

# MONTANA

## Rangeland Resources Program

### MONTANA RANGELAND RESOURCES ACT | 1947

---

“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.”

2021-2022 Report



# RANGELAND RESOURCES PROGRAM

---

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I was appointed to the Rangeland Resource Committee (RRC) about 15 years ago and it has been a rewarding experience. Attending the many tours, events, and meetings around the state has afforded me a new view and appreciation of innovative producers who do a wonderful job of producing in less-than-ideal conditions but with consideration for conservation and sustainability for the long term.

One of the best projects the RRC has initiated, in my opinion, has been the Working Lands Internship Program. As a host family, we have enjoyed an awesome group of smart, hardworking, dedicated, personable young people that reinforce our hope for the future of our industry and society.

I am also the RRC representative on the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) since its inception in 2015. This has been an intense learning experience but has offered an opportunity to represent the private landowner, rangeland, and grazing viewpoints in sage grouse discussions.

Great staff, agency and entity support, and fellow committee members whom I deeply admire, have made the RRC a fulfilling experience.

I will end with a piece of encouragement to our fellow producers, and all who are affected by, and enjoy the great Montana rangeland, to never stop learning, promoting, and sustaining one of Montana's greatest resources.

**Diane Ahlgren – Mosby, MT**



## PURPOSE

- To recognize the importance of Montana's rangeland with respect to livestock, forage, wildlife habitat, high-quality water production, pollution control, erosion, recreation, and the natural beauty of the state.
- To promote and develop cooperation and coordination of range management activities between rangeland management organizations, entities, and individuals, whether private or public.
- To recognize those doing exceptional work in range management.

## MONTANA RANGELAND

# 70% of Montana is Rangeland

## 65,000,000 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\*:

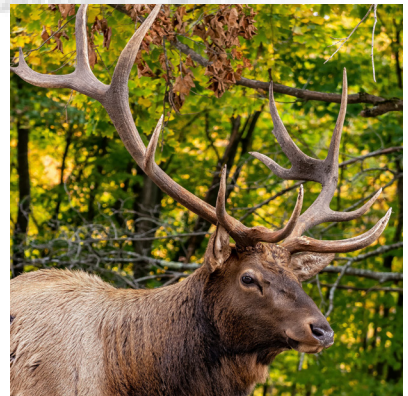
**502,899 deer**

**132,359 antelope**

**141,785 elk**

**90+ fish species**

**~70,000 upland game birds**

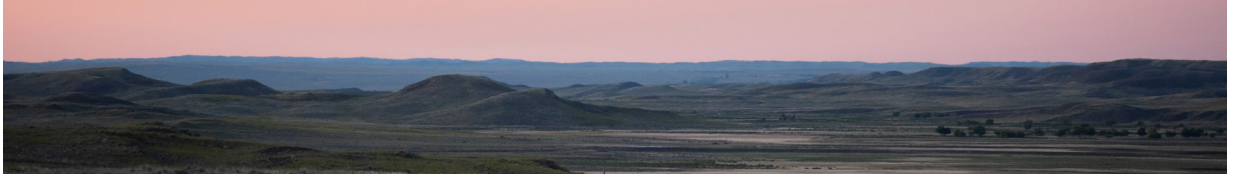


\*Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks 2021

Rangelands cover over 65 million acres of land, which equates to 70% of Montana's landscape. This important land base provides habitat for wildlife, forage for livestock and a host of ecosystem goods and services for the State of Montana. As our resident population increases, there appears to be a greater desire for more wildlife on the landscape. If this demand is to be met, landowners, agencies/organizations, and the public must work together to overcome challenges to maintain and improve our rangeland conditions. Our ever-expanding knowledge of ecology has shown only a healthy and balanced environment will be capable of supporting wildlife in the numbers desired while the other demands of the rangelands are also met.

# PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

---



## WORKING LANDS INTERNSHIP

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. This partnership effort with Montana USDA NRCS allows students to stay with host ranches, helping with any aspect of ranch life. Since 2018, 15 interns have gone through the program; of those interns who have graduated college, five have found employment working for agencies doing conservation 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 and wildlife habitat improvements. This annual event also is a great time to connect and share conservation conversations.

## 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 GRAZING ACADEMY

The 406 Grazing Academy is a 3-day, hands-on workshop for ranchers wanting to hone their skills for solving grazing management challenges on their ranch. The Academy provides participants practical information to help make strategic decisions on their ranch by showcasing successful Montana Ranchers, range managers, and MSU educators.

## 406 RANGELANDS NEWSLETTER

In 2020, the Rangeland Resources Program embarked upon a monthly digital newsletter. The newsletter started with about 250 subscribers and now has over 950, with a lofty goal of 1,500 by the end of 2022. This is a means to share information and important issues affecting rangelands in Montana.

## RANGELAND IMPROVEMENT LOAN PROGRAM

Started in 1979, the low-interest loan program provides loans to undertake rangeland improvement and development projects. Water storage, fencing, and stock water tanks are a few of the more common improvements. The projects often improve streams and riparian areas and rangeland health, which in turn benefits wildlife, combats invasive weeds and reduces soil erosion. As of 2022, there have been 275 applications, 164 loans, and no defaults.

## LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

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 lands.

# PROGRAMS AND EVENTS CONTINUED

---



---

## COORDINATING & SUPPORTING OF EVENTS WITH PARTNERS

The program will continue to support Conservation Districts with education, outreach, and activities. This also includes information transfer of important issues affecting Conservation Districts and their producers in a timely and efficient manner. The program focuses on working with state Grazing Districts, the Public Lands Council, Montana Grass Conservation Commission, Montana Grazing Lands Coalition, and other partners to promote collaboration on common goals.

---

## OUTREACH

Rangelands cover 68 million acres of land, which equates to 70 percent of Montana's landscape. This important land base provides habitat for wildlife, forage for livestock and a host of ecosystem goods and services to the State. DNRC Rangelands Program has worked with partners to promote conservation of working lands and to celebrate Montana's excellent land stewards, this project consists of the creation of digital videos, photography, written articles, social media, and design of accompanying promotional written materials which capture the conservation efforts and partnerships from across Montana. In 2022, the program will update historic program material, such as the 'Montana Rangeland Resource Program' 1986 publication.

---

## MONTANA RANGELANDS MONITORING PROGRAM

This program was created in partnership with Montana State University in the early 1990s to foster agreement and standardize monitoring methods for landowners and permittees to use on lands they own or manage. The MOU was updated in 2017 and signed by all land management agencies in Montana.

---

## 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. This program currently has two Memoranda of Understanding tied to a specific purpose. The Section 8 Public Lands Grazing MOU and the Monitoring Program MOU.



# LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD®



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*



## 2020 Award *C Lazy J Ranch Malta, Montana*



## 2021 Award *Hidden Hollow Hideaway Cattle & Guest Ranch Townsend, Montana*

Kelly Flynn taught his daughters to raise a baby lamb, ride a horse, and ultimately, run a ranch.

His land ethic was passed down from relatives who carved a living from the land since the 1860's. He recalled his aging parents pulling weeds on hot days. With those values etched in his mind, he spent a life caring for livestock, wildlife, and 6,000 acres of meadows, creeks, and forests.

With his father and brothers, and later his wife Jill and daughters Shannon and Siobhan, he developed a paradise for hunters and summer vacationers at the Hidden Hollow Hideaway Cattle & Guest Ranch.



Kelly had a noticeable conservation career including noxious weed efforts, deferred rotational grazing, and stewarding timber resources after pine beetle infestation. Kelly served in the Montana Legislature from 2011-2019, he chaired the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee and successfully passed a bill that established the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program. Kelly humbly referred to himself as the ranch's "temporary steward." He ran the ranch and imparted wisdom until he passed away on March 3, 2021. For the betterment of all, Kelly Flynn wrote his signature on Montana's landscape.

