



Montana

USDA Selects Blackfoot Challenge Project for National Funding

Three other Montana projects receive national funding through the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

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Elliston--USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Mark Rey, today announced grants totaling more than \$4.1 million to fund 27 projects in 20 states. These projects will reduce the spread of noxious weeds throughout the nation.

The announcement was made near Elliston, Montana, the site of a selected national project.

Receiving a grant totaling \$122,561 was the Powell County Weed District, a partner in the nationally recognized Blackfoot Challenge. Due to the quality of their work, the Powell County project was selected as the site for this national announcement.

"The Powell County Weed District and the Blackfoot Challenge have formed a truly exceptional network of landowners, land managers, non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies," said Undersecretary Rey. "As a result of this partnership, they will improve 630,000 acres of pristine Montana landscapes, enhancing them for future generations. USDA's natural Resources Conservation Service is a proud partner, providing funding for this outstanding project."

On hand to receive the award were representatives of the Powell County Weed District and the Blackfoot Challenge.

"We have an incredible holistic approach to weed management in the Blackfoot Watershed," said Jim Stone, chairman of the Blackfoot Challenge. "We welcome NRCS as a partner in this effort."

The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working to maintain and improve the management, productivity, and health of the nation's privately owned grazing land. Funding for national noxious weed grants was provided this year through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Selected through national competition, the approved grants will fund one- to three-year projects to control and manage invasive species. The grantees - state and local governments, tribes, and non-governmental organizations - must provide at least 50 percent of the project cost with non-federal funds and/or in-kind contributions.

"We have more than 300 landowners, managers, and partners involved in weed management covering some 630,000 grazing land acres. This outstanding project has evolved since the 1980's," said Jason Smith, Powell County Weed District supervisor. "The Blackfoot Challenge is all about partnerships and this grant will advance our work immeasurably."

In addition to the Blackfoot Challenge project, three other Montana organizations received national grants. These included:

- 1. Cooperative Weed Management at the Headwaters of the Stillwater River**

(Stillwater County Weed District - \$122,260)

This project will focus on three years of integrated pest management at the headwaters of the Stillwater River. Project components include: mapping weeds in the project area using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, educational workshops, biological control, and weed spraying.

The project borders the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in southcentral Montana near Yellowstone National Park, a prime winter habitat for Rocky Mountain Bighorn sheep and other Montana wildlife species. This is a

cooperative project including the Stillwater Mine, local landowners/managers, the State of Montana, and Stillwater County.

2. **>Integrated Weed Management Project of the Rock Creek Watershed Valley**

(Valley County Weed District - \$50,000)

This project addresses a cooperative weed control project that began in the Rock Creek Watershed in 1984. The project will allow all partners involved (the weed district, NRCS, the Bureau of Land Management, and landowners) to merge their skills and resources to develop an integrated weed management program, providing more effective control.

3. **Fish Creek Weed Management Project**

(Jefferson River Watershed Council - \$100,434)

This project will focus on mapping the extent and location of weed species by use of GIS technology on 40,000 acres. Landowners will be surveyed to determine their interest in weed control and a demonstration project will be implemented along roadways. A long-term Integrated Weed Management plan will be developed for the area.

For more information about the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Noxious Weed Grants, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service at 406-587-6952.

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