

Wheatland County



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Youth showing sheep in WCYF, by Joni Freeser.

Wheatland County is a crossroads near the center of Montana. The rural county is primarily shortgrass prairie and is bordered by mountain ranges to the north, west, and southwest. The county population is 2,069 according to the 2020 census data. Harlowton is the county seat and is the largest community with a population of 955. Two Dot is located 12 miles to the west of Harlowton and has a population of 68, Shawmut is 16 miles to the east and has a population of 51. Students from these communities attend school in Harlowton. Judith Gap is located 18 miles north and has a population of 80. Judith Gap has a K-12 school that students from Judith Gap and the surrounding area attend.

Wheatland County has a diverse economy supported by wind generation, rock mining, small businesses and agriculture. The county has deep agricultural roots with large generational farms and ranches that define our culture. We are fortunate to have a critical access hospital, clinic, and a dentist's office to meet the medical needs of the community.

Big Sky Big Leadership

In 2021, Wheatland, Golden Valley, and Musselshell Counties combined to host the third local leadership program in the Musselshell Valley. Participants meet in various locations and

spend time learning more about themselves to better understand and work with others in the community and serve in a leadership role. Some of the topics covered include: gracious space (a collaborative model), REAL Colors (personality evaluation), how to navigate difficult conversations, understanding conflict, appreciative inquiry, emotional intelligence, and improving management.

Invited speaker Becky McCray from Save Your Town presented a workshop on how individuals and communities can become idea-friendly. Participants were challenged to think about the way they can test an idea and focus on what they can implement in the community. Participants began to reframe their thinking and to focus on what they could do to take a leadership role in their community.

This year, Big Sky Big Leadership participants practiced their leadership skills and created a Harlowton farmer's market. This weekly event was exactly what the community needed every Friday afternoon. The event reflected the leadership values of the committee. They created a gracious space where community members felt safe selling their products and connecting with their neighbors. In addition, participants were able to easily access locally-grown produce and meat.

Employees value a cohesive working environment now more than ever. Another participant commented that she improved her relationship with coworkers because of what she learned during the program. She was able to become a more effective supervisor and resolve conflicts because she understood her temperament and the strengths of her coworker.

Participants reflected in the surveys that the skills they learned helped them be more effective on the boards and committees and helped them work on teams more effectively and interact with others.

Wheatland County Youth Find Their Spark in 4-H

Engaging in community service allows youth to see themselves as valued members of the community and make a difference in a real way. 4-H members in Wheatland County have been busy making a difference in their community. The Lucky Leprechauns and Cloverbud members had two community service projects in 2021. They collected hygiene products for students at the high school to ensure that everyone had needs met. One member even asked for people to donate items at his birthday instead of bringing gifts. They delivered four boxes to the pantry at the high school. In November, members made evergreen wreaths as holiday decorations to deliver with Thanksgiving meals as a gift for local seniors. In June, the 4-H ambassadors hosted a farm and ranch safety day where over 50 youth practiced ATV skills, learned to use pepper spray, basic first aid, and the importance of wearing a helmet.

In July 2021, the theme for 4-H Day Camp was Creative Expression. Hands-on workshops allowed youth to experience new creative activities that challenged them to try something new and create awesome artwork. Youth participated in mindfulness exercises like making a gratitude list or talking a mindful walk before each project. As a result, youth were more excited about trying new projects, more intentional and focused on their project, and were proud of the work they had done after completing the mindfulness activities.

For the 2021-2022 4-H year, Wheatland County 4-H experienced a significant increase in enrollment. Our clubs are bustling. Youth and parents are excited about the opportunities they find in the program. Youth have a sense of belonging, regardless of what project they are working on. Wheatland County 4-H provides a place for youth to belong and work in projects they are interested in. They learn life skills like communication, responsibility, and resilience by working on their projects. Youth have the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities through 4-H, including traditional 4-H camp, 4-H club meetings, 4-H Fridays Project Activities, and 4-H Day Camp.



Top: Leadership participants engaging in a painting activity, by Mandie Reed; **Bottom:** 4-H members holding the wreath they made, by Mandie Reed

Wheatland County Staff



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