

2020 MSU EXTENSION HIGHLIGHTS

Powell County



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Mt. Powell (10,168 ft), the highest point in Powell County, as seen from the historic Grant-Kohrs Ranch near Deer Lodge, MT, by Powell County Chamber of Commerce.

Powell County is a rural county with a total population of about 6,800 people and over 35,000 cows. Powell County's economy is heavily based on natural resource industries like agriculture, forestry, and mining. Over 50% of the county is owned by either federal or state government, most of which is open to livestock grazing, timber production, and mineral extraction. Powell County is home to beautiful and scenic landscapes composed of six distinct mountain ranges, three major rivers, vast swaths of rangeland, and small amounts of irrigated cropland and pasture.

Powell County MSU Extension provides information and outreach to local constituents in agriculture, horticulture, 4-H/youth development, and more. The Powell County MSU Extension office provides newspaper articles and free publications, hosts public workshops in numerous program areas, offers one-on-one consultations for local constituents in several capacities, and works with school children and 4-H youth across the county.

Tri-County 4-H Fair Continues Despite COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic made planning and conducting the 4-H portion of the Tri-County Fair a challenge. After

several months of working with local public health officials, an event plan outlining numerous changes to the logistics of 4-H events was accepted by public health. Perhaps the biggest difference was the lack of other fair activities that normally occur in tandem with 4-H events. The pavilion where most events were held had signage encouraging participants and attendees to mask-up, keep physically distanced, and to hand sanitize frequently. Temperature checks were required prior to entry for everyone. The schedule of events offered only one animal species being shown each day. But, even in the face of challenge, animals were shown and judged, ribbons and awards were given out, and 4-Her's were able to be celebrated for their hard work. One great addition to the fair was the livestreaming of events via the Flint Creek Courier website and Facebook page. This allowed family and friends who could not attend to view their favorite 4-Her's from across the country. The total number of 4-Her's participating in this year's event decreased compared to previous years, as did the total number of animals enrolled in the market sale. Thankfully, members of the local community and beyond made sure the market sale was a success, bringing in \$243,650 – a nearly \$300 increase when compared to the average of the previous three sales. Even though the 4-H portion of the fair looked

and felt a little different this year, our community was able to come together and make the event a success for our 4-H members.

New Services Offered by Powell County MSU Extension Are a Hit

Powell County MSU Extension offers many agricultural and horticultural services including forage and soil testing, noxious and weed free hay certification, insect and weed identification, plant disease diagnostics, and agricultural and environmental consulting. This year over 50 local producers and residents used these services, a significant decline when compared to previous years. However, the Powell County MSU Extension office was closed for several months (due to COVID-19) during the growing season, which is normally the time of year with the highest demand for these services. In total, three local gardeners had soil tests conducted, five producers and local residents utilized environmental and agricultural consulting services, six local gardeners had plants diagnosed for disease, eight producers had hay tested for nitrates, 12 producers had hay certified as noxious and weed seed free, and 18 Powell County residents brought in insect and weed samples for identification.

Despite the decline in customers, perhaps the most exciting new services offered by Powell County MSU Extension are the agricultural and environmental consulting services. Consultations this year included: enhancing water quality and trout habitat in a privately-owned pond; strategies for reducing livestock-predator conflict; creating small pasture enhancement plans; reducing bank erosion potential through native grass stand restoration; and, managing weeds in irrigated hay fields. Powell County MSU Extension expects to continue to increase the number of local residents and producers that take advantage of consultation services, as satisfaction with these services was high and word of mouth tends to be the best form of advertising in our community. Overall, these services save Powell County constituents hundreds to thousands of dollars depending on the amount and type of work completed, and help enhance the environmental quality and economic viability of our rural communities.



Top: Local 4-Hers being judged during the Sheep Showmanship Show at the 2020 Tri-County 4-H Fair, by Bo Walker; **Bottom:** An ornamental cedar tree in southern Powell County, MT, diagnosed with cedar-apple rust disease *Gymnosporangium juniperi-virginianae*, by Bo Walker

Powell County Staff



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

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