

MWCA BIOCONTROL WORKING GROUP

Billings Crown Plaza

Billings, MT

January 13, 2009

The meeting was called to order by Tonda Moon, chair, at 1:30 p.m. in conjunction with the 52nd Annual Montana Weed Control Association conference.

Attendance: Tonda Moon, Co-Chair/MDA; Dave Burch, MDA; Carol Bearden, MDA; Stacy Barta, MDA; Gary Adams, APHIS; Jay Cole, APHIS; Sandy Farrell, APHIS; Shayne Galford, APHIS; Kenny Keever, BLM; John Simons, BLM; Mary Mayer, ARS; Jeff Littlefield, MSU; Jim Story, MSU; Jim Olivarez, USFS; Sharlene Sing, USFS; Justin Runyon, USFS; Gil Gale, USFS; Diane Bessler-Hackett, USFS; Paul Moore, DNR; Scott Bockness, Yellowstone Co./MWCA; Eric Hanson, Cascade Co.; Dan Williams, Lincoln Co.; Andrew Shirey, Sweet Grass Co.; Alan Knudsen, Missoula Co.; Larry Beneker, BIA; Craig McClure, NPS; Chris Overbaugh, NPS; Suzanne Beauchaine, FWS; Stan Huhtala, BOR; Pete Stevenson, BOR; private and other representation: Grant Moore, Gary Wiest, Bob Bushnell, Hank McNeel, and Kyle Mielke

CABI BBICA = Centre for Agricultural and Biosciences International, Biotechnology and Biological Control

USDA APHIS-PPQ = United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Plant Pest Quarantine

USDA USFS = United States Department of Agriculture United States Forest Service

USDI BLM = United States Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management

USDI BOR = United States Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation

USDA ARS = United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Station

USDI NPS = United States Department of Interior National Parks System

USFWS = United States Fish and Wildlife Service

BIA = Bureau of Indian Affairs

MDA = Montana Department of Agriculture

DNR = Montana Department of Natural Resources

MSU = Montana State University

NWTF = Noxious Weed Trust Fund

MWCA = Montana Weed Control Association

Minutes from the 11-15-07 meeting were reviewed and accepted as presented.

Participant introductions were made.

Dr. Jeff Littlefield reported on the **Bio-control Implementation/Action Plan**. Key points of the plan:

- Improve agent screening
- Improve distribution
- Develop evaluation criteria
- Enhance integration of biological control with weed control
 - Coordination
 - Research/development (prioritize projects)
 - Outreach/technology transfer

The group indicated they would want to see the document electronically; Jeff will provide it to Tonda, and she will send (e-mail) it to the group when it is received.

Tonda Moon reported there was a good response to the 2008 MWCA Bio-control Agent Survey and the ensuing presentation at the 2008 Spring Weed District Training. The strongest need is for help monitoring; BLM, APHIS and MDA submitted a NWTf grant proposal to initiate a bio-control monitoring intern project. Lincoln County (Dan Williams) will serve as a pilot county, and possibly Big Horn (Scott Bockness) and other counties to be assigned. Kenny Keever will provide a project description at the end of the meeting.

Current Insect Status was provided by Dr. Littlefield.

- Field bindweed: Jeff is close to a field release of a gall mite
- Russian knapweed: one agent approved for release last year, one more possibly this summer
- Whitetop: host specificity testing complete for mites, CABI is working with several agents
- Hawkweed: a gall wasp for orange hawkweed has been tested, CABI is looking at a root fly close to requesting TAG for permission to make a release
- Tansy ragwort: flea beetle populations are increasing in the field, and we hope to see impact on plants in summer 2009; the cinnabar moth is still effective

Jeff will update status of agent availability and it will be posted on the MWCA website.

Sharlene Sing noted that CABI receives USFS funding for toadflax agents.

Mary Mayer says there is a new salt cedar insect from Kazakhstan, but unfortunately, the moths had emerged and died in transit so the new and functional Sidney quarantine facility has nothing to work with at this time.

Jim Story commented on the impact of multi-agent biocontrol on spotted knapweed. The root weevil *Cyphocleonus* is devastating the mature plants, and the long-term effects of the seed head weevils are causing a decline in the soil seed bank.

Jim and Jeff indicate efforts are being made to join the consortiums on Common tansy and Oxeye daisy.

Jay Cole continues to monitor *M. janthinus* sites (toadflax), and will be working with various agencies on collections and releases.

