Marias River Watershed NEWSLETTER

Website: www.mariasriver.com

Picture by Roger Zentzis

Volume 3, Issue 3

Quarterly Newsletter
Spring 2010

Protecting and Improving The Land and Resources

MRW HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING

By Marlene Moon, MRW Coordinator

The 2010 Marias River Watershed Annual Meeting was held at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Shelby on January 26. Chairman Paul Kronebusch, Pondera County landowner, provided a welcome to everyone.

A project update was presented by Warren Kellogg, Watershed Specialist, who has been working with the Marias River Watershed since its inception in 2002. Projects undertaken included 1)"Keep Tiber Green" cleanup on Lake Elwell; 2) the annual summer float through portions of the Marias State Park and Wildlife Management Area, (aka Charlie Lincoln Ranch); 3) the Russian olive removal demonstration project and continuing Phase II of that project; 4) the long term water quality/monitoring program; 5) the Pugsley Bridge stream bank stabilization project that will be conducted spring 2010 in conjunction with a MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks fisheries project and an anticipated Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) bridge abutment stabilization project.

Dr. Frost gives her presentation

Dr. Rachel Frost, a research scientist in the Department of Animal and Range Sciences at MT State University, Bozeman, was the keynote speaker. Her presentation was "Targeted Grazing for Vegetation Management" and "Cheat grass Biology, Ecology and Management". Her emphasis for targeted grazing was threefold…1) Development of Grazing Prescriptions, selecting the correct time to put pressure on the target weed; 2) Timing, Intensity and Frequency, grazing when weeds are palatable and nutritious and determining the frequency of defoliation, weed lifespan and seed set prevention; 3) Selecting the right animal species, breed and individual animal for the job…matching the right animal to the targeted weed. When making the animal selection, the landowner must provide proper background training and supplementation to help animals handle some plant toxins; providing as necessary herders and guard dogs as well as water and fencing; and being committed and patient as well as being thorough in planning and monitoring.

The presentation on Cheatgrass Management provided information on identification, biology, impacts and management of cheatgrass. Some of the main issues are 1) knowing that cheat grass germinates/emerges in the fall and resumes growth in the early spring. It will produce seed in May-June. There are approximately 400-4000 seeds/plant and the seeds have a short seed life (2-3 years) with a very high growth rate. 2) Impacts are that it will reduce diversity and forage/crop yield and quality. Cheat grass seed is altered with fire regimes. 3) Management involves targeting cheat grass in the spring and fall…preventing seed development and depleting the seed bank. Maintaining a healthy, competitive and diverse plant community is the best prevention of cheat grass infestation.

Gary Olson, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) biologist, spoke on the increased migration of bears, particularly the grizzly, east of the continental divide. Bears can have a home range of 5-800 square miles and can travel 50 miles per day. Glacier Park accounts for 50-60% of the grizzly population in Montana. Although a recovery zone was established that covers an area from Canada south through the Blackfeet reservation and into the areas around Dupuyer and Choteau, bears have been sighted as far south as Fort Shaw, Simms and the Dearborn area and as far east as Tiber Dam and Loma. Olson stressed that bears will seek a favorable food source and in addition to other animals, they will feed on grain and alfalfa, grasses, forbs and insects. If a good food source is present, bears will not necessarily den up for the winter. Bears east of the divide are larger due to better food sources which increases breeding.

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The Board & Regional Chairs:

Paul Kronebusch-Chairman

Barb Cole-CoChairman

Lawrence Bold

Roy Doore

Coo Coo Boggs

Ramsey Offerdal

John Rappold

The next regular MRW Quarterly Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday April 6 at 1:00pm, Marias River Electric, Shelby

Conservation District Contacts:

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This newsletter was compiled and edited by Kody Farkell, PCCD Administrator

Weed Mapping

By Damon Bunting, Glacier Co. Extension Agent

Have you ever lost the keys to your car and blamed it on everyone but yourself, only later to find the keys right where you left them? Like it or not our minds are not always the best repositories of information. A friend of mine liked to say, "I have a photographic memory but the rewind button sometimes doesn't work." Where all this is going and what does it have to do with weeds? Is a great question, and the answer is that often we don't realize the impact that weed infestations are having on the land we manage until the footprint of that patch gets out of hand.

The impact or effectiveness of our management cannot be calculated without measuring. What is the best method of mapping out your weeds or following your progress? That is a great question and the answer is it just depends. The important thing to do though is to do some sort of measurement method. If you haven't done any type of physical record keeping other than between your two ears you may be surprised. Faded ink is more reliable than the brightest of memory.

Depending on the size of the area managed or the intensity of what one wants to document determines how much information is gathered. One of the easiest methods of management tools is to go to the same location at roughly (the exact date would be nice) the same time each year or every couple of years and take a picture. Over time those pictures will make a very good history of how that area is being managed and what plant communities are thriving and which ones are diminishing. It is because of pictures of the same range resources that many land management disagreements have been resolved. By comparing the photos you can determine if the management practices you are using are moving the plant diversity in the direction you want to go or if you may need to revisit your methods.

Many land managers are using more sophisticated equipment now like GPS's to go out and actually map out the exact location of a weed infestation. Many GPS's will help get you within a couple of feet of the same point extremely reliably year after year. These are great for just putting one in your saddle bag or on your ATV while your out and about. You can also use these tools to map out the size of the weed patch. Then when you get back to the office or home you download the map onto your computer and keep an ongoing map of weed infestations.

The main point to weed mapping is to start now because if you don't how will you determine if the management methods you are using are impacting the weeds in an effective manner. If you would like help developing a weed management plan or devising a method for monitoring the spread of weeds on your property contact your local extension agent or a member of the local weed board for ideas.

Annual Meeting cont...

FWP will not intercede with bears unless they are malicious (attacking domestic animals, bothering homes etc.) and he encouraged reporting of all sightings to his agency. Captured bears are collared and moved to remote areas, but care has to be taken as bears are very susceptible to heat and need shade and water. Olson noted that people hunting or recreating should carry bear spray as a precaution and he anticipates that migration will increase.

Jane Holzer, Montana Salinity Control Association (MSCA), reported on a new "Cover Crop Cocktail" being researched for promoting soil health by MSCA and the Western Triangle Ag Research Center/Conrad. A cover crop "cocktail" of 7 species (forage peas, sweet clover, forage turnips, oilseed radish, red proso millet, oats and sunflower) was established on the Paul Kronebusch farm. Several treatments have been provided in mid and late season including herbicide termination, tillage, simulated grazing and full season growth with frost kill. Monitoring for yield, moisture use and soil biological activity will continue into 2010.

Sarah Hamlen is a wind energy education and outreach provider for MSU Extension. Her presentation was an overview of wind energy development in Montana. She reported that Montana is rated number 1 for potential wind energy. Over 50 projects were proposed in 2008. The existing Montana energy system was designed to meet needs in rural Montana and the infrastructure has not received any major upgrades or improvements to meet the demands of these projects. However, there is increased political interest in wind energy development and increasing fuel prices also play a great part in looking for alternative sources.