

Powder River County



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Forage for livestock has been a challenge due to drought, grasshoppers and fire; by Mary Rumph.

Powder River County is a rural, agricultural county of 3,297 square miles, located in southeastern Montana.

The county was named for the gunpowder-colored sand on the banks of the Powder River, which runs through it. Total acres in Powder River County equals 2,109,728 million, most of which is used for rangeland purposes.

The population of Powder River County is 1,716, according to the 2018 census figures. The population is aging, with 52 years the average.

Powder River County is primarily rural and agricultural. There is limited oil and timber production. Most of Powder River County is grazing land. Since 1954, farm acreage has fluctuated between 1.54 and 1.72 million acres. The number of ranches has decreased, and the average size continues to increase.

Agriculture

And what a year it has been... Drought, grasshoppers and the coronavirus defined life in Powder River County in 2020. The drought came first in early spring and continues; the grasshoppers arrived in late June and left (after laying eggs) in mid-August; COVID-19 hit locally in early fall and continues. Oh, we can't forget range fires...fifty thousand acres were

burned, further reducing valuable forage for livestock. It was a tough, tough summer. Seventy-five percent of the ranchers sold calves or lambs 4-6 weeks early with calves weighing 100 pounds less than normal. Breeding stock was culled at a much higher rate than usual to prevent purchasing hay for the winter.

How many different types of grasshopper controls are there? Chickens, turkeys, insecticides, and nosema bait were just a few of the controls used to keep the grasshoppers from eating everything. Rumph organized grasshopper control programs featuring Gary Adams, from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), who provided information about the pest and components of a widespread control program for summer of 2021. Twenty-six landowners attended the two programs. Several additional producers have expressed interest. Extension will follow up with landowner agreement forms and assist interested landowners in organizing community efforts for future grasshopper control.

Forage tested for nitrate. Fifty-eight nitrate tests were conducted for thirty-four producers. Five percent contained nitrate at levels requiring limited feeding. This knowledge will help ranchers plan for winter feeding rations and prevent nitrate poisoning in livestock.

Mental Health

How many different stressors can you identify? MSU Extension has taken a key role and a multi-faceted approach to help people in our community manage a multitude of stress. MSU Extension agents Riley and Rumph are part of a statewide farm/ranch stress prevention advisory council that created an online Farm Stress Prevention website. The resource can help community members better understand the causes of stress and/or how they can become agents of change in their own stress prevention/management. The website includes fact sheets, articles, podcasts, webinars, easy-to-read tips for stress prevention/management, as well as links to local, state, and national resources. The clearinghouse website was launched the first of April and by November, more than 8,000 visitors have accessed the website and the Farm Stress Home Page had 1,876 views.

Mental health access:

- Received a Dept. of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) \$5,000 grant to promote wellness and educate the community about opioid misuse and treatment options.
- Created a Wellness Weekly advertising campaign to promote local mental health resources and education. Posts are shared weekly via newspaper, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Created a local mental health resources website.
- Received a second DPHHS \$5,000 grant to continue the Wellness Weekly into 2021.

Youth Development

4-H Family Feature. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, learning through 4-H projects continued with members excelling in their projects as they spent more time at home. By connecting with the editor of our weekly newspaper, the 4-H Family Feature was launched and spotlighted 72 4-H members and their projects from March to September.

A century-old county fair was a summer highlight. MSU Extension worked closely with volunteers and public health to provide a safe environment for youth to exhibit, people to attend, and 4-H families to participate in the Powder River County Fair, celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Numbers from the fair:

- 330 Non-livestock 4-H Entries
- 176 Livestock entries
- 13 Market Steers, 14 Market Lambs, 18 Market Hogs, pen of 3 chickens
- \$3,982 premium money earned by exhibitors
- 96 donors gave \$8,400 for 4-H and Open Class awards





Opioid Use Disorder in Rural Montana

Are you taking opioids?

