

**Western Aquatic Weed Summit**  
**MWCA Western Area Council (WAC)**  
**April 13, 2010**  
**Missoula, MT**

**Minutes**

Dave Brink opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. and explained that the purpose of this meeting was to have all parties interact regarding aquatic invaders. He explained that over the past ten years, Montana has fallen behind in dealing with aquatics, and this meeting would hopefully put the state on the right path to once again be a leader.

**Aquatic Invader ID**

Eileen Ryce, aquatic nuisance coordinator with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, presented a brief introduction and identification regarding aquatic nuisance species. An aquatic nuisance species is non-native, a plant, animal or pathogen and it has to cause some sort of harm. Some of the priority species in the state include Zebra/ Quagga mussels, Asian carp, Viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHS), aquatic weeds, illegal fish introductions (Grass Carp in particular), Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM), New Zealand Mud snails and Whirling disease. It is vital that outreach and education occur through volunteers in order to be the most effective in detection and prevention of invaders. Eileen also touched on control methods for aquatic invaders. Eileen Ryce can be reached at (406) 444 – 2448 (office) or emailed at ERyce@mt.gov.

**Eurasian Water Milfoil Task Force History and Update**

Celestine Duncan presented an update on the task force and reported the status of management and prevention in Montana and surrounding states. In 2007 EWM was found in Cabinet and Noxon Reservoirs in the NW Corner of the state. The EWM Task Force was created in 2007 and Celestine feels it is one of the most effective she's worked with. Based on an inventory taken in 2008, 364 acres of EWM were found, 668 acres of Curly Leaf Pondweed and 74 acres of Flowering Rush. In another inventory in 2009, it was found that there was a 9% spread rate of EWM. In 2009, the EWM task force completed a dye study and determined how herbicide treatments would work; conducted vegetation monitoring, collected samples, hired a EWM coordinator and completed an environmental assessment. Out of 10% of the trailers inspected in 2009 in Noxon and Cabinet Reservoirs, 24 trailers were positive for aquatic plants (5% tested positive for EWM). In 2009 40 infested acres were controlled with an 84% control rate. The total herbicide cost of this treatment was \$60,000. To control EWM, it will cost approximately 1.2 million. There are four proposed check stations and in order for them to be mandatory check stations as long as a management area.

***Q. Why doesn't MT have border signs as our surrounding states do?***

A. MT Dept of Transportation is currently working on this very issue and signs will be placed at borders this year.

***Q. Is there some sort of risk assessment that county weed managers can look at to monitor for aquatics risks in their counties?***

A. Eileen states that FWP has a site with current risk assessments; however, they are coded by watershed and not easy to sit down and decipher. The top three areas at risk are Flathead, Canyon Ferry and Fort Peck Reservoirs.

***Q. Because of amount of funding needed, how do you prioritize which weeds to control or do you limit areas impacted?***

A. The task force is working on the best strategies to deal with these very issues. Doing nothing is simply not an option. All ideas are welcome and strategies need to be long term.

Panel discussion

(CANS – Center for Aquatic Nuisance Species, Bob Wiltshire, FWP – MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, Eileen Ryce, and MDA – MT Dept of Ag, Erik Hanson, Invasive Species Program Coordinator)

***Q. What does your organization plan to do in addressing invasive aquatic species in Western Montana this growing season?***

A. Bob (Wiltshire) gave a brief overview of his program and explained they will be completing outreach and education programs primarily in western Montana, and the Riparian Weed Project will be implemented. This program reaches out to the organized fishing organizations and coordinates efforts with county weed programs and map terrestrial weeds. In 2009 they worked with Trout Unlimited (TU) and mapped terrestrial weeds on the Yellowstone. TU is now working on shoreline weed control on the Yellowstone and this year's rivers include the Bitterroot, Madison, Big Horn, Canyon Ferry, Big Hole, Beaverhead, and Stillwater (among others). FWP will have a crew based in the Bitterroot to monitor from Missoula down to the divide in conjunction with FS and there will be some other crews based in various locations around western Montana as well. 3 – 4 individuals will be assigned to complete inspections of watercraft at various locations. EDRR will be in place with volunteer groups. They will primarily focus on submerged plants, but will take note of terrestrial invaders. Karen Laitala asked that there be better communication between agencies and counties regarding new sightings of invaders. FWP is implementing and producing aquatic trainings, they've had five trainings to date and they are open to anyone. There is a public awareness campaign being funded through MDA and FWP. There will be one standard message statewide in print, on television and radio. Watch for a message of "inspect, clean, dry". Materials will be ready this summer, starting with signs for fishing access sites. If you have a specific request, please send Eileen an email. CANS will be working with youth in mapping, and Celestine impressed upon Bob that it would be great if this program could be incorporated within the Rolling River Project with the conservation districts. CANS will be implementing over 250 programs in the Montana school systems this year. Erik reported that MDA will be primarily working with the check stations and they will be producing a training workshop on aquatic weeds this summer with a hands-on emphasis. MDA will be hiring two interns who would be available to counties to help conduct surveys on where to find aquatic weeds. MDA will also be looking at pet stores and pond stores, and nurseries to address aquatic invaders. They want to educate local dealers in these issues. Because this program is new, he is looking for specifics of what counties need.

***Q. How are we going to get mandatory stops for EWM.***

A. The MDA is working on creating a management area and will be enacting that process after a public comment period. FWP also has authority over fishing access sites but staffing/funding issues are an issue. However, FWP can only address anglers, while MDA would have the authority to stop ALL vehicles. MDA Funding is currently there, but counties can issue mandatory quarantines over vehicles through the current county weed act, which does trump both agency mandates. However, public perception would not be positive and counties would likely have trouble being consistent from county to county.

