

Aug. 12, 2021

**Contact:** Dr. Sara Rinfret, associate dean and director, UM Department of Public Administration and Policy, 406-243-4702, [sara.rinfret@umontana.edu](mailto:sara.rinfret@umontana.edu).

## **2021 Baucus Innovation Challenge Prize Goes to Columbia Commission**

**MISSOULA** – Cassidy Bender of the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission, part of the Montana Department of Resources and Conservation, submitted the winning pitch for this year's Baucus Innovation Challenge during the recent third annual Public Service Academy at the University of Montana.

The academy is hosted by the Max S. Baucus Institute's Department of Public Administration and Policy and serves to help both public and nonprofit sector employees advance skills for their current professions by offering high-quality training from experts in the field of public service.

Each year the Baucus Innovation Challenge invites public and nonprofit sector organizations to create and submit presentations about their innovations. Academy participants then watch the short video presentations and vote on the most innovative pitch.

The Baucus Institute sponsored this year's competition by providing a cash prize of \$500 for the winner to take back to their organization to reinvest in their innovation.

The Upper Columbia Conservation Commission's pitch detailed their partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Their industry outreach project enlists Big Sky Watershed Corps members to educate the hundreds of water-based businesses and customers statewide with the "Clean, Drain, Dry" campaign, which initiates one-on-one conversations about the impact aquatic invasive species can have and how to prevent their spread.

"We were all very excited to share the work we are doing," Bender said. "Education and outreach are vital in making change in private and public sectors, but it feels all the more special when your type of outreach is connecting with the people of your community face-to-face."

The Upper Columbia Conservation Committee plans to dedicate the prize money to further outreach efforts and the Big Sky Watershed Corps members who originally brought the idea to life.

“The 2021 Public Service Academy was my first year attending this event and my first introduction to the Baucus Innovation Challenge,” Bender said. “It re-sparked my joy for public service and my appreciation for all the wonderful people who dedicate their time, energy and lives to serving others. It reminded me how important community is and how lucky I feel to have it within my agency, the city of Missoula and the realm of public service.”

Next year’s Public Service Academy will take place in August 2022. Watch for more information in the spring because the event sells out quickly. For more information about the Public Service Academy and Baucus Innovation Challenge, visit

<https://www.umt.edu/publicserviceacademy/>.

###

AA/cbs  
Local  
081221bauc