum hosts knowledgeable speakers from many different disciplines. In 2018, topics discussed at Range Forum included fire, drought, new research, and information about the mediation program at the Montana Department of Agriculture.

MONTANA YOUTH RANGE CAMP

MYRC started in 1984 and provides a chance for youth to have fun and learn about rangelands. This week-long camp is filled with learning opportunities from soils, to wildlife, to water. The campers spend time recognizing and addressing resource concerns they learn about at a campsite. Campers participate in a plant ID line every day and prizes are given to top scores of the week.

PUBLIC LANDS GRAZING MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Section 8 process for public lands grazing disputes.

The purpose of this program is to provide a process for permittees and agencies to work cooperatively through disputes related to AMPs and grazing permits on federal lands.

406 RANGELAND

In 2020, the Rangeland Resources Program embarked upon a monthly digital newsletter. The newsletter is emailed to an opt-in list and is also posted on the Rangeland Resources Program redesigned web page at dnrc.mt.gov.

RANGELAND IMPROVEMENT LOAN PROGRAM

Started in 1979, the low-interest loan program provides added incentives for producers to undertake rangeland improvement and development projects. Water storage, fencing, and stock water tanks are a few of the more common improvements. In addition to benefits for the ranch operation, the projects often improve streams and riparian areas and rangeland health, which in turn benefit wildlife, combat invasive weeds and reduce soil erosion.

LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

The Leopold Conservation Award makes an impact by publicly recognizing extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation.

The Rangeland Resource Program honors those doing exceptional work on the landscape [MCA-76-14-102(3)] by bringing the Leopold Conservation Award to Montana in 2019. Named in honor of Aldo Leopold, the Leopold Conservation Award makes an impact by publicly recognizing extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. It inspires other landowners representing millions of acres, and influences the general public's understanding of the importance of private working land in conservation.

The award is presented in partnership with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Rangeland Resources Committee and the Sand County Foundation.

2019 Award

*Milton Ranch
Roundup, Montana*



Bill Milton is a rancher who raises cattle on Montana's sagebrush plains. His wife Dana says that while Bill's mind looks at the big picture from the stratosphere, she is "firmly rooted in the soil." Together, they show their conservation ethic with land management practices that build rangeland resilience.

Raising Angus cattle on 15,000 acres, the Miltons have refined their conservation efforts since receiving the Montana Land Reliance Conservation Award in 1993. Their pastures are intensively grazed for a short amount of time, before allowing native plants to recover and go to seed. They have successfully advocated for holistic grazing techniques on federal lands.

Milton Ranch has participated in third party monitoring of the health of their grasslands for over 20 years. To preserve soil and vegetation during times of drought, they voluntarily reduce their herd's size. New water tanks and pipelines reduce disturbance to riparian areas and natural water sources. Innovative fencing and escape ramps in water troughs benefit wildlife.

2020 Award

*C Lazy J Ranch
Malta, Montana*



Craig and Conni French always considered themselves good land stewards, but six years ago things really began to change. They came to see their cattle ranch's fate was tied to healthy soils and grasses.

The use of cell grazing (a form of rotational grazing that moves a large herd frequently to new pastures) allows more recovery time for perennial vegetation to flourish on a semi-arid, brittle environment of short prairie grass. This results in better forage and wildlife habitat.

Temporary electric fence has replaced permanent fencing to reduce conflicts with wildlife. Targeted grazing of non-native grasses has improved habitat for grassland birds and sage grouse.

With assistance from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program, they moved livestock water tanks and windbreaks away from a creek.

Their voluntary 30-year conservation lease with Montana's Fish, Wildlife, and Parks ensures their land's native grassland and sagebrush will remain uncultivated and undeveloped.

RANGELAND IMPROVEMENT LOAN PROGRAM

The Range Improvement Loan Program was started in 1979 as part of the Rangeland Resource Program [MCA 76-14-111]. It makes low-interest loans available to Montana's farmers and ranchers for rangeland improvements and development and provides low-interest loans as an incentive for private landowners to undertake range improvement practices.

Current Interest Rate	1.5%
Maximum Loan Amount	\$75,000
Repayment	Max ten years, annual installments

Loan applicants apply initially to local conservation districts where the application is reviewed along with the conservation plan. The application is then reviewed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), before being forwarded to the Rangeland Resource Committee. The Director of DNRC has final approval authority.



LOAN PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS

Loans	161
Total Loaned	\$3,588,261.55
Total Paid Back	\$3,329,153.96

No defaults

TYPES OF PROJECTS

- stock water tanks
- fencing
- water line installation
- pipeline installation
- water storage
- seeding
- restoration



RANGELAND RESOURCES COMMITTEE AND PARTNERS



The Rangeland Resources Program receives guidance from the Rangeland Resource Committee, which is composed of six ranchers located across the state and appointed by the governor.

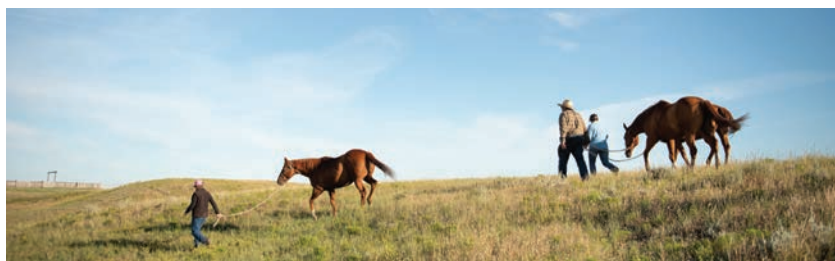
RRC is essential to the Rangeland Resources Program. Committee members attend all program events and represent DNRC's Rangeland Resources Program at many conferences and meetings.

John Hollenback, Chair | Gold Creek
Steve Hedstrom, Vice Chair | Raynesford
Diane Ahlgren | Mosby
Noel Keogh | Nye
Connie Iversen | Culbertson
Sigurd Jensen | Elmo



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RRC is committed to a program that is relevant and recognized as the authority to ensure that the rangeland resource is acknowledged as the largest and most important natural resource supporting people, wildlife, recreation, clean water, natural scenic beauty and the economy of Montana.



THANK YOU to our Rangeland Resources Program Partners

Montana Association of Conservation Districts
Montana-Dakotas BLM
Montana Farm Bureau Federation
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Montana Grass Conservation Commission
Montana Grazing Lands Coalition
Montana Public Lands Council
Montana State Association of Grazing Districts
Montana State University

Montana Stockgrowers Association
Montana USDA NRCS
Montana Wool Growers Association
Society for Range Management-Intermountain and Northern Great Plains Sections
Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana
US Forest Service
University of Montana
Western Sustainability Exchange



