



## Welcome to Mineral County

**W**e may be in the heart of “Griz Country,” but folks out in Mineral County continue to support the programs and information offered by MSU Extension. In Mineral County, Extension programs and expertise serve the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele at the local level, face-to-face.

Natural resource use has long been the basis for Mineral County’s economy. Mining, forestry, ranching, and farming are the heritage of the county’s residents. Life was never easy for the settlers of this county, living in a land in which nature had the upper hand and convenient access to resources was difficult. Much has changed, but today’s residents continue to struggle to remain in

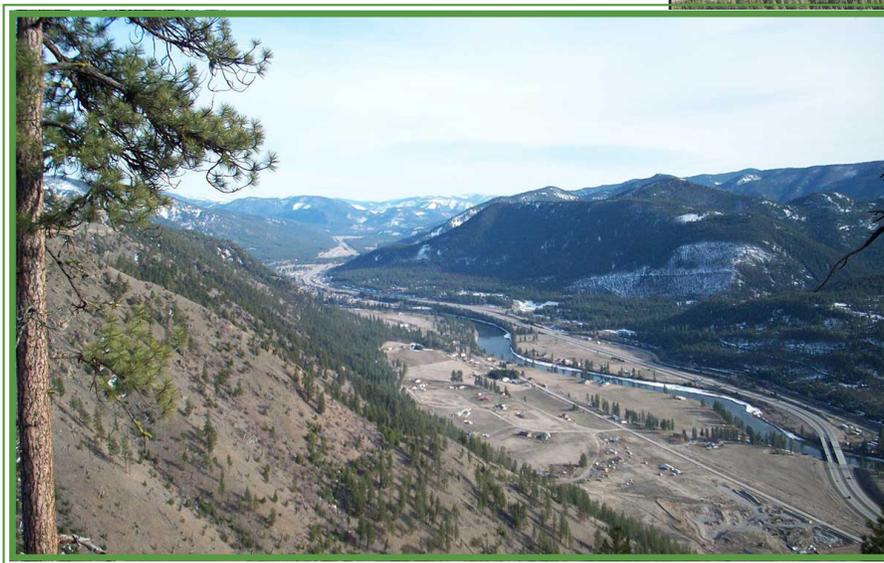
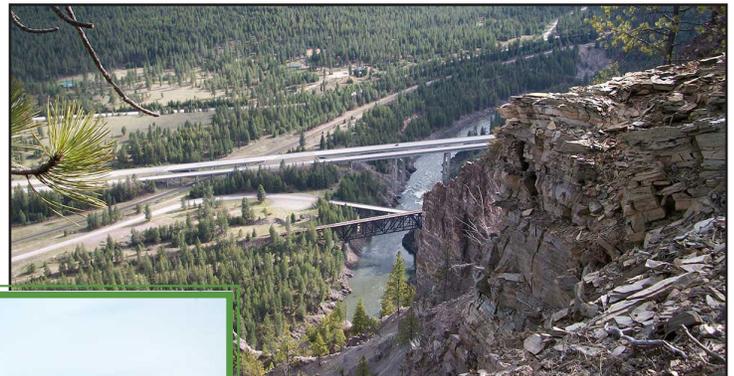
the area. In recent years, increased recreational use of the public land in Mineral County has expanded. Out-of-county visitors flock to the area for diverse recreational activities, straining local infrastructure in new ways. Compounding this situation is the incredibly small tax base for county infrastructure; public lands make up 92% of Mineral County, leaving only 8% private, taxable land for reliable support.

Public support for MSU Extension remains high and it is helpful that every dollar of county support for Extension in Mineral County leverages three times as much support from federal and state partners to meet the needs of our citizens.

**RIGHT:** Overlooking the Triple Bridges section of the Alberton Gorge near Fish Creek.

**BELOW:** Overlooking Superior from the Vista hiking trail.

Photos by Tim Read.



## 4-H Youth and Volunteers Work Hard Together

MSU Extension's role in the 4-H Youth Development Program would not be successful without involvement of the youth themselves and the help of adult volunteers. Youth engage in active learning and community service under the tutelage of adult volunteers and MSU Extension provides the programming and support resources. Mineral County 4-H members addressed an important need at the fairgrounds this year; replacing a worn, non-certifiable, 30+ year-old livestock scale and chute. Through donations and hard work, a brand new electronic scale was purchased and a new livestock chute built just in time for the county fair in August. This small project spurred several others that improved the look and safety of the livestock area for the fair. 4-H youth and adult volunteers together addressed the need and succeeded to such a degree that new goals were created, enthusiasm remains high, and public support for positive outcomes and the 4-H program continues to expand.

