

# HEART OF THE ROCKIES INITIATIVE

## JOB DESCRIPTION

### Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership (SMSP) Project Manager

September 2021

<b>Hours:</b>	1.0 FTE (40 hours/week)
<b>Status:</b>	Exempt
<b>Location:</b>	Dillon, Montana
<b>Reports to:</b>	SMSP Coordinator
<b>Salary:</b>	Range \$48,000 to \$58,000 per year
<b>Benefits:</b>	9 paid Holidays per year 15 paid Vacation Days per year 10 Sick Leave Days per year 6 weeks paid/6 weeks unpaid Family Leave policy Health Insurance in accordance with employee policy Employer contribution SIMPLE IRA

### Position Overview

The Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership (SMSP) Project Manager is a unique position created to accelerate cross boundary land stewardship in southwest Montana's sagebrush steppe. It is a fully-funded three-year position.

Heart of the Rockies Initiative would like to attract an experienced and capable conservation practitioner to the job – someone able to independently manage cross-organizational relationships, who can coordinate multiple simultaneous projects, and who is motivated to take on new and innovative approaches to natural resource stewardship.

### Position Description

The Project Manager is a full-time position who provides support to the SMSP Coordinator and is based out of Dillon, Montana.

The Project Manager will work with the SMSP Coordinator to develop and implement partnerships with local communities, private entities, and private landowners, and help the SMSP advance a cohesive cross-boundary strategy to address threats to sagebrush steppe. Examples of opportunities include:

- further development of priority riparian and wet meadow restoration efforts at a watershed scale
- development of a coordinated approach to address the threat of invasive annual grasses in southwest Montana

- maintaining or increasing our progress to abate conifer expansion, and further our effort to increase woody biomass utilization
- increase the use of prescribed fire
- explore opportunities to support large scale regenerative grazing practices
- engagement and development of local workforce to address resource issues

While the SMSP focuses on four primary natural resource disciplines affecting the sagebrush steppe ecosystem (i.e., conifer expansion, wet meadow and riparian habitat degradation, invasive annual grasses, and wildlife movement barriers), it is expected that the Project Manager will develop autonomy in their work plan and project development as they become comfortable and more skilled, and according to their individual interest areas and expertise.

### **Position Duties and Responsibilities**

- Develop projects within the four primary conservation issues being addressed by the SMSP
- Serve as project lead to oversee project design and coordinate the implementation of those projects, completing follow-up monitoring and reporting when required
- Build and maintain close and mutually beneficial collaborative relationships among federal and state land and wildlife management agencies and NGO partners
- Work with partners to support all phases of project development and implementation
- Develop and track project budgets in coordination with the SMSP Coordinator
- Independently create projects on behalf of the SMSP while working with appropriate land management agency or private landowner
- Prepare and inspect contracts
- Assist in preparation of grant applications, project completion reports, and grant reports

### **Qualifications**

#### Required

- Undergraduate degree (or equivalent) in natural resources field (wildlife, range, conservation, forestry, hydrology, environmental science, or related field)
- Experience managing conservation projects including project planning or project implementation (preference will be given to work associated with the focus of the SMSP with the inclusion of forestry and range management work experience and work on private and public lands).
- Strong understanding of natural resource issues in Montana or the Intermountain West
- Experience and proven ability to encourage and nurture collaboration among multiple project partners
- Motivated to take on new and innovative approaches to natural resource stewardship, including incorporating Indigenous knowledge into management practices
- Ability to think strategically, develop and simultaneously manage multiple complex projects from start-up to completion, and adopt new approaches in response to changing circumstances
- Passionate about wildlife conservation, functioning ecological systems, and working lands
- Collaborative, open-minded, and community-oriented
- Accountable and transparent, with a disposition to learn from mistakes

- Demonstrated integrity, and the ability to exercise confidentiality and sound judgment
- Ability and willingness to work independently, work in outdoor conditions over rough and uneven terrain, and maintain a flexible work schedule if needed
- Willingness to travel throughout southwest Montana, and occasionally beyond

#### Preferred

- Master's degree in a natural resource field and five years of experience, or a bachelor's degree in a natural resource field and 10 years of experience

