



What is the Montana Rangelands Partnership?

The Montana Rangelands Partnership is a statewide, public-private, collaborative partnership comprised of more than a dozen local, state and national organizations including Montana State University Extension Range Management, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Montana Governor’s Rangeland Resources Executive Committee (RREC), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC), and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana (SWCDM). Stacey Barta, Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator for Montana DNRC (sbarta@mt.gov), coordinates the Montana Rangelands Partnership.

What is the mission of the Montana Rangelands Partnership?

The mission of the Montana Rangelands Partnership is to further the health and sustainable use of Montana’s rangeland ecosystems.

What are the current programs of the Montana Rangelands Partnership?

The Montana Rangelands Partnership currently coordinates four main programs: 1) Rangeland monitoring technical assistance; 2) Montana Rangeland Monitoring Program; 3) Certification of grazing management plans and Certified Grazing Land Stewards; and 4) Education.

Who is employed by the Montana Rangelands Partnership?

The Montana Rangelands Partnership currently employs two full-time rangeland technicians. Their purpose is to help ranchers and other landowners to: 1) initiate and sustain rangeland monitoring, 2) develop certified grazing management plans, and 3) identify appropriate voluntary conservation programs that are available to help ranchers and other landowners sustain and enhance their rangeland management efforts. The two rangeland technicians are supervised by a committee comprised of representatives from DNRC, MRCDC, NRCS, SWCDM, and MSU Extension.

Where are the two rangeland technicians located?

Through cooperative office agreements with the Fergus County Conservation District and the Custer County Conservation District, one rangeland technician (Emily Standley) is located in Lewistown, MT and one rangeland technician (Cheryl Schuldt) is located in Miles City, MT.

How are the rangeland technicians funded?

SWCDM obtained a 3-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The Rangeland Technicians of the Montana Rangelands Partnership are employees of SWCDM and operate independent from all county, state, and federal government agencies.

What is the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation?

NFWF is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created by the US Congress in 1984. NFWF neither advocates nor litigates. Instead, NFWF works with many public agencies and private organizations to pool funds that support fish and wildlife habitat improvement and other worthy natural resource management projects. NFWF collects the money, solicits proposals, selects the eligible projects, and handles all of the contracting and contract compliance, but neither NFWF nor its funders supervise the funded projects. Thanks to good land stewardship by ranchers, tribes, and public agencies, much of the Northern Great Plains remains in largely native grasslands that are productive for both people and wildlife. NFWF's Northern Great Plains program is building on that success and is working with local private landowners to enhance, restore and help conserve native prairie and wildlife in the region while maintaining productive land use for people.

What areas are served by the two Montana Rangelands Partnership rangeland technicians?

Custer, Garfield, McCone, Prairie, and Valley Counties are the focus for southeastern Montana in 2016. Landowners in these counties are served by Cheryl Schuldt. Fergus, Petroleum, Blaine, and Phillips Counties are the focus for east-central Montana in 2016, and landowners in these counties are served by Emily Standley.

Do landowners need to enroll in any federally or state-funded conservation program to participate?

No. The only requirement to work with Montana Rangelands Partnership rangeland technicians is that landowners make a personal commitment to continue with range monitoring and grazing management practices that will provide long-term benefits to their rangelands and their ranching enterprise.

What happens to landowner monitoring data and grazing plan information?

The Montana Rangelands Partnership does not share any data, photos or information that is collected during range monitoring or grazing management planning. All data, photos, and grazing plans are the property of the landowner. Participants' names, addresses, and range monitoring locations will be kept confidential.

What other uses may landowners have for monitoring data?

A landowner may wish to participate in programs offered through the NRCS, BLM, DNRC, USFS, or other organizations after conducting range monitoring or developing grazing management plans with the Montana Rangelands Partnership. Having rangeland monitoring or certified grazing management plans already established may place landowners in a more favorable position to proceed with programs available through various government agencies and private organizations. Landowners wishing to lease additional land or enlarge their private land holdings through the purchase of additional grazing land may also be able to use their monitoring data in the lending/buying process.

How much time is required each year to conduct range monitoring?

The first year will take a little more time since choosing representative monitoring sites is the key to the success of the range monitoring program. To be on the safe side, plan on spending about a half day or one full day to work with the rangeland technician in the beginning. A few hours each year after that is all that is required! With the advent of digital cameras, GPS units and computer tablets, our range monitoring procedures are quick and easy. Once your data has been collected, plan on spending a few more hours in the winter months to analyze your monitoring data. If desired, the Montana Rangelands Partnership rangeland technicians will assist with the analysis of your monitoring efforts and help you plan for upcoming grazing seasons.

What is the most difficult aspect of monitoring?

Getting started! Once you decide to begin monitoring you've taken the first big step.

What time of year is best to conduct range monitoring?

June through August is the recommended time to collect your monitoring data and you'll want to spend a few hours at the end of the grazing season to see how much forage your livestock utilized.

Why monitor?

Monitoring is an extremely effective tool to help livestock managers reach their desired ranch objective—whether it be verifying that the land will support 'x' number of livestock and remain healthy and robust; gathering baseline data to develop a grazing plan; or monitoring the condition and productivity of the land to ensure future generations are able to continue ranch legacies. Livestock grazing must be periodically adjusted based on what a rangeland manager observes. Monitoring indicates whether adjustments are needed in the timing, frequency or intensity of grazing. One of the greatest advantages of monitoring is that measurable trends in rangeland production confirm that current management practices are meeting ranch objectives or, if a potential problem is discovered, then there is time to plan adjustments for the future before animal performance and grazing land health deteriorate.

Why develop a written grazing management plan?

A grazing management plan describes how a ranch manages its grazing land resources. Having the plan in writing makes it easier to identify possible ways that grazing management can be adjusted to better meet ranch goals. A written grazing management plan also improves communication with ranch employees, family members, lessors, agricultural lenders, consumers, and others. Certification as a Grazing Land Steward by the Montana Rangelands Partnership demonstrates that a ranch produces food and fiber in ways that are environmentally sustainable. Certified Grazing Land Stewards receive a wooden plaque in recognition of their efforts to sustain the long-term productivity and health of Montana's grazing lands. Certification is completely voluntary.

Is there a fee to receive assistance from the Montana Rangelands Partnership rangeland technicians?

No. Technical assistance is provided free of charge. There is no fee because the rangeland technicians do not work for landowners. Rather, the technicians work alongside landowners to develop monitoring procedures and grazing management practices, ensuring that those procedures and practices can be sustained for the long term.