

Marias River Watershed



NEWSLETTER

Website: www.mariasriver.com

Picture by Roger Zentis

Protecting and Improving The Land and Resources

MARIAS RIVER ASSESSMENT REPORT TO BE RELEASED

By: Warren Kellogg, NRCS

Throughout the summers of 2005 and 2006, the Marias River Watershed (MRW) worked closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to complete field work on a reconnaissance-level assessment of the Marias River and Pondera Coulee, a major tributary to the Marias River. This stream corridor assessment included water quality sampling, macroinvertebrate (aquatic bugs) collections, mapping noxious weed infestation levels, and evaluating general riparian conditions. Several landowners were also involved with the assessment by sharing their knowledge and experience living with the river.



Overall, the assessment showed that the Marias River is in fairly good shape. Being mostly an agriculture-based watershed, the water quality is very good. There are some major sources of silt and sediment that enter the river, but much of this comes from natural bank erosion and sloughing where the river butts up against the valley walls. Human-based sources of sediment originating in upland cropland during run-off events that reaches the Marias River via coulees and small tributaries were discovered. Pondera Coulee is especially susceptible to summer storm run-off with significant sediment from adjacent cropland.

Noxious weeds such as Leafy spurge and Canada thistle are prevalent along the Marias River above Lake Elwell, while Russian knapweed is more of a problem on the lower half of the Marias River.

Bank erosion is not a significant problem along the Marias River and Pondera Coulee. There are some reaches where the river has naturally cut through a meander creating raw banks and abandoned oxbows. Sections of the river, especially in the upper reaches, are still recovering from the 1964 flood.

The full stream corridor report is due out this winter. More details on the stream assessment will also be presented at the MRW annual meeting on February 5th.

Meeting Highlights

Joe Weatherwax, Blackfeet Environmental Office, presented a program on bank stabilization & wildlife enhancements projects within the Reservation. With a professional consulting firm's assistance, stabilization of eroding banks has been demonstrated by using bio-engineering methods. Rip rapping, willow sprigging, livestock exclusion fences, bank sloping and revegetation, relocation of corrals, deflector logs, root wads, plus fish ladders and best management practices were all used in these projects.

Adverse impact from infestation of Russian Olive is present in the Marias stream channel. MRW wants to look at the problem only in the corridor and develop pilot areas to determine results of varying control methods. Russian olive provides a food source for winter feeding and cover for wildlife, so an alternative native species is needed for replacement plantings. Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel are assisting in selection and in providing these substitutes.

Gary Wiest attended a meeting to discuss the Russian Olive removal being planned below Tiber Dam. Wiest has capability to cut the Russian Olive for subsequent removal. Chemical control involved in the project will be completed by the Liberty County Weed District.

With information compiled in an assessment done by Great West Engineering, the MRW was awarded, a \$50,000 Renewable Resource Grant administered by Department of Natural Resources & Conservation. This grant will cover engineering designs to repair eroded streambanks near the Pugsley Bridge while maintaining safe access across the bridge. Current information will be published on this project as it becomes available.

Volume 1, Issue 2

Quarterly Newsletter
Winter 2007

The Board & Regional Chairs:

Paul Kronebusch-Chairman

Barb Cole-CoChairman

Lawrence Bold

Joe Weatherwax

Ken Augare

Ramsey Offerdal

John Rappold

Gary Arnst

Meetings are held the 1st Tuesday of the month at Marias River Electric Hospitality Room, unless otherwise noted. Meetings begin at 1:00pm and the public is invited to attend.

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

ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR FEB 5

The Marias River Watershed will host its' annual meeting on Feb 5 at 10:00 am at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 222 2nd Ave. South, in Shelby. Speakers include Warren Kellogg, NRCS, who will provide an update on the recently completed river assessment and proposed projects. Stan Huhtala, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), will speak on the history of the Tiber Dam construction in the 1950's. Dean Hellinger will present some history and pic-

tures of the Marias River and the surrounding area. Also planned is a potential presentation on fire suppression/management.