***Q. What are your organization's long term goals on invasive aquatic species?***

A. CANS primary objective is to ultimately create a new outdoor ethic - a cleaning ethic. Discussion ensued about fees and inspections and what has happened in Idaho.

***Q. Is it necessary to separate the terrestrial and aquatic species or would it better to have one fund to deal with both?***

A. Erik replied that it is a dicey issue, but because of the funding tied to aquatic management, it really is necessary to have a separate pot of funding for management aquatic species.

***Q. What efforts are happening with Flowering Rush on the Flathead?***

A. Until there are recommendations for feasible control of Flowering Rush, education is not productive. Flowering Rush has been found upstream and downstream of the Flathead and is starting to pop up everywhere and in larger infestations. Peter Rice reported that there is a great deal of research happening now on this invasive, but management

efforts are minimal. The biology of this species is quite different from the other aquatic invasives as it spreads quite slowly; 2,036 acres are currently infested on the Flathead and it took 56 years to get to that point.

Bob with CANS explained the difference between terrestrial and aquatic weeds: A key difference is rate of spread, and the environment that aquatics survive in which makes them so difficult to eradicate and fund. There is also a great difference between county weed programs and we need to find a way to coordinate efforts. There has to be a major and concerted effort on education and prevention. Lastly, there is no funding available for attacking aquatic weeds. Everyone needs to work on legislators to help us secure funding. Bob's center is not directing staff and resources to finding the funding for aquatics, including fees. Bob also feels that we need more NGO's on board with the issue. One of the big changes in the invasives field is the shift from focusing on specific species to focusing on the overall cause. He believes we need to keep a constant, consistent overall message regarding all invaders and not focus on specifics. The current message "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers" is a national campaign that was implemented years ago and that message should be consistent with state messages.

***Q. What aquatic nuisance species publications are available now and what can be used to educate at fly shops and such?***

A. Eileen said there is a great deal of publication material available now and there will be more coming with the new campaign. She has publications on the mussels and a hitchhiking brochure. FWP can certainly help distribute them. However, with the new campaign, all messages need to be streamlined. A packet is being developed which includes a canned PSA and other information. FWP is going to fund tailgate wraps for all FWP trucks as a moving bill board. The EWM Task Force has brochures and FWP are developing cards similar to laminated cards produced by Minnesota. Contact FWP if you'd like education materials.

***Q. Does MDA have signs to post at nurseries and box stores regarding aquatic invaders?***

A. Erik reported they are currently working with those entities on that very message and will be in place this summer.

Brianna with the Clark Fork Coalition passed around a resolution for the spread of aquatic invaders and as there was no contact information with that resolution, she encourages people to contact her at [Brianna@clarkfork.org](mailto:Brianna@clarkfork.org) or call her at 542 – 0539.

***Q. Why can't FWP deal more effectively with private waterways/ponds?***

A. It is difficult to address due to all of the various invasives and it is a highly political issue. Now they do have a way to track some of the purchases for private ponds and implement enforcement. FWP gives out a great deal of pond permits and FWP does not have the staff to inspect every pond. Dave Brink stated that it would be great if county weed districts could incorporate some of these educational opportunities into their programs. County weed districts have a much broader ability to reach the general public.

***Q. Can we (county weed districts) work more effectively with all of the entities at the table and be involved in the process to be better informed?***

A. Celestine reported that a survey had been sent out with very little feedback from the task force. The task force is waiting for a response from MDA and will then send out county weed coordinators. In order to have a weed management plan, there has to be an EIS completed, which takes time. Eileen suggested that if a county needs to have immediate action regarding a species to look towards the Noxon Task Force as a prototype to emulate.

***Q. How can we increase monitoring in our areas?***

A. FWP does provide assistance with the training and they will work on a case-by-case basis to provide help. Anyone in the Clarkfork can coordinate through Brianna and there are several volunteers out of the Kalispell area for those counties in the NW corner of the state. Interested parties can contact either John Walksmith or Eileen for more info.

**Q. Who handles identification?**

A. MDA handles plant ID and FWP handles the plankton analysis for mussels for free for the entire state.

Jim Larson with Noxon Shoreline Users reported that all activity the group is involved with is on the website they created: [www.ncshorelines.com](http://www.ncshorelines.com).

John Halpop stated it is critical at the beginning when you have an issue in state waters, that you have all of the stakeholders at the table. If you don't have them, you run the risk of being "bit" in the future. It takes all stakeholders to be involved to have success. John feels the interest is growing and ten years ago the room never would have drawn such a large audience and he recommended there be one aquatic meeting per year being held just to keep people updated.

**Q. What can WAC do to help your organization be more effective in your efforts?**

A. Eileen felt that this organization is already completing a great deal of work that needs to be done. There are great partnerships in place and there are key people working on specific efforts to further the cause. One thing that has not been addressed, as resource agencies, they have a role to play personally to help advance the effort. If you are involved in an agency and you fish, you personally can help promote a "clean" environment.

**Goals for WAC**

1. Develop and strengthen partnerships (including non-governmental entities)
2. Provide a clearinghouse for information (networking and using MWCA member database to disseminate information)
3. Three tangibles for everyone

**Objectives**

1. Review CFC petition & educate legislators
2. Three specialists tour for hands-on tour in early summer (put together by Clarkfork Organization)
3. Training media
4. Distribution of WAC meeting attendance list
5. Research review promotion/collection individually within our own circles (specific to creating experts within our state.)
6. Plan another aquatics meeting

Lindsey Bona motioned to adjourn at 3:50.