Gary Adams stated that 8 sites have a low level establishment for *D. elongata* (Saltcedar) and all but one site did not have the population supplemented in 2008. APHIS also provides funding to CABI.

Todd Breitenfeldt reported that a NWTF grant project for a bio-control ID (identification) booklet similar to the weed ID booklet has been submitted, and the group will have the opportunity to review and approved the booklet.

Jeff Littlefield mentioned that grant applications have been submitted in conjunction with APHIS for monitoring projects for agents that are here and may be having an impact, but were not tested or permitted properly.

John Simons gave a summary of topics covered at the Wyoming meeting where CABI research was related. CABI has 16 projects they are currently working on: four agents for whitetop, three for pepperweed, six for Russian knapweed, two for Russian olive, and four for dalmatian toadflax. There are plans for another fall meeting in 2009. They are re-designing the hawkweed website. Mark Schwartzlander is on the Invasive Plant Council, and is researching a Houndstongue root weevil. Also at the Wyoming meeting, John Gaskin spoke on genetics, and Sharlene Sing reported on the Bozeman USFS lab, and introduced Justin Runion. John indicated there will be \$20,000.00 available from the BLM for the bio-monitoring intern, and there will be a link to the MWCA on the BLM website.

After discussion, it was agreed that the BLM Interagency would be held in Billings in the fall of 2009, the MWCA Bio-committee meeting will occur in the spring, in Helena.

Tonda Moon reviewed the current submissions being considered for the Montana noxious weed list: Curlyleaf pondweed, hydrilla, Russian olive, cheatgrass, and common mullein. The category descriptions are also being reviewed for accuracy.

Tonda also asked if the group wanted to continue with the sub-working group members; all were in acceptance, but would appreciate more e-mail updates.

Gary Adams reinforced the message that *D. elongata* can not be brought into MT from WY without a permit. Agents can be distributed from MT sites (in Montana) as soon as some reach collectable populations. Washington can still supplement some *M. janthinus*, but he encourages in-state coordination efforts with Sharlene and others like the Bison Range population.

Gary and Jay both stressed the need for weed district coordinator involvement to avoid duplication of effort, or herbicides applied after insects have been released on a weed population. There is great value in having an area contact for bio-control coordination. Gary pointed out that there are very few monitoring requirements for bio-control, and reviewed the monitoring internship project being developed between BLM, APHIS and MDA, which will require a fair amount of groundwork (contacting landowners for permission, etc) on the part of the weed district coordinators prior to the arrival of the intern. Dan Williams mentioned that there is good coordination between the USFS, MDT, Plum Creek Timberlands and the counties in the NW that will facilitate this

monitoring effort. They are already putting releases on a map (GPS point/polygon) to stop overspray onto the insect releases. On days that are not conducive for herbicide application, his crews work on bio-control. Gary mentioned the need for a confidential database.

The group indicates a desire to continue with the survey approach used in the spring of 2008, with some changes. Include the agencies, etc. for a more complete coverage. The MWCA directory list was agreed to be the best resource of contacts to survey. Remove reference to the houndstongue agent as it is not an authorized bio-control. Also, saltcedar agents are not actually available for collection and distribution in the state. Remove whitetop and Canada thistle agents from the survey. A news letter will be sent out if and when agents become legally available for distribution.

Gil Gale asked why he would be seeing no indication of establishment from the several agent releases (*Chrysolina*) made on a 200 acre monoculture of St. Johnswort. Bill West at the Bison Range indicates 8-10 years for establishment. It was universally agreed with a small (200 acre) infestation, herbicide would be the wisest choice.

Movement of *M. cruciger* already in the state was discussed. All concurred that it was legal, however morally inappropriate, and could put the bio-control program in Montana at risk

Kenny Keever reviewed the BLM initiated bio-monitoring internship. Lincoln, Lewis and Clark, Blaine, Musselshell and Yellowstone/Big Horn counties are being considered as pilots for the project, with the intent to get involvement in all the geographic locations of the state. Effort is being made to secure an intern from the Chicago Botanical Gardens.

Dave Burch explained the intent of the Montana Weed Summit scheduled at the culmination of the MWCA Annual conference. He stressed that everyone's input is valuable in this discussion showing the strengths and weaknesses of Montana's weed control efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 3:22 pm. The group will be notified of the date for the spring MWCA Biocontrol Working Group meeting.