



Welcome to Sanders County

MSU Extension in Sanders County is a three-way partnership between Sanders County, Montana State University and the United States Department of Agriculture. This partnership provides educational programs in the areas of Agriculture/Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences. Sanders County is located in Northwestern Montana. It is bordered on the west by Idaho's Panhandle and is Montana's 18th most populous county with a population of about 11,336 (2015 estimate). The county was established in 1905 and named after Wilbur Fisk Sanders, pioneer and U.S. Senator from Montana. Sanders County encompasses 2,790 square miles and just over 1.7 million acres. There is a diverse mix of agricultural land, small acreage subdivisions, rural communities and range or forested land. The economy of Sanders County is specialized in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining, quarrying, oil, gas extraction, and construction, which employ more people than what would be expected in a location of this

size. The largest industries in Sanders County are healthcare & social assistance, construction, and retail trade. Sanders County includes the city of Thompson Falls as the county seat, Plains, and the town of Hot Springs. The Clark Fork River, a tributary of the Columbia, runs the length of the valley in Sanders County. The county also encompasses the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness and two National Forests. MSU Extension provides a unique set of services and educational resources to meet the diverse and changing needs of local clientele. Sanders County MSU Extension is supported by Commissioners Carol Brooker, Anthony Cox, and Glen Magera.

