



Cost Share Program Gives Landowners Reason to Clean Up 2005 - Montana

Montana landowners in Fergus County are making good use of programs that help them with fire prevention work around their homes. The Fergus County Conservation District, in cooperation with the BLM, offers up to a 90 percent cost-share for fuel removal, and up to 75 percent for commercial removal on private lands that qualify for the program. Most of the work has been done by the landowners on non-commercial land.

The district has been awarded \$240,000 in National Fire Plan Community Assistance funding. Work began in 2003 and continues today, and 46 applications have been processed. More than 350 acres have been treated, according to District Administrator Shonny Nordlund. "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 pleased with 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 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 develop a defensible space plan so the landowner knows which trees to remove. That decision has been a key to the program's success.

Nordlund said the district's willingness to sign up landowners for a second contract after an initial contract is complete has also helped. Several landowners have already taken advantage of a second contract.

"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.



With NFP funds, Fergus County Conservation District has helped treat more than 350 acres.

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