Some common prescription opioids:

- CODEINE
- HYDROCODONE (Vicodin®)
- OXYCODONE (Percocet®)
- TRAMADOL (Ultram®)
- MORPHINE (Kadian®, Avinza)
- OXYMORPHONE (Opana®)
- FENTANYL
- DIPHENOXYLATE (Lomotil®)
- MEPERIDINE (Demerol®)
- NALBUPHINE (Nubain®)

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



Previous Page: (top) Community members of all ages enjoy the trails and memorial benches, by Julie Riley; **(bottom)** Community gardeners were successful in raising produce despite grasshoppers, by Julie Riley; **Top:** The bum calf show during the beef show is a highlight of the fair, by Stacey Rabe and Ashley Emmons; **Bottom Row: (left)** 'Are you taking opioids?' graphic, by MSU Extension; **(center)** Grasshoppers decimated all vegetation, by Stacey Rabe; **(right)** TJQMBB classes help keep people in our community moving, by Kelda Page

- 337 open class entries, excluding art exhibits
- \$84,441 raised for kids at 4-H livestock auction
- \$2,745.50 raised for local charitable organizations
- \$2,304.50 raised for 24 4-H exhibitors during non-livestock silent auction
- \$1,807 was raised for entertainment at the fair
- More than 40 volunteers donated over a total of 620 hours during fair week to provide a quality experience

Healthy Living

In 2018, Powder River County was ranked 28th out of 47 Montana counties in health outcomes. Health challenges included lack of physical activity, alcohol use and access to health care. In 2015, a regional needs assessment identified the top community health needs which were mental health and tobacco use cessation and prevention. The data provided focuses our programming efforts to help build a healthier community.

Powder River County, with Hopa Mountain and Powder River Public Health, provided 183 free face masks or face coverings and 34 containers of hand sanitizer for at-risk community members.

Tai Ji Quan Moving for Better Balance (TJQMBB) and Arthritis Exercise classes were held through March until the community was asked to shelter in place to lessen the risk of spreading the virus.

- One participant said she had fallen fewer times and her balance improved as a result of the TJQMBB class.
- Up to 20 people participated in the Arthritis Exercise class, improving balance, range of motion, endurance and strength and social connections.

MSU Extension works with Powder River Trails, a group created to encourage walking and a healthy community.

- Installed three memorial benches along the trails.
- Organized Steps for Charity, an incentivized walking program, that had 31 teams of 124 total people walking to raise \$1,240 for 11 charities. Participants said: I've walked to work and am surprised how many more steps I get in a day; wearing a pedometer has increased my awareness and

motivated me to walk; I had to go shed hunting to increase my steps, my calving just was not as difficult, and I learned I needed to increase my steps.

- Organized the 4th of July Freedom Run for 52 participants.
- Obtained \$3,000 in grant funds to purchase a mower to maintain the trails and install signage along the trails.

Healthy Living & Community Development

Providing support for increased access to nutritious foods:

- Built two additional garden plots at the Broadus Community Garden
- Rented 8 plots to 7 gardeners
- Built a drip irrigation system for each garden
- The system will reduce watering time by 90 percent, and water consumption by 75 percent.
- Gardeners said: I love the new watering system; I'll be able to water everything in a matter of minutes; I love mine so much, I've already watered twice.
- \$3,000 grant was received for topsoil and a compost supply for additional garden plots.
- Provided grasshopper control measures to manage the grasshopper infestation.

Providing support for Community Development:

- Facilitated a virtual ReImagining Rural community development workshop for 20 community members in conjunction with Powder River Chamber of Commerce and Ag and School Community Development Council.
- Identified and implemented several community projects that were quick, easy and could connect community members for positive impacts, including a Hay Bale Decorating Contest.
- Received \$2,000 from the Montana Community Foundation to place interpretive signs on the courthouse square and provide leadership training.

Powder River County Staff

Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EQ/AE Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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