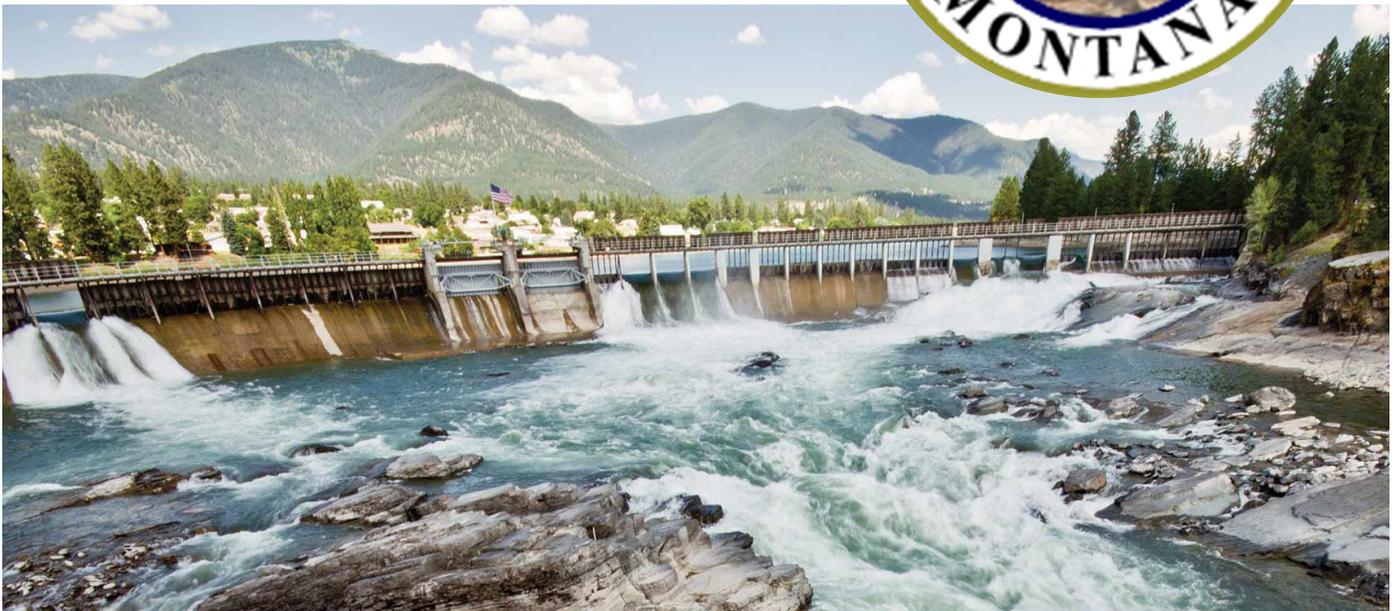


Photo courtesy of Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission

Texas 4-Her's visit Sanders County

In July 2017, Sanders County hosted their first 4-H interstate exchange with eight youth and four adults from Hopkins County, Texas. An interstate exchange program is an exciting opportunity for youth and adults to experience the geography, culture and heritage of a local community of 4-H youth and leaders with a common 4-H identity, yet potentially different perspectives. Participants learn how states are similar but also how they are different, such as weather conditions, geography, local industry, and history. For example, some states are better suited than others for agriculture and produce a large part of our nation's food. Other states boast beautiful beaches and provide places for recreation. For one week, youth learned about the Sanders County 4-H Program and the livelihoods of citizens throughout the

county. Youth were guided through Ross Creek Cedars, drank huckleberry shakes in Trout Creek, visited the PPL Island Park, Fish Ladder, High Bridge, Old Jail Museum and went swimming and fishing at Thompson Falls State Park. They visited the National Bison Range, Yellowstone National Forest, ate pizza at Ripples in Plains, and rafted down the Clark Fork River. Local 4-H Ambassadors presented the ins and outs of the 4-H program in Sanders County. Youth were surprised at the many differences in programs between the states, such as Montana 4-H having a market project carcass evaluation. Families learned to be exchange hosts, and created new and lasting friendships. Youth from Sanders County will be fundraising to travel to Hopkins County, TX, in July of 2018.



Texas 4-Her's around Sanders County.
Photo by Juli Thurston



A Love for Learning

For many 4-H members, their project work is the highlight of their 4-H year and they put a lot of effort in. For Hattie Neesvig, a 12-year-old member of the Whitepine Happy Workers 4-H Club, the 4-H service learning project is one of her favorites. Neesvig is in her second season of sharing her love for reading and learning with the children of Sanders County. She teamed up with the Public Health and WIC program to help achieve a vow of encouraging local children to develop a love for reading, while creating a desire to learn. During the year, she personally sewed 105 bags using donated fabric. She then organized a book drive at her school and collected enough books to provide 56 children with a bag filled with books. The Public Health Office will disperse the bags during the holiday season.

Neesvig says, “The best part about doing this is knowing that I am helping make some child’s Christmas a little better.” She plans to continue her project until she goes to college. She will receive the local Prudential Spirit of Community Award here in Sanders County and is awaiting national competition results.



Photo courtesy of Shana Neesvig

Lifting Women to Better Health

One by one, women in Sanders County have been getting stronger with Strong Women. With the high population of retirees in Sanders County, The Strong Women Strength Training program has been a hit. The Strong Women Program was developed at Tufts University to increase strength, muscle mass, bone density, and balance in women. Those who attended the sessions twice a week for two-to-four months reported moderate to considerable improvements in general health and balance, feeling stronger physically, doing everyday activities more easily, increasing weight they are able to lift, and flexibility. Sanders County has partnered with Clark Fork Valley Hospital to offer women of all ages the opportunity to improve their quality of life. Sixty-three women during 2017 have participated in classes hosted both in Thompson Falls and Plains.

LIFTING WOMEN TO BETTER HEALTH



STRONGWOMEN



Photo by Juli Thurston

Growing Parenting Skills

Sanders County MSU Extension Agent Juli Thurston was approached by the local Child Protective and Family Services to request parenting classes for residents in Sanders County and CPS clients. Many families looking for parenting resources and workshops have to travel to Missoula or Kalispell and can't afford travel costs. Thurston partnered with Plains School Alta Care Counselor Becki Uski to provide this much-needed education. Two workshops and three one-on-one coaching sessions were implemented in 2017 with two more workshops already scheduled for 2018. Workshop facilitators used the Positive Parenting Solutions Curriculum written by Amy McCreedy as well as the Grow! curriculum developed by Penn State University. Participants learn how to create a warm, nurturing home environment, decrease parental stress and teach children coping skills, how to communicate clear expectations, offer consistent routines and rules, implement appropriate discipline and learn behavior modification strategies. Parents are also taught healthy eating and physical activity habits. While parents are in session, youth discuss and participate in activities related to the parenting workshop topic that week. Parenting programs such as these are designed to strengthen families over time, which lead to children who grow healthier, show increased readiness and resiliency and allow for a stronger parent-child relationship.



