

Stillwater County



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North Stillwater County, by Haley Barker.

Stillwater County has everything from the beautiful Beartooth Mountains and river valleys to the rolling plains with big, beautiful skies. Located in south-central Montana, the county offers fishing in rivers or streams, floating the Yellowstone and Stillwater Rivers, hunting in the Beartooth Mountains or the open plains to the north, Art Walks in Absarokee and more. Stillwater County has a population of 9,131 (according to the 2011 Census), with 1,891 people in the largest incorporated town of Columbus. MSU Extension has two agents and one support staff: Lee Schmelzer, agriculture and 4-H agent; Haley Barker, family and consumer science and 4-H agent; and Raya Logan-Jackson, 4-H administrative assistant. We look forward to continuing to serve the needs of our neighbors and communities in Stillwater County.

Stillwater County MSU Extension Responds to Historic Flooding

In the early morning hours of June 13, the creeks and streams draining the Beartooth Mountains rose dramatically to flows of 23,400 cubic feet per second, nearly doubling

the previous record high, and equaling two and a half times flood stage. Before the water receded, 11 local homes were destroyed, six were unreachable, and more than 80 were damaged. Three county and state bridges and eight private bridges were washed out. Numerous private and public roads were washed out. Some ranchers were especially hard hit and lost access to their fields and ranches.

Working directly with the Stillwater County Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) Incident Management Team, Stillwater County MSU Extension mobilized resources and began to pull information from MSU, state, and federal disaster recovery publications to quickly create a dedicated website and post relevant information to social media platforms. One community leader relayed that MSU Extension's website was the best place to find helpful recovery information. DES referred all agriculture questions to Stillwater County MSU Extension.

An immediate unmet need was to help ensure safe drinking water for all residents in flood areas, especially while residents were experiencing a very trying, stressful, and costly time. With help from the MSU Extension Water Quality Specialist and University Administration, Stillwater County MSU Extension

secured an EPA-approved portable water quality testing lab. Within 10 days of the flood, Stillwater County residents had access to free bacteria water testing twice a week and could receive results within 24 hours.

Between June 23 and the end of September, 195 water sample tests were completed. At least 82 wells tested had flood water flowing over the top of the wellhead and 33 more wells had water flowing around the wellhead. Of the 195 water samples, 62 showed the presence of Total Coliform Bacteria and of those, 40 samples tested positive for E.coli. All landowners were sent written and video instructions for shock chlorination treatment. Subsequently, 35 wells were retested to ensure they were no longer contaminated.

Of those wells that were difficult to clear (i.e. shallow wells and older hand-dug wells), several necessitated drilling new wells or connecting to other safe drinking water sources on the property. Information on properly abandoning wells was provided when needed. This service spared residents an estimated \$16,600 in testing costs county-wide.

Strong People, Strong Bodies in Stillwater County

Our Strong People program has returned to Stillwater County by popular demand. Strong People is a community-based, low-impact, strength training program for mid-life and older individuals. The benefits from strength training include increased muscle mass and strength, improved bone density, reduced risk for osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and obesity, and improved self-confidence, sleep, and vitality. Three classes are offered weekly in Absarokee. Two sessions have been available from our Family and Consumer Science MSU Extension Agent Haley Barker, one in the spring and one in the fall. One participant has noticed a remarkable difference in balance from the beginning of the fall session to now. The class breaks during the holiday season and resumes in 2023.

Stillwater County 4-H Make It, Take It Day

With four classes to choose from, 4-H youth had the opportunity to participate in multiple classes for Make it, Take it Day. When choosing a morning and afternoon class, members got a taste of multiple projects and got to take home some awesome products. Classes included: cookie decorating, woodworking (make a photo hanger), leathercraft (make a knife sheath, wallet, or coasters), finger knitting, and ink-dyeing (coasters). If sessions finished early, members participated in making blankets as a community service project. This activity day gave 4-H members the chance to test their skills, learn something new, and meet other 4-H members in the county.



Join us for

STRONGPeople

WORKOUT CLASSES
6-WEEK PROGRAM
EVERY THURSDAY
FROM 10:00-11:00AM

AT THE MAINSTREET COMMONS IN ABSAROKEE

Classes start
March 10th
FREE TO JOIN

StrongPeople is a community-based low impact, strength training program aimed at mid-life and older individuals. The benefits of strength training include:

- Increased muscle mass and strength
- Improved bone density and reduced risk for osteoporosis and related fractures
- Reduced risk for diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, depression, and obesity
- Improved self-confidence, sleep, and vitality





Previous Page: (top) Flooding along the Stillwater River; **(bottom)** Strong People Advertisement by Raya Logan-Jackson; **This Page:** Make It Take It workshop session, by Haley Barker

Stillwater County Staff



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

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