



## Welcome to Park County

**P**ark County encompasses over 1.7 million acres, including 57% public lands and the highest peak in Montana – Granite Peak. Just over 16,000 residents enjoy the beautiful expanse of scenic mountains and river valleys the landscape offers. Agriculture, healthcare and social services, and tourism are major economic drivers in Park County.

Park County MSU Extension is funded jointly by the City of Livingston, Park County, and Montana State University and maximizes taxpayer investment by leveraging funds and resources to improve lives, landscapes, and livelihoods. For every \$53 dollars invested by Park County taxpayers, MSU invests \$47 – an 89% return on investment.

- MSU Extension
- Park County
- City of Livingston

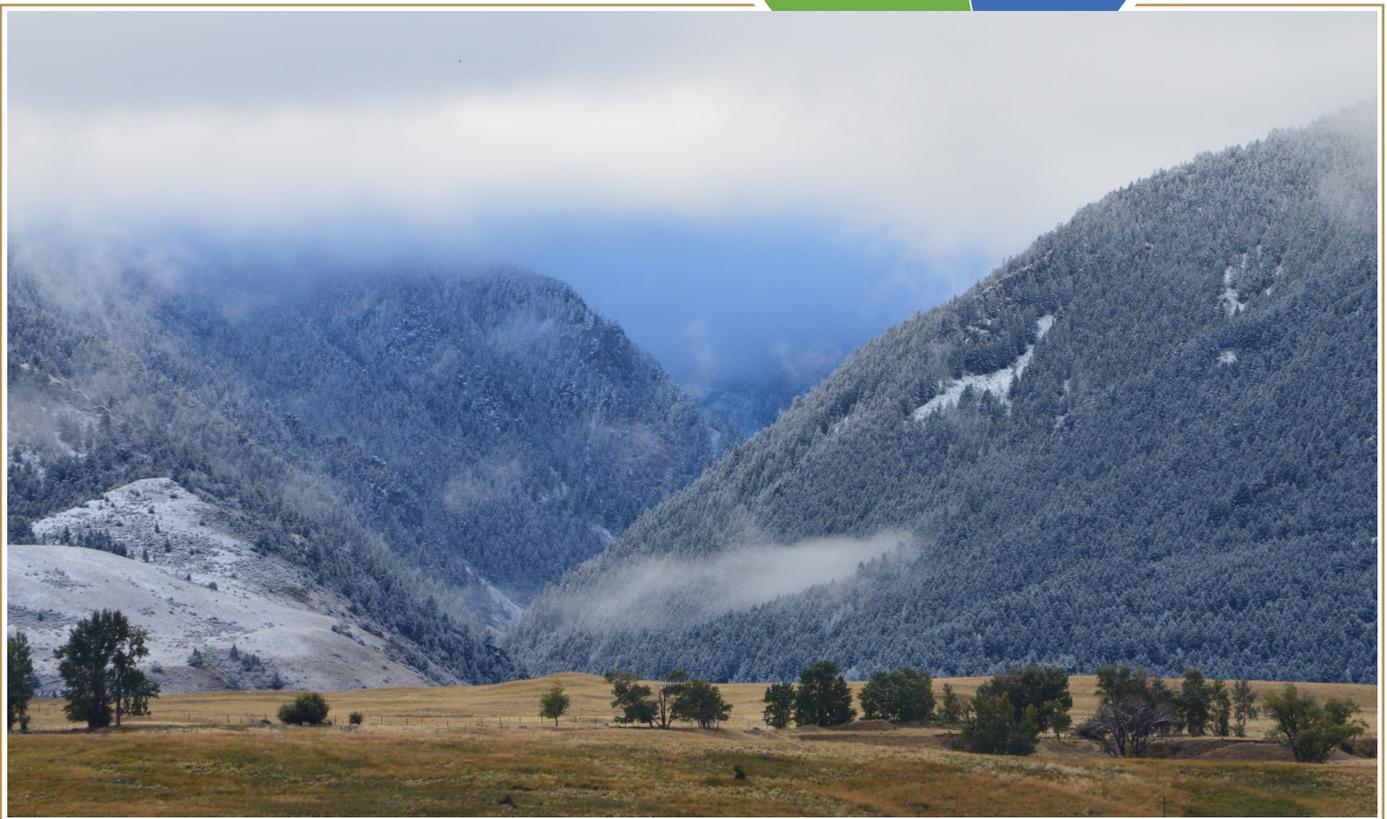
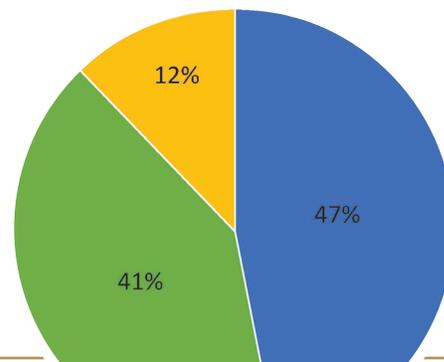


