

Mineral County and MSU Extension

The Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was established in 1914 and the land-grant universities in each state were given charge of its mission; non-formal education designed to help people use research-based knowledge to improve their lives. In Montana, local county Extension offices are the off-campus arm of Montana State University (MSU) and act as the conduit of knowledge between the University and the public, meeting local needs to help people help themselves. A cooperative agreement between federal, state, and county resources enables local Extension agents to develop and present programs in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, economic and community development, and family and consumer sciences.

Kevin Chamberlain and MSU mascot, Champ, celebrate during the 2015 MSU Extension Annual Conference.

The first full-time Extension agent for Mineral County was James E. Wilson, who began serving the people of Mineral County in 1947. In the 70 years since that time, 15 agents have provided organizational structure and programs to meet changing local economic and social needs. The longest serving agent, Kevin G. Chamberlain, announced his retirement in July of this year, a culmination of 28 years in Mineral County. During his tenure as agent, MSU Extension expanded community and economic development services, introduced forest stewardship programming, facilitated collaborative efforts with federal and state land managers, industry, and community members; and championed the need for an additional half-time agent position in Mineral County.



As in the past, MINERAL County and MSU Extension continue to move forward, serving local needs and preparing for the future.

Business planning assistance

A Successful and Tasty Business Plan

Services provided by MSU Extension include business planning for new and established businesses and grant writing and administration



Bitterroot Sweet Relish produced by Western Montana Specialty Foods. Photo by Kevin G. Chamberlain

for county efforts. In collaboration with Lake County Community Development Corporation (LCCDC) and Sanders County Community Development Corporation (SCCDC), Mineral County MSU Extension provides free workshops ranging from computer software such as Quickbooks and Excel, to business principles such as Cashflows and Marketing Strategies to assist participating business in Mineral County. 2017 has deemed itself to be a successful year for many

Mineral County businesses. The Mineral County Revolving Loan Fund has assisted two local businesses with new loan packages and received loan payoffs from four small businesses, bringing the total loan packages processed by MSU Extension to eleven. In addition, MSU Extension staff assisted 17 business clients with over 100 hours of contact time.

Extension's role in economic development often takes years to gauge impacts and evaluate results. One of the businesses that profited from MSU Extension support and instruction in business is Western Montana Specialty Foods. Mary Ippisch started the business in 2010, producing her Bitterroot Zucchini relish in the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center located in Ronan. In June of 2017, the business was able to become a licensed processing facility in full production, supplying her signature relish in a variety of sizes to vendors and food service providers including area schools, even so far away

as MSU-Bozeman. The relish is also distributed to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. The company's ultimate goal is to reach the national arena with her "Made in Montana" product.

The End of one Era, the Beginning of Another

November 17, 2017 marked the end of an era for Tricon Timber, LLC, the only sawmill still in operation in Mineral County. The mill began as an idea in the late 1980s before becoming a small log operation that utilized the lodgepole pine that had become so abundant in the area as a result of the 1910 fire. Tricon was updated and revamped many times over the years and with a recent \$10 million renovation, reached production levels of almost 10 times the original target. Tricon developed rail reloads throughout the state with locations in Trout Creek, Helena, Livingston, Laurel, and Huntley. They have been at the forefront of stewardship and forest restoration in western Montana, creating access to a sustainable and renewable resource while reducing forest fire fuels which have plagued our area in recent years. The original plan to produce about a million board feet per month, became a highly respected sawmill, one of the largest and fastest mills in the state of Montana, producing at its best 140 million board feet annually. The workforce of Mineral County is about 2,500 and Tricon employed about 24 percent that workforce.



Idaho Forest Group purchased the lone sawmill in Mineral County in December, 2017 from Tricon Timber, LLC. Photo by Emily Park

In December of 2017, Tricon Timber, LLC was acquired by the well-established company Idaho Forest Group out of Coeur D'Alene. As the first facility outside of Idaho, there is a great focus to continue the manufacturing excellence Idaho Forest Group has come to be known for in the wood products industry. This is a healthy, growing company – big enough for its national and international markets, but with hometown ethics and pride in a job well done. Excellence is the goal in caring for natural resources, employees and customers. According to Erol Deren, Idaho Forest Group V.P. of Sales & Marketing, "The St Regis sawmill acquisition supports our continued growth and will be an excellent strategic addition to our existing operations in Northern Idaho."

