Noxious Weed Control is a priority for landowners in Powder River County. MSU Extension has been instrumental in acquiring funding from the Southern Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) for the purpose of increasing the control of noxious weeds on and adjacent to Custer National Forest Service lands. Powder River County was awarded $66,000 to continue the program in 2016-2017. Implementing the program involved working with the County Weed Coordinator, the Powder River Weed District, Forest Service representatives and County Commissioners to coordinate noxious weed control. Four hundred acres of noxious weeds were treated by the Noxious Weed District utilizing RAC funds.

At the annual MSU Extension Ag Winter Series, we discovered the transfer of farm/ranch property was a hot topic. Sixty-two producers attended the winter series program; and as a result of the transfer of property program, 35 families requested copies of the publication, “Transferring Your Farm or Ranch to the Next Generation.” In addition, Extension established an Estate Planning committee to work on organizing individual estate planning documents and to develop program ideas for future presentations to educate more families about the importance of communicating in family businesses.

Livestock production is a key enterprise in our county. This year, the summer was hot and dry, resulting in 50 percent less hay production than average. Consequently, almost all small grains were cut for forage. As a result, we tested 70 samples of forage for nitrate for 39 producers. Three samples tested high enough to recommend further testing at a lab. The forages included barley, sudan grass, millet, wheat, and oats. MSU Extension also assisted producers in locating hay through the Montana Hay Hotline and provided protein supplement choices to a rancher who ran out of grass in late summer for his herd of cattle.

Soil Health and a No-till Gardening Workshop was attended by 45 participants from a six-county area. The importance of keeping the soil covered was a key principle. Speakers demonstrated the difference between traditionally tilled soil and non-tilled soil. The workshop stimulated a great deal of interest and discussion, with participants considering changes in their current gardening practices.

Weed & Pests – Prairie dogs and pocket gopher populations seemed to love the warm, dry conditions last summer and fall. In addition to helping ranchers, MSU Extension provided control and product availability information to the Commissioners who were dealing with prairie dog encroachment of a county cemetery.

Ninety-eight producers are private applicators in the County. We worked closely with them to obtain recertification credits toward license renewal. Extension and the Noxious Weed District have offered 33 hours of recertification opportunities during the 2012-2016 cycle.

Water Quality for livestock and irrigation were concerns with the dry summer. When water is too high in total dissolved solids (tds), it can be harmful for livestock and crop production. We assisted two landowners in testing water for conductivity, total dissolved solids and salt content to determine suitability for irrigation; and helped a producer test water to determine suitability for livestock consumption. Another rancher was concerned about blue green algae in a reservoir and moved his cattle to an alternate water source as a result of the information we provided.
OREO Trip: 50 4-H youth and 10 4-H adult volunteers from Southeastern Montana traveled to the Black Hills for an active and educational three-day event. Powder River County 4-H youth, and parents worked with MSU Extension to organize the event. Participants took in the aerial adventure park, a trampoline facility, paintball and the recreation center. Participants also learned about the fire at Crow Peak, and toured a fish hatchery and Black Hills State University.

The Powder River County Fair included 65 project interviews with 4-H members and judges with 297 entries. In total, there were 77 livestock entries, which included market and breeding animals, showmanship and carcass contest entries. $1,581 in premium money was earned by exhibitors, with an additional $6,630 in awards for both 4-H and open class exhibitors. The additional award money came from numerous donors. The livestock auction raised $66,348 for 49 market animals. A silent auction is organized to help non-livestock members offset some of their project costs. Twenty-two 4-Hers sold 25 items to raise $630.

The annual Bug’s Life After-School Literacy program attracted 40 participants from kindergarten through fourth grade. The theme, “Inside Out” explored feelings and group activities further enhanced understanding feelings and actions related to feelings. “The volunteers, both adults and teens, were very helpful and considerate,” commented first grade site director Twila Talcott. “The younger children really look up to those older students,” she added. Two hundred twenty-three books were read during the five-week session.

Teen 4-H planned the 22nd annual Mini-Congress event. Thirty-one youth in third through seventh grade participated in the day-long event. Eight teen 4-Hers developed leadership and organizational skills as they taught workshops and led icebreakers and large group activities for the participants.

Thirty-three youth enjoyed the Summer Fun Day organized by the Powder River Teen 4-H Club that was held in Cottonwood Park. Eight teens taught fun and active workshops that included making complicated airplanes, tie-dying t-shirts or making delicious ice cream and healthy snacks.

MSU Extension Agent Mary Rumph worked with two Teen 4-H members to present the Farm Safety Puppet Show to 13 kindergarten students. They learned the importance of protecting their heads by wearing helmets and to recognize potential dangers on the farm and ranch.

Ten 4-H members and one Teen 4-H member attended 4-H Camp Needmore.

MSU Extension agent Julie Riley worked with volunteers and Teen 4-H members on Community Clean-up Day trimming trees and picking up trash along the highway.
YOUTH ISSUES

The Youth Issues Coalition, a collaborative community effort to address youth issues, was first organized 14 years ago. The purpose of the coalition is to create a healthy community for our youth and to help them make positive, healthy choices. Three main areas of focus this year were Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Service; Underage Drinking; and Life Awareness (College Prep).

