



Welcome to Wheatland County

Wheatland County was without Extension for over 70 years. Since 2004, Montana State University has been proud to partner with Wheatland County to bring Extension back to the county.

Wheatland County is located in the heart of Central Montana. The county is served by one agent who offers programs in 4-H and youth development, community and economic development, agriculture and natural resources, and family and consumer sciences. Programs are developed to meet the emerging needs and interests of community members and vary from

after-school programming to assisting with writing grants or pesticide education.

The population is about 2,100 people and Harlowton is the county seat and the largest community with a population of around 900. Wheatland County is a strongly agriculture based community with a deep heritage of generational ranches. Producers primarily run cow-calf operations and raise hay. Wheatland County also has a strong small business community. Recently, the economy has benefited from the development of wind resources for alternative energy.



Crazy Mountains

Extension Programs Benefit the Public

Empowering Emerging Leaders Through Community Development

A local, grassroots Mom's group brought concerns about our local playground forward and addressed the Harlowton City Council. They were concerned about the limited opportunities for pre-school aged youth, the inadequate fence surrounding the area, and that several pieces of equipment were dangerous. The City of Harlowton asked Montana State University Extension to partner with the Mom's group and help coordinate the project.

Wheatland County MSU Extension agent Mandie Reed facilitated planning meetings using the appreciative inquiry process. This positive, asset-focused process helped the group form a unified vision and identify their goals for the project, without becoming bogged-down in a tedious process. The group successfully included the Public Works Director and the City Mayor in discussions to ensure the ideas were feasible and could be maintained. After participating in the process, the group developed plans for a large-scale playground renovation including a new fence, fall protection for all equipment, and equipment that met the needs of children of all ages and abilities.

Wheatland County MSU Extension took the lead on writing grants to fund the project and the Mom's group worked on local fundraisers. They were successful in receiving \$169,466 in grant funding and \$21,029 in community donations and from fundraisers to fund the playground renovation.

The playground renovation is a source of community pride and excitement. The Wheatland County Chamber of Commerce recently partnered

with the City of Harlowton to upgrade the RV campsites adjacent to the playground. This project created an even better facility at Chief Joseph Park. One visitor this season commented that the facility was so perfect for their family, they were going to plan their travel to include a stop in Harlowton.

Ownership in this project encouraged the members of the Mom's group to become engaged in leadership roles in other areas of the community. What began as a simple project, maybe a fence and a new playground structure, grew into a complete playground renovation that is a gem in the heart of our park. Each of the members of the original Mom's group feels ownership in creating this space for our community. They also engaged nearly every other organization in the community and encouraged them to become a part of the project, creating a true community-owned project. Wheatland County MSU Extension's partnership was critical to the success of this project and ensuring the engagement and ownership of the Mom's group.

Annie's Project

Annie's Project in Wheatland and Meagher Counties is strengthening Central Montana farms and ranches by providing valuable resources for farm and ranch women. We hear over and over that people are overwhelmed, frustrated, and don't know where to start with making business decisions related to the farm and ranch. Annie's Project is designed to help address these issues. The focus of this program in Wheatland County is to empower farm and ranch women to become more involved in their

Volunteers help with installing the first phase of equipment at Chief Joseph Park



agricultural businesses, provide a comfortable opportunity for learning, and foster networking among participants. The topics and education provided allow women to assist in a new way on the operation and increase the capacity of the family ranch. One participant shared that their family is already using the information she has gained in making ranch decisions.

The program is six sessions long and participants will meet monthly, September 2017 through March 2018. Speakers cover topics related to marketing, communications, working between generations, financial planning, estate planning, beef production, and water rights. Everyone's time is so valuable, and the steering committee wanted to be sure that each session was top quality and a great experience, so they took care to select new locations in both Wheatland and Meagher Counties.

The steering committee is critical to the formation of the program, and Wheatland County MSU Extension agent Mandie Reed partnered with Jeri Pavlovick from the USDA Farm Service Agency to recruit a diverse committee. "The steering committee has taken so much ownership in the program and had such a broad base of knowledge and ideas; we built a robust program. I am excited about the agenda," commented Wheatland County Extension agent Mandie Reed. The committee was very committed to making sure each session provided participants with information that is timely and applicable.

Annie's Project participants learn about their communication style during a REAL Colors workshop



Teen Leadership Camp

In late June, 2017, 25 middle-school-age campers from Central Montana gathered north of Hedgesville to learn about leadership. Teen Leadership Camp builds leadership skills of high school students while they serve as counselors and take a leadership role in planning a leadership camp for middle school students. The camp utilizes the experiential learning model to help campers learn and practice skills to build resilience in a leadership context. They discover authenticity, purpose, perspective, perseverance, and self-reliance. Every activity is planned to maximize fun and impact. The camp is generously supported by the Callant Family Foundation so campers can attend for \$25, making it accessible to everyone regardless of their socioeconomic situation.

Camp counselors take a very active role in planning camp each year. Doing much more than choosing a theme, counselors plan workshops or identify workshops and topics they would like to teach. They learn communication, cooperation, and accountability, as well as service. Counselors also learn a lot about resilience and leadership, too.

"After attending TLC this summer, I realized I was spending so much time doing things for other people, and not focusing on what is most important to me. If I am going to reach my goals, I need to get focused on what is really important and stop doing the things I don't care about." This comment was from a camp counselor after spending time working on authenticity and purpose with our guest speaker Margaret Rottsoolk, a mindfulness coach. These critical moments, where we can help youth realize their purpose and provide them with the skills to achieve

Campers at Teen Leadership Camp practice their leadership skills in small group discussion and during the "Awesome Race."



them, are what we strive for at Teen Leadership Camp. We want youth to realize their dreams.

As a result of attending camp, the campers showed a significant increase in their resiliency score, which is one of our primary goals. Another is the development of leadership among our counselors and helping them understand how they can positively impact the campers. “You can see kids start to blossom and get it, and I remember that as a camper too. That is why I come back each year,” commented one returning counselor about the experience. Teen Leadership Camp helps develop the leadership potential in each youth in a safe and caring environment. We embrace what is unique about everyone.

4-H Communication

Effective verbal communication and public speaking are some of the most valuable communication skills we can teach youth in 4-H. The ability to effectively communicate allows youth to achieve their goals and build their confidence. Addressing a crowd or participating in an interview becomes something they excel at, rather than something they dread.

Youth who participated in communication activities through Wheatland County 4-H showed significant improvement in their ability to speak in front of groups and their confidence in public speaking. One fifth grade 4-Her wrote that “because of 4-H communication skills, I am able to get better at talking in front of people.” A senior

member shared that before participating in 4-H communication events, they were very shy and had very little confidence. 4-H has helped improve that. A sixth grade 4-H member wrote “because of 4-H communication skills I am more willing to speak in public, express my ideas and accept leadership roles.” Each of these impacts will help 4-H youth achieve their goals and become leaders in their communities.

Wheatland County 4-H members have been reaching some very high goals. We are proud to have two senior 4-H members serving as 4-H State Ambassadors this year. Both Amanda Martin and Eric Reed tested their communication skills while applying for their positions on the ambassador team and have been using their interview skills to help them achieve their goals after high school.



Mandie Reed with Amanda Martin and Eric Reed, members of state 4-H ambassador team

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