

THE MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST

News from Montana's Conservation Districts

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Lichen researchers descend on Roundup ranch

From Last Best News: The Milton Ranch north of Roundup was crawling with botanists on the cool, wet, third week in September, and Roger Rosentreter, retired state botanist for the Bureau of Land Management in Idaho, was probably the most ebullient member of the team.

When he arrived back at the ranch headquarters two hours past the usual afternoon gathering time, he said, "We've been out searching for manna lichens! Do you know what they are? They're the kind that blow on the wind, and came in time to save the Israelites from starving in the desert during their exodus from Egypt!"

Bill and Dana Milton hosted and fed the high-powered group that was assembled by Andrea Pipp, the program botanist for the Montana Natural Heritage Program in Helena. Pipp applied for and received grants from the BLM and the Montana Native Plant Society to fund the team's travel expenses, while they donated their time and expertise to compile the first inventory of lichens and mosses in Musselshell County.

Specimens of each moss and lichen species found on the ranch will be curated and housed at the University of Montana herbarium in Missoula, observation data will be entered into the MTNHP database, and as time allows, photographs will be posted [on the MTNHP website](#).

[READ MORE](#)



A possible new species found on the ranch, magnified 10x.

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Exxon Mobil to pay \$12M for Yellowstone Spill

(Reuters) – ExxonMobil Corp. has agreed to pay \$12 million to Montana and the U.S. government to restore natural resources damaged or destroyed by a pipeline rupture in 2011 that spilled oil into the Yellowstone River, according to a settlement proposed on Wednesday.

ExxonMobil Pipeline Company's Silvertip pipeline burst July 1, 2011 at a crossing beneath the flood-swollen Yellowstone River near Billings, Montana, about 150 miles (241 km) downstream from Yellowstone National Park.

The release of 1,500 barrels of crude oil affected 85 miles of a river known for its near pristine waters, wealth of wildlife and world-class fisheries.

Under the agreement unveiled Wednesday, funds from Exxon would be used to mitigate harm caused by the spill to fish, wildlife, migratory birds and aquatic habitat.

A restoration plan drafted by the state and federal governments would, among other things, seek to restore riparian and terrestrial habitats, stabilize river banks and expand fishing access in and around the river.

The deal struck between the Texas-based oil company and Montana, the U.S. Department of Justice and other federal agencies still must be approved by a U.S. District Court judge in Montana and is subject to 30 days of public comment, legal documents show. [READ MORE](#)

YRDC projects included in proposed Yellowstone restoration plan

As described at left, Exxon Mobil will pay \$12 million to clean up the Yellowstone spill.

It is important to note that several proposed restoration projects that were included in the State of Montana's Department of Justice - Natural Resource Damage Program's proposal originated from the Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Council's - Yellowstone River Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) and accompanying Recommended Practices documents.

YRDC Chairman Don Youngbauer offered Conservation District insight to those who attended the news conference and spoke along with others including Governor Steve Bullock, Attorney General Tim Fox, US Attorney Michael Cotter and John Cruden Assistant US Attorney General for the U.S. Justice Department's Environment and

Nesting Trumpeter Swans a Missoula Valley first

From the Missoula Current:
HUSON – Joe Boyer was down in the pasture this summer inspecting his red Angus bulls when he saw something peculiar. The two trumpeter swans were rare enough, but what followed them from the cattails went viral in Missoula's conservation community.

The pair of nesting trumpeters marked the first time in recorded history that North America's largest flying bird successfully hatched signets in the greater Missoula Valley. There were five signets at the start, though the number appears to have diminished with the approach of fall.

"I'd seen the swans, but all of a

sudden there were the young ones," Boyer said, standing above a slough of Roman Creek that cuts across his Huson ranch. "I thought it was a big deal because I'd never seen them before."

As it turned out, it was a big deal, and it marked a major achievement in an ongoing effort to conserve vital wildlife habitat and working ranches from future development across Missoula County.

Over the past decade, Boyer has worked with [Five Valleys Land Trust](#) to place 1,200 acres of his working ranch into conservation, protecting it from a fate that has consumed so many other ranches across the region.

[READ MORE](#)



Don Youngbauer addresses the crowd about conservation district insights for the Yellowstone cleanup.

Hunters: Using certified forage is good stewardship

Montana is a great place to hunt for elk, mule or whitetail deer, and pronghorn antelope, but noxious weeds can impact your hunting experience. These non-native plants reduce wildlife habitat by outcompeting native grasses and displacing desirable shrubs and flowering plants.

The seeds of noxious weeds, like houndstongue, can hitchhike on clothing, gear, and ride/pack animals or be a contaminate in hay. If these hitchhikers are not removed or certified forage is not used noxious weed seeds can be

transported to new areas. Good land stewardship is protecting healthy wildlife habitat over the long haul, so your favorite hunting spot will be there for your great grandchildren.

