

Phillips County

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Crop test plots in Phillips County, photo courtesy of Marko Manoukian.

Phillips County is in North Central Montana along the Hi-Line. It encompasses 3.2 million acres with 33% being managed by the Bureau of Land Management and 48.5% as private lands. Other land managers in the area are Montana State Lands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Agriculture is the main industry in Phillips County, consisting of 53,000 mother cows (ranking third most in the state); 5,900 sheep; 363,200 of crop acres; and 40,000 acres of irrigated land. The gross value of all agricultural commodities in 2017 was about \$77.9 million dollars excluding any government program. Recreation is also an industry in the county with big game and upland bird hunting. Warm water fish species are available in the Milk and Missouri River, which make up the southern border of the county. The Nelson Reservoir is a large irrigation reservoir that also has warm water sport fishing.

Drought ravages crop and livestock production

2021 winter was open and devoid of snow. Spring was dry and temperatures frequently were below freezing. By May, producers were reporting grasshoppers. There was no appreciable

rain or runoff, and livestock operators were left with empty reservoirs. Many small grain and pulse crops were left in the field because they produced too little to harvest. For livestock operators, there was no dryland hay. That condition extended into Canada to Minnesota, Nebraska and into California. Many livestock operators have sold adult reproductive cattle to balance forage availability. In total, 25,000 head of adult cattle have left Phillips County through the sales ring or for other states. Some producers hope to bring those animals home in the next year. To do that, they will rely on rainfall or snowfall of at least five inches between November 2021 and April of 2022. Our long-term average (1970-2020) is only three inches, so mother nature is creating a continued challenge for moisture.

St. Mary/Milk River received appropriation

On November 18, 2003, Lt. Governor Karl Ohs convened a meeting in Havre, Montana, to raise awareness of the urgent need to rehabilitate the aging St. Mary Facilities of the Milk River Project (a diversion dam and headgate on the St. Mary River provides the Milk River basin with water). On November

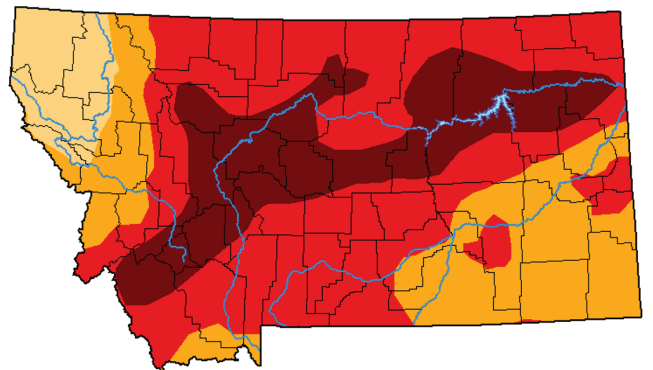
6, 2021 as part of the Federal Infrastructure bill, the St. Mary/Milk River project will receive \$100 million in funding.

Local Extension agent Marko Manoukian has been a part of every meeting since 2003. In 2014, he became the local Chair of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group. The economy of the Hi-Line region is dependent on the stable water supply that the St. Mary/Milk River project provide.

In 2021, Manoukian provided an explanation of the 113-year-old Bureau of Reclamation facility to Idaho Water Users Association (125 people), National Water Users Association, Irrigation Caucus (30 people) and Phillips County residents (20 people). Without the flow of the St. Mary there would be no Milk River.

Phillips County Cloverbuds

The Phillips County Cloverbuds (youth ages 5-8) continue to have close to 20 participants. They meet once a month, doing hands-on learning, science activities, and learning the basic structure of 4-H. This winter they will make a snowstorm in a jar, which teaches them how water and oil don't mix, and that baking soda makes gas bubbles when added to water. Later in the spring, they will learn the basic parts of a plant, before making seed clusters to plant at home when it's warm enough. At the end of the 4-H year, Cloverbuds get together and plan a meal to make for their families, which gives them the opportunity to learn about nutrition, practice kitchen safety, learn the correct liquid and dry ingredient measurements, and be proud of their learning, and the meal they have made for their families.





Previous Page: (top) Livestock reservoirs across Phillips County are drying up in 2021, by Marko Manoukian; **(bottom)** November 18 drought monitor map, by National Drought Mitigation Center University of Nebraska-Lincoln ; **This Page:** Phillips County Cloverbuds dinner 2021, by Randee Shannon

Phillips County Staff



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