A 4-H member decorates the new wall in the livestock pens. Photo by Dave Brink.



New chutes and digital scale installed by 4-H volunteers.

## Mineral County Resource Coalition

The Mineral County Resource Coalition (MCRC), facilitated by MSU Extension, started in 2015 as a group of diverse citizens working together to support the management of natural resources on public lands to improve the economic stability of our communities and citizens. Currently, collaborative processes are the means to advance public interests in public land and resource management. Developing and securing a reliable supply of resources for local manufacturing facilities is a need and emphasis of the coalition. Monthly, MCRC meetings bring together private and public agencies to work toward this common goal. Occasionally, representatives from Montana's congressional delegation and state legislators also attend.

As a result, during the scoping phase of proposed land management actions, substantive local input is provided to federal and state land management agencies. In 2018, six of ten fire salvage projects on the Kootenai and Lolo National Forests were either modified or new alternatives created due in part to the efforts of the MCRC. This resulted in over 2500 acres of timber resources added to the projects, thereby benefiting local communities.

The level of engagement that the collaborative groups encourage from the public help U.S. Forest Service staff understand the public's interests and concerns, in turn leading to better decisions and results. They feel confident that the community and local government support their efforts to manage federal lands in the county. Impacts to the local community as a result of MCRC engagement consist of conventional timber sales that have directly provided logs to local sawmills, increasing employment opportunities in a struggling economy; field trips to potential project areas that will in turn stimulate recreation and employment opportunities, while providing much-needed forest management; stewardship projects to help achieve land management goals while meeting local and rural community needs, including contributing to the sustainability of rural communities and providing a continuing source of local income and employment; Title III projects to educate and financially-assist local landowners with fuel mitigation practices such as removal of vegetation from around homes. All of these have improved habitat and forest health (made

a minuscule dent in fire threat), and are small areas of the restoration we seek. Much more can be done, however, seeing some success has energized the group to continue to work locally for the good of the community and healthy public lands.

### **Individual Approach to Local Needs**

Mineral County MSU Extension has a history of an individualistic approach to most agricultural and natural resource-related issues on the local level. Responding to new and changing needs with university-researched data and resources remains a strength of the MSU Extension program in general. Although the spring and summer weather-related calls for assistance were ordinary, the fall of 2018 took an unusual turn with new and unique contacts with clients. Client calls concerning an “epidemic level” occurrence of western hemlock looper moths, a native forest insect that typically reaches high populations every 15-20 years, alarmed many people in the western end of Mineral County. Not to be outdone, a homeowner in Superior reported an unusual infestation of Asian lady beetles, never before reported in Mineral County, moving into a local residence and seeking shelter to overwinter. On the other end of the pest spectrum and the other

end of the county, a case of willow black canker, caused by a fungus, was identified in an 80-year-old willow.

In each case, individual attention, service, and distribution of university-researched data concerning management addressed the varied needs. While the success of client decisions (based on the information provided) remains to be collected, local clientele appreciate and report favorable results from individual assistance as opposed to more formalized programming events.

### **Building Better Communities by Building Better Leaders**

MSU Extension and the MSU Local Government Center (LGC) collaborate to provide training, technical assistance and research to local communities to strengthen the capacity of today’s community members and volunteers.

In February, Tara Mastel, Associate Specialist with the MSU Extension LGC presented a Leading Local, one-day, activity-based workshop at the Alberton Community Center. The workshop was sponsored by the Mineral County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC), MSU Extension Mineral County, Alberton Community Recycling Project, Alberton Community Center, TrailWest Bank, MSU Extension LGC, and Blackfoot Telecommunications.

The Leading Local workshop offered tips and insight to assist new and seasoned community volunteers to feel more prepared and effective in their roles, with activities on: a review of leadership style differences by generation, what makes an effective meeting, how to engage board members



**80-year-old willow tree showing signs of willow black canker. Photos by Dave Brink.**

and recruit new members, and how setting a course can help re-energize an organization.

MSU Extension plays a vital role in providing tools and guidance to assist organizations throughout the county in obtaining their goals. The local Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC) involves Mineral, Sanders and Lake Counties, and is responsible for assisting local

development organizations and the communities, governing bodies and businesses they serve to assess, plan, and facilitate economic action within the region. By offering various business development workshops, MSU Extension strives to enhance the quality of life and sustainable economic well-being of all residents of the community.

**Leading Local workshop in Alberton. Photo by Emily Park.**



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