#### **About Heart of the Rockies Initiative**

The Heart of the Rockies Initiative is a partnership of 26 independent local, state, and national land trusts that work along the Central Rocky Mountain corridor in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Alberta, and British Columbia, and small parts of Utah and Washington. The mission of the Heart of the Rockies Initiative is to ensure connected habitat and working lands for people and wildlife by increasing the pace of durable conservation in the region. Land trusts formed the Initiative in 2002 to meld the incredible power of community-based conservation in communities across the Rocky Mountains into a partnership that conserves and restores land and water at ecologically meaningful large landscape scales while respecting local community values. Our members work primarily with private landowners to voluntarily conserve the most ecologically and agriculturally valuable private lands in the region. Our vision is big picture, strategic conservation that leads to intact, functional ecosystems and successful, resilient communities.

One of our core programs is facilitating and coordinating the High Divide Collaborative. Rural communities throughout the High Divide landscape have long histories of working in local partnerships to address conservation issues. The High Divide Collaborative scales those efforts to a larger landscape perspective. The Collaborative is an effective partnership of landowners, local community leaders, public land managers, state wildlife agencies, scientists, and conservation groups who work together to conserve and restore resources of importance for local communities and to protect ecological and social integrity at the landscape scale.

The SMSP is one of those successful, active local partnerships which includes local managers from Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Montana's Dept. of Natural Resources Conservation and Fish Wildlife & Parks, The Nature Conservancy, and local watershed groups.

Heart of the Rockies Initiative is an equal opportunity employer, committed to fostering an equitable and inclusive organizational culture that supports its diverse staff and independent contractors.

#### **Supervision**

The Project Manager is directly supervised by the SMSP Coordinator for daily activities and program development. They will participate in annual job performance reviews with the Coordinator and Heart

of the Rockies Initiative Deputy Director. In a unique partnership between Heart of the Rockies Initiative, The Nature Conservancy, and Intermountain West Joint Venture, the Project Manager position is hosted by Heart of the Rockies Initiative's High Divide Program and the SMSP Coordinator is hosted by The Nature Conservancy's High Divide Headwaters Program. Each position is fully integrated into their host organization and works together with the SMSP to advance cross-boundary on-the-ground collaboration.

**To Apply**

Please submit a resume and cover letter detailing your education and experience and how you meet the desired qualifications to Heart of the Rockies' Deputy Director JoAnn Grant at [joann@heart-of-rockies.org](mailto:joann@heart-of-rockies.org) by October 15, 2021.

In southwestern Montana's sagebrush country, there is a hopeful spirit that drives diverse partners to maintain healthy working lands and communities, to keep plants and forage from becoming fuel for destructive wildfires, and to conserve lands that benefit agriculture, recreation, and wildlife.



# Southwestern Montana: A Geography of Sagebrush and Hope

## The Place

Sagebrush country in southwestern Montana is a vast, vibrant place between the alpine peaks and deep forests in this far-flung corner of Big Sky Country. This intact expanse of sagebrush shrubs and native grasses and flowers spans from mountaintops to valley bottoms that cradle the headwaters of the Missouri River. Sagebrush habitat protects and links precious snowpack to verdant tributaries and connects habitats for grizzly bear and Arctic grayling, and migration routes for pronghorn, Greater Sage-grouse, and other species. This place is home to multi-generational family ranches intermixed with public land that support vital recreational economies, all anchored by this native landscape and the ecological processes it supports. However, serious challenges are threatening this place and the communities—human and wildlife—that live here.



# The Challenges

Changes in this habitat threaten to degrade and destroy this productive and relatively intact part of America's sagebrush sea and with it the culture and economies connected to the land.

*Here are a few of those threats:*

- **Exotic invasive grasses such as cheatgrass are spreading** rapidly and replacing native forage for livestock and wildlife, as well as potentially fueling destructive rangeland fires.
- **Douglas-fir and juniper trees are expanding** beyond their native ranges and have already taken over hundreds of thousands of acres of historically productive grasslands and other diverse habitats while increasing the risk of high severity wildfires.
- **The changing climate** is expected to reduce snowpack and water availability as well as decrease the resilience of habitats such as wet meadows and floodplains that recharge natural reservoirs. Protecting and restoring these degraded headwater systems encourages water to stay on the land longer.
- **Dramatic increases in property values** are making it increasingly hard for multi-generational family ranches to persist. Ranching is the way of life that maintains this connected landscape and sustains this working wilderness.
- **Human populations are expanding** and with this, the potential for a growing disconnect between communities and their relationship with nature. This disconnect may diminish the relevance, and therefore the effectiveness of, conservation efforts.

