# USDA Forest Service - Montana Units

# FY2022 Accomplishment Highlights

## Introduction

The latest iteration of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in Montana and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MT DEQ) was signed in early 2020 as a five-year update to the longstanding MOU. Among those notable changes to the MOU was addition of Section IV (J), which states:

IV. The Forest Service shall:

J. Provide DEQ with the annual U.S. Forest Service accomplishment report for activities on NFS lands in Montana. Production of this annual accomplishment report would be coordinated by the FS R1 regional hydrologist. Report contents would be drawn primarily from the U.S. Forest Service’s Watershed Improvement Tracking (WIT) database and would include all regional soil and water resource improvement activities that occurred during the previous federal fiscal year.

The format and content of this report has been mutually agreed upon as a work in progress; each subsequent iteration of the report will be refined in effort to best meet the needs of both agencies.

For 2022, geospatial data has again been shared with MT DEQ representing locations where selected watershed restoration activities have occurred on USFS-managed lands.

In effort to improve transparency and communication with partners like MT DEQ, USFS Region 1 has been coordinating with Washington Office database managers to develop a publicly accessible dashboard for viewing selected soil, aquatic, and watershed restoration activities completed on National Forest System lands. The dashboard is currently in beta testing and is anticipated to be available in late spring or early summer 2023. The dashboard will be an ArcGIS Online platform that provides both mapped locations of selected activities coupled with tabular and graphical display of associated statistics and information.

This 2022 report provides a statewide snapshot of accomplishments in four reporting categories: soil and watershed acres improved; stream miles improved/linear feature restoration activities; Best Management Practices monitoring; and priority watersheds improved. Annual accomplishment reports from individual forests can be forwarded to MT DEQ where available.

The 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) created multiple new programs for funding watershed and aquatic restoration activities on NFS lands. USFS Region 1 was the beneficiary of these programs, in particular the Legacy Roads and Trails program and Collaborative, Aquatic-Focused Landscape Restoration (CALR) program. Funding from these programs was made available late in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, resulting in much of the funded work being deferred to Fiscal Year 2023. Depending on the BIL program, Forests are actively working with the Regional Office on 2024, 2025, and in some cases 2026 proposals. More information on BIL-related funding accomplishments will be provided to Montana DEQ during coordination meetings and in subsequent years’ reports.

Data included in this FY2022 annual report have been drawn from the Forest Service’s national accomplishment reporting databases. Reported watershed restoration activities have been filtered to showcase accomplishments most pertinent to attainment and improvement of water resource beneficial uses. While national and regional reporting guidance is provided, individual Forests retain the flexibility to decide which activities they elect to report subject to the needs of their programs. More restoration and mitigation activities may have been completed by some Forests than reported here.

Though efforts have been made to ensure equitable accounting of accomplishments, not every acre reported can be assumed to have the same level of landscape benefit or effect. As noted above, accomplishment reports from individual National Forests can further contextualize the scope of work completed.

## Soil and Water Acres Improved

Figure 1 shows selected soil and water resource acres improved on USFS managed lands in Montana. USFS Montana Forests performed a variety of activities in service of watershed restoration ranging from channel reconstruction and streambank stabilization to road obliteration. Road and trail improvements highlighted many of the forests’ programs of work; Montana Forests realigned, decommissioned, stored, stormproofed, and repaired greater than 200 acres of road and trail prisms across the state. Additionally, on the order of 50 acres of wetland restoration and crossing reconstruction occurred across three National Forests in Montana during FY2022.

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