



Soil and Plant Science Division Technical Soil Services Northwest Soil Survey Region



50th Anniversary of Montana Range Days

Havre, Montana, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO)

Purpose

At the request of NRCS Montana, Havre MLRA SSO staff taught about soils and ecological sites at the Montana Range Days event held in Malta, Montana, from June 22 to 24, 2026 (fig. 1). Approximately 100 participants from all over the state gathered to learn about the fundamentals of rangeland management, tour local stewardship projects, and compete for prizes and scholarships. The ultimate goal was to empower participants to improve conservation, become good stewards, and sustain rangeland for generations to come.



Figure 1.—Scott Brady, MLRA Soil Survey leader, teaching about ecological sites

Background

Montana Range Days is the State's premier rangeland education event and celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. The event attracts youth and adults from all over Montana. Since its start, over 7,000 participants have taken part. During the 3-day event, participants learn about plant anatomy, plant identification, soils, ecological sites, inventory and monitoring, stocking rates and utilization, and ranch planning.

Day 3 is a contest where participants can compete individually or as teams in prospective categories, or they can go for it all and compete for the ultimate title of Top Rangehand. A variety of scholarships are available for prospective students seeking higher education in range management. Other exciting events include a lamb barbeque, a banquet, and a dance. Visit the [Montana Range Days website](#) for more information.

Key Outcomes

Scientists from the Havre MLRA SSO, Montana Land Reliance, and The Nature Conservancy served as instructors for the soils and ecological sites station. Instruction began with the five soil-forming factors and was followed by a lesson on how to texture soil by feel. The discussion then moved into ecological sites, emphasizing the correlation between soils, environment, and the resulting plant communities. Finally, participants learned how to use a dichotomous key to identify an ecological site based on its soil and environmental characteristics (fig. 2).

Staff from the Havre MLRA SSO, NRCS Montana, and multiple partner organizations collaborated to provide a variety of information and hands-on experiences. By empowering participants to improve conservation, become good stewards, and sustain rangeland for generations to come, the benefits of events like Montana Range Days are exponential and measured in years, if not decades.



Figure 2.—Students identifying soils and ecological sites on contest day.