Photo by Tracy Mosley.

## Cooke City Tackles Infrastructure Needs

Cooke City is a community of 100 year-round and 300 seasonal residents located three miles from the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park (YNP). Cooke City's antiquated systems of wastewater management are failing and in dire need of updating. Many septic systems were constructed in the 1950s and because of its proximity to YNP, any discharge into streams must be pure enough to adhere to drinking water standards. Although this type of technology exists, it is quite expensive, prohibitively so for a community of this size.

Eight years ago, the community held three elections to form a sewer district that failed by a close margin, primarily because of the anticipated cost of a community wastewater management system. The 100 residents that rely mainly on summer tourism simply cannot afford a multi-million-dollar project. However, community leaders recognize that they cannot ignore the need for effective and safe wastewater management as a gateway to YNP and the 250,000 annual visitors to Cooke City.



The road to Cooke City via Yellowstone National Park. Photo by Katie Weaver.

In 2016, Park County MSU Extension began facilitating community meetings where water and wastewater were identified as the top community priorities. In 2017, local, state, and federal agencies joined the community for an infrastructure meeting that was attended by over 40 people. It was shortly thereafter that the Cooke City Water District secured grant funding for a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) to address wastewater challenges. The PER began in November 2017 and is currently underway with anticipated completion in 2019.

Park County MSU Extension continues to support the PER process through meeting facilitation, education and outreach, and preparation for a 2019 election to form a sewer district. "This project is about helping Cooke City come to terms with its growth and to be prepared to accommodate the future increase in tourism," said Deb Purvis, Cooke City Water District President. This effort championed by local leadership and supported by MSU Extension faculty embodies the importance of capacity-building work to ensure communities are prepared for the future.

## Ranchers Proactively Address the Difficulty of Drought

Park County MSU Extension's agriculture agent partnered with One Montana and the USDA Northern Plains Climate Hub to convene ranchers from Park and Sweet Grass Counties to reflect on past experiences with drought and to share ideas about how to become more resilient to future drought. During the day-long workshop, ranchers worked in small groups and engaged in whole-group discussions, sharing personal experiences with dealing with drought, resiliency strategies they've used in the past, and successes and failures, with a specific focus on the 2017 flash



Ranchers discussing drought management strategies in small groups. Photo by Tracy Mosley.

drought. Participants shared perspectives on range management strategies during and after drought, and thoughts on agency resource availability for managing drought.

Participants discussed strategies for being more resilient to drought. Some of these included being proactive, not reactive to combating drought; altering timing of culling cattle and age classes to cull each year; managing processed and annual forages for emergencies; developing new and existing water sources for increased storage; evaluating operational vulnerabilities; alternative fencing; keeping good records; and leasing additional pasture. One participant shared, “I’m leasing pasture and I don’t need to lease pasture. I’m doing it to rest my own grass and arranging it so we don’t go to the same pasture every year in the same way.”

Outcomes of this workshop included landowners and land managers collaborating to share and pool ideas for reducing the negative impacts of drought and how to better prepare for it in their management. Participants stated that it was a great forum to build community and network with others that have similar struggles when drought occurs, and to share ideas for the future.

