

Project: Working Lands Stewardship

Brief Description: The Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA), through MSU, requests funding to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of Montana's farms, ranches and rural communities, and preserve historical sites on private agricultural lands. Working Lands Stewardship is the catalyst for cooperative conservation across Montana, with a positive, collaborative approach that binds agricultural, rural community and conservation interests.

Executive Summary: Working Lands Stewardship is a unique cooperative partnership between MSU, MSGA and other private/public entities and agencies. In addition, collaboration will occur with 18 Montana agricultural and conservation organizations. Working Lands Stewardship will help Montanans work together to preserve Montana's history, future legacy, environment, and rural communities by encouraging sustainable stewardship of agriculture landscapes. New opportunities revolve around carbon markets, climate change, public-private partnerships, global issues and connections to food systems and environmental stewardship.

The *Land Steward Certification* program will provide recognition to agricultural enterprises that practice sustainable environmental stewardship on their private and public grazing lands. The certification program will provide technical assistance that helps landowners make prudent resource management decisions. The *Land Steward Certification* program is the only agricultural land certification program of its kind in the Nation.

Working Lands Stewardship will develop a unique, incentive-based approach that protects historical sites on private lands. Ten-year contracts (*Historical Site Preservation Agreements*) will compensate farmers and ranchers for: 1) preserving natural landscapes surrounding historical sites on private agricultural lands, and 2) providing limited public access to these sites. Kiosks at each site provide historical interpretation and inform visitors that historical site preservation, modern agricultural practices, and environmental values are mutually dependent. This message will also be delivered to landowners and the urban public via radio and television spots, seminars and workshops, newspapers and magazines, and the worldwide web.

Working Lands Stewardship recognizes that the economic sustainability of farms and ranches is necessary to preserve the open space, natural environment, and historical sites found on private agricultural lands through earlier efforts piloted through Undaunted Stewardship[®]. In response, Working Lands Stewardship provides technical assistance to agricultural enterprises wishing to establish or expand tourist-related enterprises, such as bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, recreational cabins, and campgrounds.

Congressional Action Needed: An appropriation of \$1 million is requested.

Importance to Montana: Private agricultural lands are the cornerstone for Montana's \$2 billion per year agricultural industry, and agricultural landscapes provide many of the amenities that make Montana a special place – open space, abundant wildlife, clean water, and scenic beauty. Private agricultural lands also contain many of Montana's most significant historical sites. As the catalyst for cooperative conservation across Montana, Working Lands Stewardship will enable landowners, agricultural groups, conservation organizations, and government agencies to work together to sustain Montana's rural economy, culture, history, and natural resources. In addition, Working Lands Stewardship could create pilot programs that could be expanded into other Western States.

Contacts at MSU:

Tom McCoy, Vice President for Research

(406) 994-2891

Jeff Jacobsen, Dean and Director, COA/MAES

(406) 994-3681

WORKING LANDS STEWARDSHIP - TALKING POINTS

- The Working Lands Stewardship program council will provide a unique partnership with MSU. The council will be comprised of representatives from 16 agricultural, conservation, and government groups in Montana (American Rivers, The Conservation Fund, Missouri River Stewards, Montana Association of Conservation Districts, Montana Association of State Grazing Districts, Montana CattleWomen, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, Montana Farmer's Union, Montana Grain Growers Association, Montana Land Reliance, Montana Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commission, Montana Public Lands Council, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Wool Growers Association, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service).
- The Land Steward Certification program will provide technical assistance to landowners to help them make better resource management decisions based upon sound science and rigid certification standards.
- Ten-year contracts (Historical Site Preservation Agreements) support farmers and ranchers for: 1) preserving the natural landscapes surrounding historical sites on their private agricultural lands, and 2) providing limited public access to these sites. Currently 11 sites are protected and furnished with roadside turnouts, interpretive displays and short walking trails offering access to historical sites on private agricultural lands. The displays provide historical interpretation and inform visitors of the role that agriculture has played in preserving the landscapes and their history. Interpretive display sites are located along county, state, and federal highways, and in the Missouri River Breaks National Monument.
- Working Lands Stewardship will educate the urban public about the compatibility of sustainable agricultural practices with environmental values. This message will be delivered via many outlets, such as public service announcements on radio and television, public seminars, articles in newsletters and magazines, the worldwide web, and articles in newspapers around Montana and the nation.
- Working Lands Stewardship will work with Montana ranches to help them establish or expand their recreational enterprises (e.g., bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, recreational cabins, and campgrounds).
- Working Lands Stewardship will explore new avenues to advance and promote sustainable stewardship of agricultural lands while preserving Montana's environment and history. A liaison with the Rural Landscape Institute and consideration of crop certification in a manner similar to the current rangeland program are under consideration to enhance the Working Lands Stewardship goal of comprehensive sustainable stewardship practices.
- Pilot projects in other Western States based upon the Working Lands Stewardship Montana model may be launched.