A lunch of chili and cornbread (with salad and dessert) will be offered. The cost for the meal will be \$6.50. Reservations must be made and lunch fee paid by Jan 28. Contact the Toole County Conservation District at 434-5234, ext. 113 to place reservations.

CONSIDER THE SOURCE— WATER QUALITY

By Kristi Kline ,MT Rural Water Source

Source water protection planning involves looking into watershed regions for activities that could change the soil permeability, vegetation type or cover, water quality and quantity, or rate of flow that could change the characteristics of a stream or waterbody.

Watershed regions can have many tributaries within its boundaries. As rainwater and melting snow run downhill and across land areas, sediment and other materials are carried into streams within the watershed.

Water **quality** changes can occur immediately within streams when runoff occurs. Visual measurement of water doesn't always tell you the quality of the water. There are many **constituents** in water that determine its quality and are measured by public water systems that provide drinking water to a community. Removing these constituents can increase operational costs for water treatment facilities. Some conditions within a watershed can be more severe from one year to the next and strain facility budgets and irritate consumers.

One goal of source water protection planning is to prevent pollutants from entering the water source by working with all entities within the watershed region and finding solutions that are achievable. Preventing pollutants from entering a water source helps reduce costs for water treatment systems and protects the resource for multiple uses within the watershed.

Landowners need the public to be aware...they may unintentionally start a new weed patch...

Noxious weeds are classified by 3 categories based on how wide-spread they are and how fast they spread. The weeds that are most wide spread are listed as a Category One. These, as well as those in the other two levels, are hard to control once established and it is a long and expensive process. It will pay big dividends to control these weeds before they become so widespread they are designated a Category One noxious weed.

Do you know what Dalmatian toadflax looks like? How about St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, ox-eye daisy, or Houndstongue? If you're out in the landscape, whether public or private, you should learn to identify all the noxious weeds.

An often ignored noxious weed is Canada thistle. It is found throughout the drainage area and needs to be managed every year. Small infestations can become large patches relatively quickly and control costs increase along with the decrease in production of desirable crops

WATERSHED SURVIVAL TRAINING

By Paul Kronebusch

Every year the Montana Watershed Coordination Council sponsors a watershed coordinator's training. Held in mid-September, the collaborative learning this year was facilitated by resource professionals from the Institute For Conservation Leadership, based in Bozeman, MT. They were assisted by the River Network from Portland, OR.

The theme was *Enhancing Leadership Skills Today To Meet The Challenges Of Tomorrow*. The Institute focused on leadership and communication skills; discussing planning and action required for a program to reach a goal.

The Institute went one step further to action planning. This is a concept referred to as Impact Mapping. The group was guided through a process to identify and map connections between the desired impact, program activities and resources available. Participants also learned to develop strategies for engaging identified stakeholders; utilizing outcome mapping and building a leadership mountain for building opportunities to engage people.

Instructors focused on increasing communication skills in order for leaders to be more effective in their work, to have better listening skills, inquiring and advocacy skills. Participants were shown how to use these skills to facilitate more productive meetings.

After this thorough three-day training, participants were sent on their way to manage and improve their own watershed groups.

Noxious Weed Threats, Prevention

By Dan Picard, Pondera Co. Extension Agent

or forage.

Field bindweed is also found in the drainage. This is a very serious weed and, once established, extremely hard and expensive to control. Seed life in the soil has been reported to be 40 years or more.

Whiteweed poses a serious threat in drainages as it thrives in wetter areas. Control is very difficult and is spread by using infested hay, by irrigation water, and other methods including vehicles and animals. This weed starts very early in the spring so control needs to start earlier than most producers are prepared for because they are usually seeding their spring crops.

Russian knapweed, Spotted knapweed, and Diffuse knapweed are also be found in the Marias drainage. Despite awareness these weeds continue to spread. Landowners need the public to be aware that when they walk or drive in infested areas they may carry viable seeds to uninfested areas and unintentionally start a new weed patch when they knock the seeds from their clothes, clean their dog's coat, or seeds fall off their vehicle or tires as they leave the area.