These threats don't stop at land ownership boundaries; they move across and impact both private and public holdings. Ranchers, land managers, hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreation groups all benefit when the land is healthy. In this place these people are willing to work together—to give a little to get a little—to keep their communities thriving.

## Featured Project:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with multiple partners to manage cheatgrass across the Centennial Valley of southwest Montana. Starting with predictive maps of invasive annual grass invasion risk, cheatgrass occurrence was documented using field surveys and satellite imagery. With this information, close to a thousand acres of cheatgrass were treated in this valley in 2019, and the results from post-treatment monitoring are looking promising. Continued efforts to locate and treat cheatgrass infestations will prevent further invasion and maintain healthy range conditions for livestock and wildlife.

This post-treatment monitoring photo shows one area with test plots of cheatgrass that were tarped over to prevent herbicide contact during treatment while the surrounding infestation was treated. Seeing these successful results are really exciting!



# The Building of a Model: The Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership



In recognition of these challenges, ranchers and small business owners, together with the State of Montana and federal agencies, local conservation districts, and non-governmental organizations put their chips on the table and began a series of coordinated sagebrush restoration and rangeland health projects in the region.

**Together, these partners built the Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership. The partnership has learned how best to leverage funding, to foster innovation between private landowners, industry, and public land managers, and to improve the health of working rangelands for the good of people and nature.**

They have built a successful model of identifying problems, taking on the challenges, and turning them into opportunities.

**The work of the Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership's larger goal is to spark a shift in the system to make conservation more durable and sustainable into the future. By connecting many individuals from within their growing communities *directly* to natural resource management, the Partnership will help sustain disappearing working lands and foster broader support of stewardship.**

For more information about this partnership, contact Sean Claffey at [sean.claffey@tnc.org](mailto:sean.claffey@tnc.org).

## Key Accomplishments Since 2018:

**6.6 miles** of wet meadow habitat preserved/restored.

**41,000 acres** under permanent conservation easement since 2018.

**50 miles** of fencing modified to become “wildlife-friendly”.

**15,340 acres** with conifer removed to restore habitat diversity and forage opportunities. This includes over **10,000 acres** of prescribed fire across private and public lands.

**751 structures** installed to slow water and preserve wet meadow habitats for natural storage.

Through the Montana Forest Action Plan, the Partnership is working with the **wood products industry** to pilot ways to improve utilization of small diameter materials and biomass.

As part of establishing employment opportunities in southwestern Montana, a **Youth Employment Program** was created in 2021. This program will serve as a new workforce made of local youth and young adults who will have an opportunity to work, learn, and make an hourly wage while contributing to their community and households.





## Land Health = Community Health: The Work Still to Do

Over the next several years, these partners will release numerous scientific products that objectively detail outcomes of management actions. Initial results have demonstrated that these approaches are working. Here is what is necessary to see this crucial conservation continue:

- Investment and momentum cannot slow. Support of innovative ideas cannot cease. To keep the strong healthy landscapes and communities of southwestern Montana, to realize the full potential of this model for collaboration, and to leverage the success of this partnership to others across the West, a sustained commitment of time and funding is required by all partners at the national and regional scale, as well as by local landowners and organizations.
- We must conserve the economic, social, ecological, and cultural values of this working landscape so it does not erode like so many places in the West. Please join in by learning more about this partnership and helping support its pursuit of a geography of sagebrush, opportunities, and hope.

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As a member of a 5th generation Montana ranching family, I feel it is imperative to highlight that agriculture is the driving force to the economy of our state. Maintaining and preserving our native grasslands, sagebrush steppe, forests, and watersheds is critical to the sustainability of our way of life moving forward. Through cooperation with the Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership, I have implemented several practices to protect and enhance grazing and watering resources for livestock as well as wildlife. I fully expect my family to continue ranching for generations to come.

--- Terry Todd, Ruby Valley Rancher

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