Your Forest Needs You. Forest Stewardship Program offered in Thompson Falls

Montana forests are valued for wildlife, fisheries, livestock grazing, watershed protection, recreation, and wood products. Nearly two-thirds of Montana's 23 million acres of forest land is publicly owned, mostly by Federal Government agencies. The next largest ownership is Non-Industrial Private Forest (NIPF) landowners. These 50,000+ individuals control over twice the acreage of the forest products industry. NIPF owners and their 3.8 million acres are the focus of the Forest Stewardship Program. Sanders County forest landowners of five acres or more total 1,770, that includes in-state and out-of-state residents owning 93,438 acres. The Forest Stewardship Program is coordinated by the MSU Extension Forestry division and supported in part by Sanders County Commissioners. MSU Extension Forestry operates from the premise that there are a lot of landowners who can do for themselves if given the know-how.



The goal of the program is to help develop a lifelong relationship between a landowner and their property. The program teaches people to observe, measure, gather and classify data. Participants can then assess the trade-offs and consequences of their management activities and make informed decisions. The key is empowering forest landowners with personal knowledge of their property and the basic principles of forestry and environmental management through taking an inventory of their property, setting land user goals and priorities, analyzing resource trade-offs and understanding environmental consequences of stewardship decisions as well as completing their own stewardship plan with the motivation to implement stewardship principles. Classes are taught by a team of natural resource professionals throughout Montana with a wide range of expertise. Some specific workshop topics include forest ecology, how to manage fire risk, wildlife habitat enhancement, how to assess and maintain

forest health, range/understory vegetation management, how to protect and enhance water quality, but most important where to go for help and resources when needed. Actively managed forests can provide forest health and vigor, stream and wetland protection, natural-resource-based recreational opportunities, livestock grazing, sustainable wood supply, and income. The Thompson Falls workshop held in July of 2017 had 20 participants with a cumulative 1,674 acres. One participant said “the forest stewardship workshop provided me with knowledge and support for me to be a good steward of my property. I was pretty green about forest management, just moving here from the flat lands. The cost-share programs and connections I made may provide my family and I with a total added income of \$12,000 in 2018. Thank you for the opportunity to pass on this valuable knowledge to my children and to utilize for myself!”



Photo by Kelsey McMullen



ANNIE'S PROJECT

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women

The 2012 Census of Agriculture states that Sanders County has 492 farms encompassing 338,725 acres totaling a market value of product sold as just over \$14 million. Thirty-four percent of Montana farmers are women. From the classroom to the farm to the boardroom, women in agriculture are helping to pave the way for a better future. As Extension leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure the next generation of women are educated, encouraged and empowered to take on the challenges of meeting the world's growing food, fuel and fiber needs. Farm and ranch women are decision makers and the decisions made today have long-range impacts on all aspects of business. New in 2017 was the Sanders/Lake County Women in Agriculture Program, Annie's Project. Annie's Project is a six-week course bringing women together to learn from experts in production, financial management, human resources, marketing, and

the legal field. Ten women from Sanders and Lake counties participated in workshops to learn about resources offered through USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA), agriculture financial management, insurance options, what an accountant needs, worker protection standards, crop production and irrigation systems, ag marketing, veterinary feed directive obligations and record keeping. The next class offered will include estate and succession planning. Results from the class were positive and all women stated they had learned at least two new practices they would implement to improve the operations of their business.



Photo by PennyLynn Webb

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EXTENSION

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