

Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Soil and Plant Sciences Division

Soil Survey Region 5 Office



## Miles City MLRA Soil Survey Office, Montana

### Rolling River Trailer Delivers Hands-on, Feet-on Education

#### Purpose

The Rolling River Trailer (RRT) is a trailer lined with steel, plumbed with pipes and spigots at both ends. This sends the water circulating through the pipes below and comes out as a “river” in sand made from recycled plastics. The Montana Association of Conservation Districts and the MT Department of Natural Resources jointly own the RRT, and it is quite useful in showing participants about rivers and how water runs through a watershed. The students stand on step ledges all around the trailer to join in the fun.

Carol Watts of the Custer County Conservation District and Mary Jo Kimble, Soil Survey Office Leader in Miles City, went to a local elementary school at the end of May to present the RRT to 240 kids in grades 1-8. We were one of seven stations available for the students to learn about nature.

#### Key Outcomes

We taught the students about watersheds and erosion, and how flora and fauna help to keep the rivers, such as the Yellowstone and the Tongue Rivers here in Miles City, from going over the banks during flooding season and how it supports the wildlife, the ranchers, the water supply for the City, and other resources. We discussed how the plants and trees have roots that bind together the soil and help hold the banks against erosion. We made streams in the plastic sand on both sides of the trailer, with one stream having “greenery” that holds the stream from eroding and flooding. We showed them how the river is energetic and powerful, that a change in the river affects the rest of the river system, and that the river systems affect more than the water flowing between the banks. We also demonstrated how greenery (trees, grass, plants) hold the soil with their roots and that erosion is not inevitable. We showed how a healthy riparian area protects the banks of the river system as it meanders through.

Afterwards we let them build streams and ponds and houses, and let the water go down the streams to demonstrate how erosion happens. Many of the participants enjoyed being able to try on their own and it was a big hit for the day. We were asked if we were available for future demonstrations with the RRT, and our answer is always yes, because teaching children about healthy rivers, watersheds, soils, and plants is the first step in *helping people help the land*.





The RRT delivers a hands-on, feet-on education about rivers, watersheds, erosion, and more.



Students play and learn at the same time on the Rolling River Trailer in Miles City, MT.