The most effective action when it comes to noxious weeds is prevention. One of the most important things to do is to use certified Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage. Montana's public lands require certified forage to help protect them from noxious weeds and their seeds.

Here are three key points to know

when you purchase certified forage: 1) each bale of certified hay or straw needs to be individually marked with special two colored orange and blue twine or a red NWSFF tag; 2) bagged certified feeds (pellets, cubes, and grain) must have an approved orange NWSFF label on the bag to show certification; 3) in addition to the special markers on the bales, request a transportation certificate from the producer, it provides authenticity of certification between the producer and the consumer buying the certified hay or straw.

REMEMBER: as you get ready to hunt with horses and mules, feed certified forage to them at least three days before entering public lands.

Montana is a huge landmass, with over 94 million acres for land managers to cover searching for noxious weed infestations. Private landowners and public land agencies can use your help looking for new infestations of noxious weeds. As a hunter you are providing an extra set of eyes to find those unknown patches of noxious weeds. Report noxious weed infestations you find to the private landowner, your county weed coordinator, or to the agency who manages the land you hunt on.

Hunters enjoy the outdoors and have an appreciation for good land stewardship! Keep doing your part by using certified forage, learning how to identify noxious weeds, and removing noxious weed seeds before going to your favorite hunting place. To find certified forage visit: agr.mt.gov.

Study shows wildfire can cause mercury contamination

From Boise State Public Radio: Mercury contamination is well documented in the eastern United States. But USGS research ecologist Collin Eagles-Smith wanted to know how big of a problem is it in western states, including Idaho. He led a comprehensive study that was released earlier this month, showing widespread mercury contamination.

According to the study, mercury can come from a number of different natural and manmade sources. In Idaho, historic gold and silver mining is one source – as the element gets released into the environment, flowing into downstream watersheds. But Collin Eagles-Smith says that's not the only way mercury is released. The scientist says western wildfires burn vegetation that's a natural holder of mercury.

"So depending on where you have a burn, you could have hundreds of years of accumulated mercury released into the atmosphere in one pulse."

Eagles-Smith released a comprehensive study of mercury contamination in the West earlier this month. He says what's more toxic than mercury is methylmercury, which occurs under the right conditions when the element is combined with bacteria – and is especially a problem for fish and wildlife in arid parts of Idaho.

Although Eagles-Smith urges people to follow contamination warnings and to be aware of the problem, he's hopeful the study could improve land and water management practices that may contribute to mercury issues.

[READ MORE](#)

Economic Effects of Noxious Weeds on Private Grazing Lands

By Kate Fuller, Stacy Davis, Jane Mangold, and Matt Rinella

Successful management of invasive plants is critical to maintaining healthy agricultural and wildland systems and relies on adequate funding. Adequate funding to achieve such goals, however, hinges on a clear understanding of what is being lost to weed invasions—for example, livestock forage production—and what is being spent to control weeds. Published information on the economic losses caused by invasive weeds is scarce. The most recent analyses of the effects of noxious weeds in Montana occurred some 20 years ago.

As part of a Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund pilot study, we developed a 16-question survey concerning noxious weed management and associated costs. The survey was done in winter 2015-2016 and targeted livestock producers who were grazing livestock on privately-owned rangeland in Montana. Survey responses were received from 129 people in 45 counties, with the majority of respondents grazing cattle (88%) followed by sheep and horses (29% and 23%, respectively). The majority of the survey referred to the largest contiguous block of privately owned or leased land on which respondents grazed livestock, which we referred to as “Block A.” The average size of Block A was 5,055 acres.

The most common noxious weeds reported were Canada thistle, leafy spurge, and houndstongue. However, leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and knapweed (spotted

and diffuse) were reported as causing the largest decreases in livestock production. Only 6% reported having no noxious weeds on Block A. Using information from other studies where field data estimated forage loss due to two state-listed noxious weeds, we estimate the average reduction in biomass resulting from the reported presence of spotted knapweed and leafy spurge at 0.7 and 0.8%, respectively. We estimate the corresponding average value of the reduction in stocking rate is \$0.40 per acre per year, or \$2,022 for the average Block A.

The top three strategies used to control established noxious weeds on Block A were chemical control (88% of respondents), grazing (29% of respondents), and biological control (27% of respondents). About 46% of respondents used more than one control strategy or integrated weed management.

Respondents' average total cost of noxious weed control, including labor and materials, was estimated to be \$0.89 per acre per year, or \$4,499 per year for the average Block A. However, costs of noxious weed control ranged a great deal across individuals—from \$0 to over \$40 per acre. We estimate the total economic loss over all of Block A land, including both the costs of control and the costs of foregone production, to be \$1.29 per acre per year, or \$6,521 per year for the average Block A. However, it is important to note that Block A acreage represents only a small percentage of privately owned land in Montana. In addition, the per-acre numbers would undoubtedly be higher if we were to incorporate the reduction in biomass production resulting from weeds other than leafy spurge and spotted knapweed, the two species for which we have biomass reduction models.



