



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Montana Delegation announces USDA Forest Service grants to Montana communities**

*Economic Action and Rural Community Assistance programs aid rural economies*

Missoula, Mont. June 13, 2003—Senator Baucus, Senator Burns, Congressman Rehberg and Regional Forester Brad Powell announced today that Montana’s rural communities will receive about \$400,000 in Federal Economic Action and Rural Community Assistance grants through the USDA Forest Service’s Region 1 State and Private Forestry office in Missoula. “I’m extremely pleased the Forest Service has made these important grants available to Montana communities,” said Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.). “I’ve been a strong supporter of Economic Action and Rural Community Assistance funding for many years. And I encourage and challenge Forest Supervisors across Montana to continue to make every effort to work with Montana communities to develop competitive grants like these that enhance rural economies and create jobs.”

Rural Community Assistance and National Fire Plan Economic Action grants help rural communities improve living conditions, develop sustainable local economies, enrich their cultures and enhance their natural resource environments. “Our communities need all the help they can get,” said Senator Conrad Burns (R-Mont.). “Funding like this will help those in our smaller communities, and I will continue to support these efforts from Washington.” Senator Burns is a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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This year's awards are summarized in four categories:

1. \$170,000 in National Fire Plan funding will boost six projects that seek to use small diameter wood removed to reduce the threat of wildfire. Projects range from making kiosks, pavilions, bridges or wood flooring out of small diameter wood to generating electricity by burning waste wood at existing mills. Five projects are located in the towns of Dillon, Hall, Lolo, Superior and Townsend; the sixth will span five western Montana counties.
2. \$15,000 will help Madison, Mineral and Carter Counties prepare economic development plans that are necessary to guide the communities' efforts to improve the health of their natural resources and economies, and enable them to better compete for state and federal grant assistance in the future.
3. \$184,120 in Rural Community Assistance Program funding will help 11 communities and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes with a variety of economic development projects. Many of these projects are designed to enhance Montana's growing tourist industry. Examples include assisting with work on a rest area, museums, visitor centers, trailheads and fairgrounds.
4. Three more grants totaling \$29,616 will help Big Timber, Twin Bridges and Townsend enhance the experience of Lewis & Clark Bicentennial visitors with a native plant garden, and an interpretive park and kiosk.

The Rural Community Assistance Grant Program has been in place for over a decade and there are notable, successful projects in many communities near National Forests spread throughout our state. "These grants represent an important investment in the kind of federal and local partnership needed to protect our forests and enhance Montana's rural localities," Rehberg said. "As always, Montana exemplifies the successful environmental collaboration between land managers and neighboring communities."

The total amount of funds available each year varies. "For the past few years, National Fire Plan Economic Action Funding has roughly doubled our ability to help Montana's Communities," said Regional Forester Brad Powell. "Rural Community Assistance is one of the best things we do in the Forest Service because of the relationships we build with our neighbors." The program brings a great return on its investment, with every federal dollar leveraging an average of \$10 from non-federal sources.

Applications for these programs are submitted annually through the Forest Supervisors of Montana's 9 National Forests. Grants are available to communities, counties and tribes, and can be awarded to develop plans, conduct feasibility studies, explore economic ventures, expand or create businesses, create or enhance outdoor recreation and tourism, develop alternative forest products, improve living conditions and enhance natural resources. Prospective applicants may contact their local National Forest office or Scott Bell, Rural Community Assistance Program Coordinator for the Forest Service at (801) 625-5259 for more information.