## Leadership for Local Governments

Park County MSU Extension faculty partnered with Park County and City of Livingston governments to host the Leadership Engagement Series, a program designed to improve personal leadership, teamwork, and public engagement skills for local government employees and elected officials. The program was initiated by Park County MSU Extension faculty in response to a need identified in the 2017 Park County Strategic Plan for improved public engagement.



Leadership participants discuss characteristics of different personalities. Photo by Tracy Mosley.

Thirteen City of Livingston and 12 Park County employees from diverse departments committed to the two-month program. Participants learned about their own personality type and characteristics of other types by engaging in a Real Colors® personality-assessment training. Additionally, they engaged in individual activity, small group breakouts, and large group discussions to learn about ethics and values, generations, communication, and conflict management.

Participants of this leadership series improved their self-awareness and the awareness of how others behave, to more effectively interact with co-workers, employees in other departments or across governing bodies, boards and committees, as well as to better serve the public in their respective departments. In response to the generational understanding workshop, one City of Livingston police officer stated that, “Everyone at the police department should have this training.” Another participant stated, “I am getting more comfortable with who I am. Understanding me is huge!”

## Extension and Park High are reaching out to students before suicide strikes

### *What is happening?*

Montana ranks first per capita in the number of suicides in the nation, according to the June 2018 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Vital Signs report. Within the state, Park County’s suicide rate (22.5%) has consistently ranked the third highest per capita since 2005. From 2005-2014, Park County experienced 76 suicides. The Montana 2016 Suicide Mortality Review Team Report found suicide was the second leading cause of death for children and adolescents ages 10-24 behind unintentional injury.

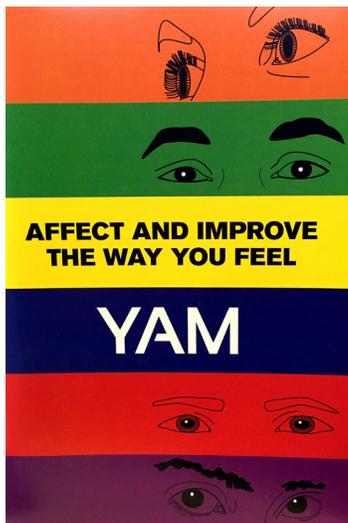
### *MSU Extension’s Response*

Park County MSU Extension taught the research-based suicide prevention program Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) to 104 freshman students at Park High School. YAM is a highly successful program that was developed in Europe. The program is currently only available in Montana and Texas. Montana is the only state where Extension agents are certified to offer YAM in rural schools. Because rural schools often have small class sizes and not all students volunteered to participate in the evaluation, the results of the YAM program are based on statewide results.

## Results

Statewide results indicate students who participated in YAM experienced a significant decrease in depressive symptoms. There was also a trending decrease in anxiety symptoms. Almost 80% of students reported that after participating in YAM they would now seek help from school staff for assistance with depression and 49% indicated they would seek assistance with feelings of suicide. One local student wrote, "I just wanted to say thank you for coming to talk to us for five weeks...I feel like you guys have helped me out with a lot of my problems. I went through depression a lot over the

past two years because I've had two of my best friends pass away...talking about depression helped me out a lot. Thank you!"



The YAM booklet is provided to every student with insights into mental health and a list of local resources.

## Test Driving a Career: MSU Extension Partners with PHS to Give Students a Variety of Experiences

From 2011-2016, Park High School graduating seniors have been interviewed about their after-graduation plans. Consistently, 30% (approximately 30 students each year) have indicated they will directly enter the workforce. However, when questioned further, the majority (25-28 students) said they had no specific plan and didn't know where they were going to work. During the same period, Park County experienced a shortage of skilled workers.

Together, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Park County MSU Extension, and the Livingston School District developed a plan to allow all PHS student to explore career options, intern at local worksites, and develop a concrete future plan.

In the first year of the project, 300 students assessed their interests and skills and matched them with potential career options. Students selected several career options and then reviewed classes at PHS that provided them with skills to work in those careers. Twenty-one students are participating in career internships. Ardis Steinmetz, PHS guidance counselor, said, "This project is so exciting! All the students are engaged. You can hear them talking about careers in the halls even after our presentation ends." The project will continue through the spring of 2021.

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## EXTENSION

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