Grants

223, etc. Grant Deadlines

Deadlines for 223, mini-education, and district development grants from DNRC for FY 2017 are as follows: **July 29, 2016**; **October 14, 2016**; **January 14, 2017**; and **April 26, 2017**. [Grant Info](#)

Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grants

Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) grants provide assistance to counties, individuals, local communities, researchers, and educators in their efforts to solve noxious weed problems in Montana. Applicants may request up to \$75,000. Due December 1. [More Info](#)

Western SARE Grants for Farmer/Rancher Research

The Administrative Council of the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program announces the Call for Proposals for Farmer/Rancher Research & Education Grants for 2017. With this grant, a producer, working with a technical advisor, develops a proposal to conduct both research and education on their farm/ranch on a sustainable agricultural topic. Due December 7. [More Info](#)

Jobs

Yellowstone Program Assistant

Ecology Project International's Yellowstone program is looking for an individual to join a team that is engaging youth in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Bitterroot Valley. More Info: www.ecologyproject.org/about/jobs

Events

Facilitation and Meeting Management Workshop

MRCDC & Petroleum CD are hosting a meeting management / facilitation workshop for supervisors, administrators, & others. October 20 at the Lewistown eagles club. Email petroleumcd@midrivers.com to RSVP.

MWCC Symposium

Save the date for the 2016 Watershed Symposium, October 24-26 at the Crown Plaza in Billings. Topics will include watershed management strategies, success stories, and a variety of technical and organizational programs.

Soil Health & What it Means to You Workshop / Ag Expo

Rosebud & Treasure County CDs are hosting their second annual Soil Health & What it means to You Workshop & Ag Exposition on November 30th & December 1st, 2016 in Forsyth. Speakers include Jay Fuhrer, Brendon Rockey, Gregg Simonds, & more. www.rosebudcd.com for info.

Scholarships available for convention attendance

Each year, the MACDEO offers a few scholarships for administrators/conservation district employees to attend the MACD annual convention. You must be a current member of the EO to apply. Employees.macdnet.org for more info.

Resolutions Passed at Area Meetings

The following resolutions were passed at MACD area meetings in September and will be brought for a vote at convention (with committee designations in parentheses):

- 16-1 - Support for Conservation District Water Reservations (Water)
- 16-2 - Supporting Infrastructure (Soil and Land Use)
- 16-3 - Retaining the CBMPA Legislation (Soil and Land Use)
- 16-4 - Continued Funding for CBMPA Program (Soil and Land Use)
- 16-5 - Pollinator Outreach and Education (Education)
- 16-6 - Industrial Hemp (Soil and Land Use)

In addition, proposed bylaw changes were brought forth at the Area 3 meeting, and will be brought to the District Operations Committee meeting. Bylaw changes do not need to be passed at area meetings, and instead must be approved by a two-thirds majority at convention.

Thank you to all who participated in this process and who attended the area meetings. We look forward to seeing you all for some lively discussion at convention!

Have something you'd like to see in TMC? Submissions are due every other Friday at 5:00 (visit our website for a calendar), and should be sent to tmc@macdnet.org.

Coming Up:

October

6 MISAC Listening Session, Pablo

CMR Working Group Meeting, Jordan

10 MACD Board Conference Call

13 Shelterbelt Workshop, Ekalaka

14 223, Mini Education, & District Development grants deadline

MACDEO Convention Scholarship apps due

20 Facilitation and Meeting Management workshop, Lewistown

20-21 River Restoration Workshop, Big Sky

24 MACD Exec. Committee Conference Call

24-26 MWCC Symposium

25 Soil Health Workshop with Jim Gerrish, Missoula

Have an event to share?
Visit macdnet.org/calendar to add your event to our list!

save the date

SOIL HEALTH WORKSHOPS

WITH JIM GERRISH, DR. DWAYNE BECK, & DAN FORGEY

Join us for a series on soil health

FEATURING

JIM GERRISH

Oct. 25 Missoula | Oct. 26 Dillon | Oct. 27 Livingston

DR. DWAYNE BECK & DAN FORGEY

Jan. 17 Great Falls | Jan. 18 Billings | Jan 19 Sidney

Registration \$20 online / \$25 at the door

Visit www.swcdmi.org/programs/soilhealth for registration & more info

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For more information or to learn about vendor opportunities, contact Ann McCauley (406) 443-5711 or ann@macdnet.org

[Click here to register for our Soil Health Workshops!](#)