



Cost Share Program Gives Montana Landowners Reason to Clean Up

Montana landowners in Fergus County are making good use of programs that help them take fire prevention measures around their homes.

The Fergus County Conservation District, in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, offers up to a 90 percent cost-share for fuel removal, and up to 75 percent for commercial removal on private land that qualify for the program.

The district has been awarded \$240,000 in National Fire Plan Community Assistance funding. Work began in 2003 and continues today. Forty-six applications have been processed thus far, and more than 350 acres have been treated, said District Administrator Shonny Nordlund. The majority of the work has been done by the landowners on non-commercial land. "We're very pleased with the work that's been done," said Nordlund. "The cost-share has helped the landowners a lot."

Shannon Downey, Montana BLM fire mitigation specialist, has also been encouraged by the results. "We have the flexibility to ask, 'Where are the needs and what are the initiatives and ideas?' " said Downey. "I find that conservation districts work very well one-on-one with the individual landowners. They're very comfortable with and familiar with the idea of having a cost-share program that works with individual landowners to perform particular practices on the land."

The district hired a forester to assess each property and to develop a defensible space plan so that the landowner knows which trees to remove. That decision has been a key to the program's success, said Downey.

Another successful aspect of the program, according to Nordlund, has been the district's willingness to sign up landowners for a second contract after an initial contract is complete. Several landowners have already taken advantage of a second contract.



Through National Fire Plan Community Assistance funds, Fergus County Conservation District has helped treat more than 350 acres.

"The way we look at hazardous fuels reduction projects, like this one, is that if there is a wildland fire and some of these rural residences have defensible space around them and are surrounded by a parcel that has been thinned, we can fight that fire with much greater safety and much more cheaply," said Downey.

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