

Broadwater County



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Sunset over Edgewater Farms, an agri-tourism venture south of Townsend, by Allison Kosto.

MSU Extension in Broadwater County is a partnership between Broadwater County, Montana State University, and the United States Department of Agriculture. This partnership provides educational outreach in the areas of Agriculture/Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Community Development, and Family Consumer Sciences. The office in Broadwater County houses one MSU Extension Agent and an Administrative Assistant who also serves as the Fair Manager.

Broadwater County is a fast-growing county with a population of about 7,288. The county encompasses 796,000 acres of agricultural land, small acreage subdivisions, rural communities, and range or forested land. With about 45% of the county in public land, the area is a popular choice for recreation, especially around Canyon Ferry Reservoir. Primary industries include agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and services. Townsend is the county seat and home to the MSU Extension office.

Enhancing Leadership Skills in Broadwater County

In the fall of 2021, MSU Extension in Broadwater County launched a new program called Big Sky, Big Leadership. This community leadership initiative seeks to address the need for leaders in rural communities and help participants develop skills and improve awareness of local issues.

The program met monthly for nine months. Each class featured a leadership development topic and a community experience. Leadership topics included personality styles, communication, conflict management, generational differences, leadership styles and effective meetings. For the community experience, each session featured an on-site visit or tour, or a guest speaker or panel to present information on a topic relevant to the community.

There were 13 applicants for the first class and 10 successfully graduated in May 2022. On the final evaluation, participants shared examples of how the program has impacted them and furthered their reach in the community:

- 100% of survey respondents felt their participation helped them to improve the effectiveness of meetings and actions of boards or groups they are a member of.
- 86% of survey respondents felt they had become better leaders at home, work or in the community.
- 3 participants became new members of community nonprofits or organizations.
- 3 participants supported or mentored someone else to become a better leader.
- 2 participants planned to apply for a board position within the next 6 to 12 months.
- 1 participant became a member of a government board.
- 1 participant started a new community effort or project.

Because of the success of the class, a second program started in September 2022 with 15 participants.

4-H Prepares for Growth

Even though the pandemic slowed the 4-H program, it has slowly recovered and is preparing for growth again as the county continues to expand in population. This year, 121 club members were enrolled, supported by 51 certified volunteers who lead clubs, organize project work, serve on committees, and coordinate events and activities. On average, volunteers spent eight hours per month volunteering with 4-H. This equates to a value of \$129,646 in time to support local youth in 2022.

To prepare for continued growth, Broadwater County 4-H did a strategic planning session in August 2022 to identify priorities and set goals. As a result, the Elkhorn Clovers 4-H Club was reactivated, making a total of seven clubs in the county which is a record in recent history. Additionally, the 4-H Livestock Committee developed a campaign spearheaded by chairman Jason Noyes to raise over \$400,000 to build a 4-H Livestock Pavilion at the Fairgrounds, which should be in place by the 2023 Fair. The pavilion expands the 4-H program's ability to show and house animals during the fair.

Through 4-H, youth learn life skills, including leadership, communication, critical thinking, goal setting, and healthy choices. On their scholarship applications, graduating seniors shared skills gained through 4-H:

- "Being involved in 4-H helped me to develop into the leader that I am today. It has shown me the value of serving others." -Colton Noyes
- "4-H means inspiration, growth and leadership to me. 4-H has allowed me to grow into who I am today." -Gabriella Rauser
- "4-H has molded my idea of a leader into something very achievable and real." -Bailey Taves





Previous Page: (top) Big Sky, Big Leadership Program Participants 2021–2022. Left to right: Sheila White, Jeff Langlinais, Shari Graham, Billy Fambro, Peter Parr, Dawn Mahr, Jeff Kirksey, Carla Stephens, Justin Tiffany, Kelsey Rose and Chantelle Mostad. Not pictured: Jessica Bushnell and Deanna Kolodka, By Allison Kosto; **(bottom)** John Hahn, co-chair of BCDC, welcomes participants at the Town Hall Meeting as part of the community review process, by Allison Kosto; **This Page:** Flag raising at 4-H Camp 2022, by Allison Kosto

Aligning Community Priorities

According to the 2020 Census, Broadwater County is the third fastest-growing county in the state. This growth has created many complex issues in the county. Allison Kosto, MSU Extension Agent in Broadwater County, is on the Board of Directors for the Broadwater County Development Corporation (BCDC). In 2004, BCDC coordinated a community review that set priorities for the community resulting in many measurable impacts. However, due to changes and growth in the county, BCDC determined there was a need to update the plan. BCDC and MSU Extension in Broadwater County partnered with the Montana Economic Developers Association, University of Idaho Extension and Montana Business Assistance Connection to plan a new community review.

During the summer of 2022, a survey was sent out to every household in the county. Next, the county hosted a team of outside facilitators for a series of listening sessions. There were nine listening sessions across the county which were attended by 114 participants. The listening sessions culminated in a Town Hall Meeting where facilitators shared information on initial data from the survey and listening sessions. They identified priority areas which included housing and planning, small business and employment opportunities, emergency and social services, agriculture land preservation and community involvement.

The facilitators developed a formal report that will be used to guide planning and future projects in the county. Additionally, the community is gearing up for phase two of the review process in early 2023. For this phase, BCDC selected three priority areas, and another team of facilitators and subject matter experts will be brought into the county to develop action plans with local stakeholders.

Broadwater County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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