



## Welcome to Powder River County

**P**owder River County is a rural, agricultural county of 3,297 square miles, located in southeastern Montana. The county was created from Custer County on March 17, 1919, and named for the Powder River which runs through it. The Powder River was named because of the dark gunpowder-colored sand on its banks. Powder River County encompasses 2,109,728 million acres, most of which are used for rangeland.

The population of Powder River County is 1773, according to the 2015 census. The population is aging, with 52 years the average age.

Powder River County is primarily rural and agricultural, and mostly grazing land. There is limited oil and timber production. Since 1954, farm acreage has fluctuated between 1.54 and 1.72 million acres. The number of ranches has decreased and their average size has increased. Noxious weeds are a big concern in Powder River County – probably because there are an estimated 144,814 acres infested!



Landowners collect flea beetles, a bio-control agent for leafy spurge during the annual Extension Weed Tour.

# MSU Extension benefits Powder River County

## Landowners use bio-control in the war on Leafy Spurge

The fight against the spread of the noxious weed, leafy spurge, united landowners at Powderville last summer. The annual MSU Extension Range/Weed tour focused on all available tools for the containment and control of this noxious weed. The Powder River is completely infested, with control efforts primarily aimed at keeping the leafy spurge from spreading into alfalfa meadows; and using sheep and goats to utilize infested acres. Landowners on the tour encountered a sea of leafy spurge and questioned whether the past two decades of biological control (flea beetles and other insects which interfere with a plant's life cycle) were of any use. After being armed with sweep nets and harvesting a healthy, substantial population of biological-control agents, the question then became, "what would this area look like without bio-control agents?" The spokesperson with Montana Bio Weed Control encouraged landowners to integrate weed management using a variety of control methods and besieged them, "don't ever give up!"



A curious producer peeks at flea beetles, a bio-control agent for leafy spurge, on an MSU Extension Weed/Range tour last summer.

## Empowering Women in Ag

"I love the opportunity to learn, discuss and 'cuss' with women the issues we face daily working in agriculture," said one participant of Annie's Project. "It is the perfect venue to share problems and seek solutions with women who share similar lifestyles," she added.

The purpose of Annie's Project is to empower women in agriculture to be better business partners through networks and by managing and organizing critical information. Twelve women attended the six-week program, receiving 18 hours of instruction in areas of production, financial management, human resources, marketing and the legal field. After participating in the "Real Colors" workshop, used to identify personal temperament and how to distinguish the personality type of co-workers, one participant stated, "even though we are all a different color, it is possible to communicate with others effectively with a little practice."

## Sheep Symposium

Economic tools designed to help producers with their marketing and budgeting decisions were introduced at a Sheep Symposium in April. Twenty participants explored the use of online tools tailored to fit their individual needs. In addition, they learned how to control internal and external parasites in the flock.

## Irrigation Management on the Powder River

Water quality and its long-term effect on soils was of key interest to irrigators on the Powder River. High Total Dissolved Solids (TDS, which is a measure of minerals in water—a negative one being nitrate, which can be toxic to livestock) and limited water supply contribute to a loss of production. Jim Bauder, retired MSU Extension Soil Scientist, provided 30 years of data on water quality and best management for irrigation to 51 producers.



Annie's Project participants learn how to handle critical information for financial management.



## 4-H Youth Development

### *Project Fridays*

4-H Project Fridays gave the 85 members of the Powder River 4-H program an opportunity to explore a variety of projects. Project workshops were held after school on three different days and highlighted the digestive track of a ruminant in beef nutrition; the importance of gravity in aerospace; measuring dry ingredients in Baking 101; identifying insects in Entomology, and more.

### *4-H is a Hoot!*

Seventeen members of Powder River County 4-H gained knowledge about birds of prey at 4-H Camp Needmore. Dissecting owl pellets, learning about birds of prey and personally meeting an owl gave members insight into the life of raptors. Camp enriches lives by offering growth in physical, emotional and social competence. Through the camp experience, youth gain social skills, learn self-respect and character building, and create a sense of community living enhanced with service skills.

### *Teen 4-H Builds Community Leaders*

Collecting “Books for Africa,” a community service event at State 4-H Congress led locally by the Teen 4-H Club, resulted in \$150 donated to assist with freight and six large boxes of books. Nine members organized and taught workshops at the annual 4-H Summer Fun Day attended by 29 elementary-aged children. The event provides an opportunity for teens to develop leadership skills, enhance positive relationships with peers and younger children, practice teamwork and have fun. Teens also led activities and mentored 25 elementary-aged students at a literacy-based after school program, reading more than 200 books together.



4-H members worked together building bird houses at 4-H Camp Needmore.

## Healthy Living in Powder River County

Montana’s county health rankings in 2018 placed Powder River County 28th out of 47 in health outcomes. Particular challenges included physical activity, alcohol use, and health care access. A 2015 regional needs assessment indicated that mental health and tobacco use were top community health needs. MSU Extension is using information from the rankings to help build a healthier community, making the healthy choice the easy choice.

Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP), brought diabetes education to Powder River County. Participants learned:

- how exercise benefits the absorption of insulin;
- to eat less sugars and more vegetables;
- the need to see an eye doctor once a year; and,
- to take diabetes medication.

Two people tracked their calorie, fat and carbohydrate intake and one person scheduled an appointment with their healthcare provider.

Broadus’ Powder River Trails, an organization created and managed by MSU Powder River Extension, was selected as one of six organizations or communities to send a team to Montana’s Building Active Communities Initiative. A few steps closer in building a more active local environment include a \$3,777 grant to build a community garden; \$3,000 to build a fitness trail; and a year of technical assistance from the National Park Service to build a trail system.

Steps for Charity walking challenge, 4th of July Freedom Run and Moonlight Walk were events organized through MSU Extension to promote physical fitness and raise funds for building trails-raising \$3,000. The farmer’s market raised



Broadus farmer’s market. Photo by Julie Riley

approximately \$4,000 for local vendors and increased access to healthy foods.

The Youth Aware of Mental Health project, an adolescent suicide prevention program, was facilitated with high school freshmen. Montana results indicated there was a 49 percent improvement in students who were more comfortable to seek help with feelings of suicide, and 79 percent improvement in students seeking help for assistance with depression.

### Parenting is the Most Important Job

MSU Extension worked with the Youth Issues Coalition to offer an Active Parenting class. A school psychologist, pastor and county superintendent assisted in teaching the class and offering child care. Participants learned the following:

- To channel negative thoughts because anger does not get results;
- To take two seconds to diffuse, regroup and be patient;
- To put oneself in other's shoes and understand their reasoning;
- The meaning of the acronym HALT, which is hungry, angry, lonely and tired;
- To use polite requests, "I" messages, and firm reminders as discipline tools;
- Dictator, doormat and authoritative parenting styles and how and when they fit into those styles;
- To give physical affection daily;
- The importance of building a child's self-esteem;
- And, to say "I love you" more.

Six participants learned the importance of building relationships with their children, and developed skills and the self-confidence to understand what they were doing right as parents. Volunteers provided a safe and caring space for eleven children to enable the parents to attend the six week program.

*"It takes a village to raise a child."* African Proverb



Taking time to read and connect. Photo by Kelda Page

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