Mineral County and MSU Extension

“A long, narrow valley…”

“A long, narrow valley…” was the description of Mineral County in a report on timber resources published by the then Montana Department of State Lands and the Forest Service (USFS) in 1983. At that time, Mineral County produced over 86 million board feet of timber from one major sawmill and six smaller mills. Additionally, at that time, there were two post and pole operations, two cedar mills, and one log home producer. The fact that the largest ponderosa pine tree in Montana is found in Mineral County alluded to the potential of the area to produce timber resources.

Today, that wealth of timber industry is gone from Mineral County; Tricon Timber is the sole remaining small mill and Big Sky Forest Products the only post and pole operation. Yet the resource that once supported the industry of Mineral County remains. Public lands, either federal or state, account for over 90% of the acreage in Mineral County. As such, decisions made regarding the management and activities directly impact local residents. Decisions regarding the management of public lands rely on input from the public. To facilitate input from Mineral County citizens, MSU Extension, and the USFS, Superior Ranger District, established a working collaborative called the Mineral County Resource Coalition (MCRC).

MCRC provides a forum for Mineral County residents to voice their informed opinions to those making management decisions. Discussion revolves around the community input process and information from the USFS, the agency responsible for managing over 82% of the public land in Mineral County. Since MCRC began, USFS public meetings have gone from 10-15 in attendance, to 70 or more. Similarly, field trips to view proposed actions have increased from less than 10 to more than 50 citizens in attendance. Relationships, conversations, tours, questions, and answers are the functions and products of this collaborative effort.

This process has brought the forest back to the community and lessened the sense of disenfranchisement felt by local residents and the sense of separation felt by USFS personnel. Local government, congressional staff, state agencies, industry, schools, health, recreationists, and citizens at large all contribute and participate. As this collaborative continues, we look forward to many more successes as MSU Extension supports and sustains this effort.

MSU Extension and Economic Development

Mineral County is no stranger to hard times, and hard times lead to hard choices as people struggle to maintain some semblance of quality of life in Mineral County. Like other small, rural counties in Montana that cannot provide the variety of services and amenities of larger metropolitan areas, residents of rural areas are accustomed to doing without and making things work. MSU Extension answers the call to serve them in a variety of capacities.

Economic Development has become an important need in Mineral County and MSU Extension adapted to meet this demand. MSU Extension developed the capacity to manage the county’s revolving loan fund, provide assistance to local businesses, and created a private, non-profit 501(c)3 to assist other community organizations.

Services provided by MSU Extension include business planning for new and established businesses and grant writing and administration for county efforts. These efforts have yielded over $2.36 million in grant funds for projects totaling over $3.8 million.

The most recent project brought three-phase power to the Mineral County Airport for future development of an industrial park and expansion potential for businesses located nearby. One business, Superior Meats, is now able to install and operate industrial grade equipment and create 11 new, full-time positions. Additionally in 2016, seven business startup clients received assistance with planning, marketing and initial projections, two loan packages were prepared and funded, and over 20 business inquiries resolved.

MSU Extension staff represent Mineral County on local and regional economic and community development boards and coalitions, bringing a multitude of state, regional, and federal financial and technical resources to the residents and businesses of Mineral County.
Mineral County and 4-H

Hard Working Volunteers for Hard Working Youth

Participation in 4-H has a positive impact on the choices youth make, both in their daily lives and future careers. Adult volunteers working with youth fosters active learning and enriches self-esteem, all of which builds a strong foundation for positive youth development and achievement.

Mineral County youth enrolled in the 4-H youth development program continue to explore new opportunities. Whether it be new projects like robotics or cake decorating, qualifying for national shooting sports tournaments, or leadership roles as camp counselors or club officers, all 4-H work includes an adult volunteer or Extension staff. It is the mission and role of MSU Extension to make these opportunities possible for both youth and adults and provide programmatic support.

Youth working alongside and learning from caring adults has long been a hallmark of the 4-H program and this continues to be the case in Mineral County. Youth in 4-H report learning responsibility, planning, and community service skills; in addition to the hands-on, practical skills necessary to finish projects or tasks.

The 2016 Mineral County 4-H program enrollment consists of 53 youth members and 24 adult volunteer leaders. Superior and St. Regis are home to organized clubs and there are several “at-large” 4-H families in areas without organized clubs. Livestock projects, especially market swine, remain the most popular with 4-H youth, with shooting sports and cooking following close behind. Adult volunteer leader participation continues to improve as they challenge youth to improve their efforts and expand their interests. The combined enthusiasm of youth and adult 4-H members has a cascading effect within the community. An increasing number of adult volunteers are interested in sharing their time and life experiences with youth members of 4-H. Likewise, community support for the 4-H program remains high which is also encouraging in these times of strained economic conditions.

“There is no magical show stick or lucky brush. What there is, is hard work, confidence, passion, and a desire to succeed.” -- Anonymous