



Picture by Roger Zentzis

Marias River Watershed

NEWSLETTER

Website: www.mariasriver.com

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Quarterly Newsletter
Summer 2008

Protecting and Improving The Land and Resources

MARIAS RIVER SUMMER TOUR TO BE HELD JUNE 25

Co-sponsored by the Marias River Watershed Group, the Marias River Basin Weed Control Association has scheduled their 2008 summer tour. This year a golf scramble and conservation walk at the Marias Valley Golf course in Shelby will be held on June 25th. Registration closes on June 5th so be sure to register early.

The 9 hole golf scramble will include a weed identification contest at each tee box as you travel the course. For non-golfers, the conservation walk will cover weed identification and stream bank conservation.

The day starts at 8:30am and both groups should be done by noon, just in time for lunch. Following lunch, speakers from the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Reclamation, Dow Agrosiences, Dupont, and Helena Chemical will be on hand for weed control chemical updates. Damon Bunting, Glacier County Extension agent, will do a presentation on pesticide record keeping. Awaras from the golf scramble and the weed ID contests will be given out at this time.

Registration is \$8.00 for non-golfers, \$24.00 for golfers and \$32.00 for golfers who would like a cart.

Three Private Applicators credits and Commercial Applicator credits will be available.

Registration forms and agendas are available at your local Extension Office or Conservation District Office. Be sure to register by June 5th!

MRW Happenings

Guest Speaker

Guest speakers continue to provide valuable information relating to the many aspects of the watershed. On April 1st Dick Berg, Geologist from Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, discussed many facets of geology in the Marias River Region of Montana, from the Sweet Grass Hills west to the Rocky Mountains.

Geologically, formations are largely within the Madison limestone group, containing caverns with oil, gas, and water. The Rocky Mountains were formed 70 million years ago and the last 50 million years' volcanic activity influenced the terrain. River meanders, volcanic and glacial activity, seas, and swamps...all natural processes that continue to go on, formed hills.

Marias Fair Booth

MRW Education Committee has discussed providing a booth at the Marias Fair in July to promote the watershed. This will be a joint effort with MRW members, Glacier, Liberty, Pondera

and Toole Conservation District Administrators working together to distribute information.

Coordinator Position:

Ads have been placed in area newspapers, seeking to fill the Watershed Coordinator position. The process of selection is expected to be completed soon with the Coordinator this summer.

Next meeting:

The next MRW will be Tuesday, July 1st at 2:00 pm in Chester at Our Savior Lutheran Church. An open public meeting held at 7:00pm. in the evening to explain the Russian olive project location at the face of Tiber Dam. The agenda will include an overview of the project with Jim Ghekiere describing Russian olive removal in Nebraska. Matt Cole, Treasure County Commissioner, will speak on their Russian olive eradication project. Warren Kellogg, NRCS, will discuss science of the project. There will be an open question/answer period.

The Board & Regional Chairs:

- Paul Kronebusch-Chairman
- Barb Cole-CoChairman
- Lawrence Bold
- Joe Weatherwax
- Ken Augare
- Ramsey Offerdal
- John Rappold
- Gary Arnst

The next regular MRW Meetings will be held Tuesday July 1 at the Our Savior Lutheran Church in Chester at 2:00pm.

Conservation District Contacts:

- Pondera 406-278-7611 ext. 101
- Glacier 406-873-5752 ext. 101
- Liberty 406-759-5778 ext. 102
- Toole 406-434-5234 ext. 113
- Big Sandy 406-378-2298
- Hill 406-265-6792 ext. 101
- Chouteau 406-622-5627 ext. 101

A Russian Olive Perspective

Jim Ghekiere, Liberty Co. Weed Coordinator & Jeannie Olmstead, Toole County MSU Extension Agent

In the late 1800's, copper baron Marcus Daly purchased a summer home near Hamilton, MT. Mr. Daly loved the exquisite taste of the honey produced by bees pollinating Spotted Knapweed. Wishing to have this delicious honey available at his new home, Mr. Daly planted Spotted Knapweed in the Bitterroot Valley to boost production of this delicacy. This was the first Spotted Knapweed in Montana, & is just one instance of a plant that was propagated because it was thought to be beneficial & turned out to be a serious, invasive weed.

Montana is now beginning to take a serious look at yet another introduced plant with beneficial traits that is becoming a serious weed problem – the Russian Olive tree.

Introduced from Europe, Russian Olive has been promoted as a desirable ornamental shade tree. Originally planted in shelterbelts, it is one of the hardiest species of trees introduced to the Great Plains. Recognized as a source of food and protection for wildlife, it provides winter roosting cover for pheasants & nesting sites for mourning doves & songbirds. Several species of mammals eat the fruits, & squirrels eat the bark and young branches.

The ability of this plant to thrive in Montana's dry, harsh climate & saline soils, as well as its benefits to game bird species, has made Russian Olive a top choice for shelterbelt plantings for many decades. However, it is this same trait that makes it a serious invasive weed in many of Montana's watersheds.

Homesteaders along the Musselshell & Yellowstone Rivers planted Russian Olive for protection from Montana's harsh

winds 120 years ago. The trees did well, they now cover entire segments of these river corridors from edge to edge. Its invasive characteristics have choked out many native tree species, including cottonwoods & rose bushes. The stands of Russian Olive are so dense the river bottoms cannot be grazed, forage plants cannot survive, & the land is no longer farmable. In the short time span of 120 years, Russian Olive has changed from a desirable tree species with remarkable survival characteristics to a serious concern in riparian zones.

Following construction of Tiber Dam in the mid-1950's, Russian Olive was one of the primary plants introduced to provide shade and protection. It grows well in the disturbed areas, making it an excellent choice for developing the new campground. Looking now at the riparian area below the dam, one can see the amount of spread that has occurred from those original plantings in Sanford Park. The plants have spread upstream & across the river from the park, & many seeds have been transported downstream. From looking at the spread of the Russian Olive on the Musselshell & Yellowstone Rivers we know that, if left unattended, they will continue to spread from where they began just 50 years ago until they totally overtake the river bottom.

It is up to us now to take a serious look at the current Russian Olive situation & assess what we want for this river over the next 100 years and beyond. Although it may not seem to be a problem now, we must address this issue & develop a good management plan before the Marias becomes what the Musselshell is today.

Marias River Watershed Plans Demonstration Project

An assessment conducted by the Marias River Watershed (MRW) concluded that the Marias River is not resistant to the dense, crowding and pushing out many native species by Russian olive.

Funded by a Department of Natural Resources grant, the MRW is planning a Russian olive removal demonstration project in a 50 acre site below Tiber Dam at Sanford Park.

Various removal methods are tentatively planned in order to limit disturbance to the area. The trees will be cut and a growth retardant chemical will be applied to the 3"-4" stumps by the Liberty Co. Weed District. Chemical will be applied down to the root, resulting in permanent control of re-growth. The cut trees will be bundled to create fish habitat within Tiber Dam waters, chipped and mulched, burned, and larger pieces will be made available for use by anyone interested.

MRW will submit a Plan of Action and Timeline to Bureau of Land Management for final approval before initiating actual removal. Once the Russian olives have been removed, Fish Wildlife and Parks will assist in selecting replacement stock.

This project is a one day demonstration, designed to determine the cost for vegetation removal along the Marias River. This demonstration will affect only Russian olive in the riparian area within a 50 acre area with limited impact and disturbance to the area. Trees and bushes which provide comparable shelter and food sources will replace those Russian olive removed.

For more information, plan to attend the MRW's public meeting July 1st at 7pm in Chester. Contact your local Conservation District or watch your local newspaper for further information.