# WORKING LANDS INTERSHIP PROGRAM

---

The Montana Rangeland Resources Committee and the Rangeland Resource Program at DRNC in partnership with Montana USDA NRCS provides a unique opportunity for college students during the summer months.

This internship is designed to offer beginning agriculturalists, natural resource specialists, range specialists, biologists, soils majors or any student looking into natural resources, the real-world and hands-on experience implementing the educational tools already gained to a ranching operation. This paid internship takes place during the summer where interns work and learn from mentoring ranchers from across the state of Montana. Students majoring in any natural resource related field are encouraged to apply for this opportunity.

The Internship Program is not a working ranch hand position, but students are expected to help in any way possible throughout the summer doing various chores that are necessary for daily ranch operations. Interns are provided the opportunity to learn about rangeland monitoring, plant and weed identification, rotational grazing, ranch economics, erosion control, habitat conservation and much more. Interns are also immersed in the host ranch local community, and attend a variety of meetings and workshops along with their host.

Since 2018, **15** interns have gone through the program; of those interns who have graduated college, **five** have found employment working for agencies doing conservation in Montana!





# 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**      **2.5%**  
**Maximum Loan Amount**   **\$100,000**  
**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

<b>Loans</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Total Loaned</b>	<b>\$3,697,569.01</b>
<b>Total Paid Back</b>	<b>\$3,328,992.69</b>

*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.



## 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

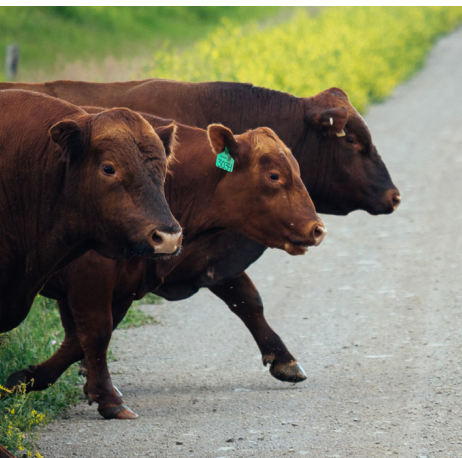
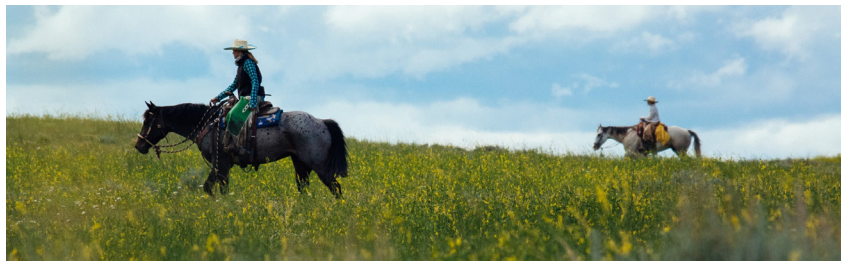
Montana Stockgrowers Association  
 Montana USDA NRCS  
 Montana Wool Growers Association  
 Rancher Stewardship Alliance  
 Society for Range Management-intermountain and Northern Great Plains Sections  
 US Forest Service  
 University of Montana  
 Winnett Aces  
 Western Sustainability Exchange

**Diane Ahlgren**, Chair | Mosby  
**John Hollenback**, Vice Chair | Gold Creek  
**Jim Anderson** | Chinook  
**Ron Devlin** | Terry  
**Sigurd Jensen** | Elmo  
**Leah Lewis** | Boulder



**Stacey Barta** | State Coordinator  
 Rangeland Resources Program  
 (406) 594-8481 | sbarta@mt.gov

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.







I ❤️ RANGE