The Coalition hosted an MSU Researcher, Kaylin Greene’s findings on why young people in rural areas drive after they have been drinking. Greene conducted 10 focus group discussions with young adults in Montana, including youth in Powder River County. The results of the study have been helpful in developing strategies to decrease underage drinking and driving.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES
Healthy Living

MSU Extension offered several programs to increase access to physical activity and healthy eating in 2015-2016.

Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities…a research project with Cornell and Montana State University Extension. Thirty-one people from Powder River County were screened, and 13 people qualified. The program that met twice a week for six months was designed to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. Participants completed a baseline screening and blood draw four times throughout the year to assess their progress. The goal was to increase awareness of how to make small lifestyle changes by either increasing physical activity or the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed.

The program provided over $500 in equipment so that healthy food preparation was easier. One woman reported her resting heart rate has decreased, something her doctor said wasn’t possible. Two participants increased fruit and vegetable consumption. Another woman has lost 10 pounds. Health education topics were wide ranging and included reducing sodium in the diet, creating healthy recipes and reducing stress. The final results of the research project will be available at a later date.

The Powder River Heart Club was created because of Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities. Their assignment was to increase access to physical activity or healthy eating. The group chose to improve and expand the walking trail system in Broadus.

Several grants were written and meetings were held to plan improvements. The group met with Beth Schumate, coordinator of the Recreational Trails program to learn how to submit a more successful grant. Strong Hearts, Healthy Communities paid $200 for Tongue River Electrical Cooperative (TRECO) to determine the cost and number of lights necessary to light the trail and extend its use in wintertime. The School Community Development Council (SCDC) and the Powder River Recyclers funded two benches and one trash can for approximately $4,000. The group also organized the first annual Moonlight Walk. Forty-nine people participated in the first annual walk to raise $1,600 for the Broadus Trails. The SCDC and the Powder River Tobacco Prevention Coalition sponsored the walk, which was a family fun event that encouraged physical activity.

The Powder River Recyclers offered to buy an additional bench, if the Powder River Strong Hearts Club pulled weeds and grass from the boulevards east of town. Over 25 volunteers cleaned the boulevards over a five-day period. The boulevards are beautiful, and two benches and one trash bin have been installed.

The Strong Hearts Program teaches that regular physical activity is one of the most important things we can do for our health. It can help:

- Control weight
- Reduce risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduce risk for type 2 diabetes
- Reduce risk of some cancers
- Strengthen bones and muscles
- Improve mental health and mood
- Improve ability to do daily activities and prevent falls in older adults
- Increase chance of living a healthier, longer life

Powder River County Extension Service meets the needs of Powder River County residents by offering programs that increase strength, improve flexibility and balance and build endurance.
Montana Arthritis Exercise Program
This program is offered twice a week, September through May. Participants have improved their overall health by 12 percent from when they first started the program. Tests measure their flexibility, endurance and arm strength and blood pressure and weight.

One woman said that she has lost 25 pounds since going off the drug she used to take for arthritis pain; one man shared that the classes have helped with his golf game. Another has said “going to the arthritis classes twice a week, increasing time spent walking and exercising at home have helped me manage pain caused by arthritis.”

Strong Women
This program is offered twice a week, September through May. One participant said that the muscles that support her knees are stronger; she is now able to kneel where she wasn’t able to before. Another has gradually increased strength in her arms and legs, and has improved her balance.

Walk With Ease
Twenty-three women signed up for the six-week Walk with Ease program; 11 of the participants are new to the Arthritis Foundation program. One person appreciated an article on the benefits of exercise in dealing with anger. Another has said "I keep changing my goals. My last half mile is uphill. When I start to slow down I start pumping my arms and it not only keeps me going but is great cardio!"

The local Farmer's Market is promoted in the fall. There were 10 vendors who sold locally-raised produce, increasing consumption of healthy, garden vegetables.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Mindfulness for Health was a series of classes presented by Cody Kinzer, Licensed Counselor. Twenty-four people learned to develop relaxation techniques. They said they were better able to focus on the present and were more aware of distractions.

A THRIVE Mental Health focus group was held in Broadus. Nine people gave input on mental health in Broadus, from services to any perceived stigma. Antonia Klein, Eastern Montana Mental Health, commented on working with MSU Extension Service in Powder River County “I am so happy to work with the Broadus community because they are great people who really care about others. I tell everyone Broadus is a force to be reckoned with because they are out there doing so much. You may be small but you are MIGHTY! Others need to follow your example.”

A Mental Health First Aid Class was organized. Based on our population and average statistics, 100 women and 200 men could be dealing with anxiety and depression. With limited resources available, it is difficult to provide services for treatment and healing. MSU has established the Center for Rural Mental Health Research and Recovery. The director for the center will be developing links with Extension for the purpose of education, research and prevention programming; with the possibility of providing specialists on a regional or statewide basis to support county efforts. As a step in providing knowledge and skills locally, a Mental Health First Aid Class was organized. Twenty-one people became certified in mental health aid training including many teachers, youth, clergy, law enforcement, EMTs, MSU Extension staff and medical professionals. The eight-hour class provided tools to help identify people in crisis and how to talk with them. The training also aims to change the negative stigma associated with mental illness. Watch for more on this topic in future MSU Extension programs.