MSU Extension continues to facilitate the Mineral County Resource Coalition (MCRC), a collaborative forum of local residents and USFS personnel concerned about proper management of more than 782,000 forested acres in Mineral County. Tricon Timber played a major role in helping Mineral County's voice be heard by congressional staff as well as federal and state agencies; facilitating many meetings with local government and the timber industry to express the importance of managing local forest resources. The USFS has an estimated 350-400 thousand acres of production forest in Mineral County with a sustainable yield of approximately 120 million board feet. With the largest employer in the county changing hands, we look forward to seeing what the future holds for our economy.

First it grows, then it burns

A cool, wet, spring followed by higher than average temperatures and over two months with no precipitation kept the Extension office busy fielding calls about dry conditions in fields, gardens, and forested acres across Mineral County. Irrigated and non-irrigated crops alike suffered stress that many producers were unable to prevent. Yields for these crops were low to non-existent but irrigated crops fared better over the course of the season.

Unfortunately, conditions in the forests around Mineral County did not fare so well. Although no

stranger to wildland fires, 2017 was particularly memorable for most people in Mineral County. The Sunrise fire started on July 16, just 11 miles southeast of Superior. It was considered "contained" by the end of October after coming within three miles of Superior and consuming more than 26, 500 acres at an estimated cost of \$31 million. While mostly consuming timber on federally managed lands, it did impact approximately 1200 acres of private forestland, some of which was sustainably managed under the Extension Forest Stewardship program. Additionally, the number of people and livestock displaced by fire suppression efforts over the course of two months was unusually high for the area. Fortunately, friends, family, and neighbors all worked together to alleviate hardships for those displaced and very few community resources were needed. Other wildfires in the area filled the valley with heavy smoke, reducing air quality considerably and stressing many residents. Once the Sunrise fire was officially contained and rehabilitation efforts could begin, Extension began working with landowners on forest assessments, revegetation plans, and other resources to begin the long road to recovery for wildfire-impacted areas.



TOP: Alfalfa yields decreased in first cuttings due to heat stress and inadequate nutrient uptake.

BOTTOM: The Sunrise fire southeast of Superior on August 15, 2017. Photos by Dave Brink.

Sometimes it's the little things

"What is this?" Even in the age of instant access to information via the internet, many people still prefer input from reputable and knowledge sources. MSU Extension is recognized as that very sort of authority when it comes to diagnostic services in agricultural and natural resource areas. Mineral County MSU Extension fielded over 170 requests for identification and information on various plants, animals, and diseases thereof; as well as soils and feed analyses. Plant and animal identification is typically handled internally with confirmation from the Schutter Diagnostic

Lab at MSU if necessary. Plant diseases, soil and feed analyses, and more technical requests are often submitted either to the Schutter Lab or other facilities. Some samples are brought into the office, some arrive via email, but the clients requesting field visits often yield the most impressive results.

A visit to a landowner near DeBorgia, Montana, who requested assistance in managing pocket gophers serves as one such example. The MSU Extension agent provided research-based information on management options, demonstrated proper control techniques, and assisted the landowner in learning new skills. An added bonus was the discovery of a common, but seldom seen, native snake, a rubber boa. The landowner was most impressed at the discovery and information made available on what had been an unforeseen diagnosis.

Field visits like these often require a lot of time but the direct benefit to the public cannot be dismissed. Local Extension agents are accessible to the public at all times merely by the fact that they live in and are recognized by their communities as knowledgeable sources of information. These are the impacts that are important to the lives of residents of Mineral County.



Rubber boa, a native snake, found during a demonstration of pocket gopher control techniques. Photo by Dave Brink

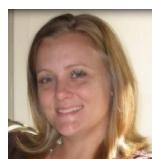
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