Powell County is a rural county with a total population of about 7,000 people and over 35,000 cows. There are seven census-designated communities in Powell County, the largest of which is the county seat, Deer Lodge. Powell County’s economy is heavily based on natural resource industries like agriculture, forestry, and mining. Over 50% of the county is owned by either federal or state government, most of which is open to livestock grazing, timber production, and mineral extraction. Powell County is home to beautiful and scenic landscapes composed of six distinct mountain ranges, three major rivers, vast swaths of rangeland, and small amounts of irrigated cropland and pasture.

The Powell County MSU Extension office, located in the courthouse in Deer Lodge, is staffed by one full-time MSU Extension Agent and one full-time administrative assistant. The office provides information and outreach to local constituents and organizations in agriculture, horticulture, 4-H/youth development, and more. Powell County MSU Extension provides newspaper articles and free publications, hosts public workshops in numerous program areas, offers one-on-one consultations for local constituents in several capacities, and works with school children and 4-H youth across the county to serve the people and places of Montana.

Montana 4-H Gone W.I.L.D. (Wilderness Learning Independence and Development) Backpacking Camp and Gear Library Debut

After soliciting and receiving nearly $10,000 dollars in grant funding and a year of planning, Montana 4-H’s first youth backpacking camp launched in the summer of 2022. Grant funding was used to create an outdoor gear library composed of sleeping bags, sleep pads, tents, camp stoves, bear spray, and other outdoor essentials which are now available to be loaned out to local 4-H youths and their families. The outdoor gear library also served to outfit local 4-H youths for the inaugural trip of the MT 4-H Gone WILD backpacking camp.

In late July and early August of 2022, seven 4-H youths successfully completed a 4-day, 3-night backpacking trip in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness south of Georgetown Lake. 4-H youth, aged 12-14 years old, were taught how to pack and carry their camping gear, set up and maintain a camp, plan and cook nutritious backcountry meals, and many other outdoor lessons. Instructors Ben Hauptman (Granite County MSU Extension Agent), Kayleen Kidwell (Deer Lodge County MSU Extension Agent), and Bo Walker (Powell County MSU Extension Agent).
Montana Master Gardener Program Returns to the Montana State Prison

After a four-year hiatus, Powell County MSU Extension returned to the Montana State Prison to offer the Montana Master Gardener Level I certification. In total, 27 inmates – many of whom pursued a separate landscaping certification in tandem – completed the 20-hour course and 20-hour community service requirement. Students learned about soils and fertility; plant physiology and ecology; vegetable and fruit management; turf grass management; shrub and berry pruning; and more.

Many student-inmates enrolled in the program currently hold landscaping, ranch or farm management jobs on the prison property. The knowledge and skills acquired through the Master Gardener Program both complement and add to their current skill sets. Many student-inmates who took the course hope to continue working in landscaping and horticulture upon their return to society.

The Master Gardener Level I course was in high demand during the spring of 2022. So much so that Master Gardener Level II will be offered in the Fall of 2022 to further inmate students’ horticultural knowledge. Currently, Powell County MSU Extension plans to offer Master Gardener Levels I and II once per year while demand remains high.