

Healthy Acres Newsletter



A Taste of Missoula's Finest: A Sold-Out Success!

Jean Jenkins, Healthy Acres Healthy Communities Foundation

On September 25, our community came together to celebrate culinary creativity, local talent, and shared generosity at **A Taste of Missoula's Finest**—and what a night it was! We were thrilled to welcome a sold-out crowd of 100 guests for an evening filled with delicious food, lively conversation, and inspiring community spirit.

The real stars of the evening were our incredible **local chefs**, who wowed guests with their artistry and flavors. A heartfelt thank-you to **Nate Keller, Abe Risho, Dominic Glenna, Bert Gahagan, and Gretchen Taylor**, as well as the **Blackfoot Valley Cattlewomen**, for lending their time, talent, and passion to make this event truly unforgettable.

To complete the experience, **live jazz** by musicians **Dylan Bautista** and **Owen Ross** created the perfect ambiance—adding warmth and rhythm to a night of celebration.

Together, we celebrated not only Missoula's vibrant food scene but also the mission behind it all—supporting the programs of our Honeyberry Culinary Classroom. These programs connect people of all ages with the joy of cooking, nutrition education, and community learning.

Watch the video to learn more about how these programs are making a difference:

[Video](#)

Thanks to the generous support of our attendees, sponsors, and auction donors, we are proud to share that **we raised \$44,000** to continue growing these opportunities.

From everyone at Healthy Acres Healthy Communities Foundation, thank you for helping us make this year's Taste of Missoula's Finest such a meaningful success. Your support helps us nourish curiosity, connection, and community—one dish at a time.





News from the Honeyberry Kitchen

Kelly Moore, Missoula County / MSU Extension -FCS

When Fall arrives, it is greeted by those of us who love cooler temperatures, falling leaves, and the storing of garden tools and sprinklers. The harvest has been eaten, shared, donated, or preserved. The Rocky Mountain Gardens, with a tireless, dedicated, and knowledgeable staff, recently provided the Honeyberry Culinary Kitchen with an abundance of tomato goodness! Beautiful heirloom tomatoes of all shapes and sizes were grown in the garden test plots to provide potential growers with detailed documentation and to provide food for future Honeyberry cooking classes. As a lifetime garden fresh, tomato fan, the vast array of sizes, colors, textures, and flavors was a delight to discover! What can you do with so many tomatoes, you might ask? We opted to use canning and freezing methods for long-term storage of pasta sauce and tomato soup. Fresh tomatoes were used to make salsa and pico de gallo. "The Homesick Texan" cookbook by Lisa Fain has an excellent recipe for Pico.



Tomatoes were steamed and the skin removed when recipes required; however, I prefer to leave unblemished skin on for added flavor, texture, and nutrition in recipes using fresh tomatoes. A food processor or Vita Mix makes the tomato processing job much more efficient, and you are far less likely to have tomato anxiety.

Food-safe, research-based tomato canning recipes can be found here nchfp.uga.edu. Visit the Dept. of Ecology and Extension Plant Clinic and horticulture specialists to find the best varieties. If you are dreaming of growing your own tomatoes next spring, MSU Extension also provides free Mont-guides for selecting and growing tomato varieties in the unpredictable Montana climate: search MSU Extension Store.

Whether it's "To-may-toe or To-mah-toe", to you-it's all that and more to a tomato lover like me!



Nature's Travelers: The Wonders of Seed Dispersal

Steffany Rogge, Education Coordinator

As part of a larger education strategy to provide consistent exposure to plant ecology, the Department of Ecology has created a series of programs geared towards different grade levels. This fall, the ecology education crew has been busy capturing the attention and minds of area 1st graders. Beginning with building the basics of seed dispersal, it all starts with a question: How do plants make more of themselves?

Nature's Travelers, The Wonders of Seed Dispersal, is a hands-on, creative thinking lesson that explores the mechanisms of how seeds scatter and move around. The program encourages personal experiences and connections to further entice participants' learning. We read **A Seed is Sleepy**, by Dianna Hutts Aston and Sylvia Long, which lays the foundation. Students then work together to draw 3 different ways seeds can move, and an all-time favorite from the book is that seeds move by "tumbling through a bear's belly." To which we ask, how does that move a seed around? Lots of funny looks and glances at the teacher, when finally, a brave kiddo proclaims, by pooping it!



Students learn the natural processes that move seeds away from the parent plant through wind, water, animals, and more.

Time to move, we take a walk around the Rocky Mountain Gardens, looking for different seeds, which we collect, observe, and discuss how they might move. Burs are examined looking for the tiny hooks that attach them to our clothing and animal fur. We ask the students if any have Velcro on their shoes to show that nature inspired how it works similarly to a sticking seed, and this is called biomimicry.



Remaining dandelion and milkweed fluffs are gently blown into the air, mimicking wind dispersal. On our way through the garden, we stop to experiment with creating an exploding seed. Students are tasked with creating a seed pod that is capable of launching its seeds far away from the plant. Bird seeds, balloons, and a tack are observed, and ideas start to materialize. We discuss the weight of the seed, quantity, and pressure of air while each student pours seed into the balloon. The lead then blows air into the balloon until anxious chants of **MORE**, and **STOP** are suggested. Then comes the time for the explosions! One lucky kid is chosen to drop the balloon onto the tack held by the brave leader. The balloon pops, seeds spread, and everyone hurries to find the furthest seed.



Seed Dispersal continued

After a quick trip to the play log, students head back inside to design wind-dispersed seeds. Each student is in charge of crafting a seed capable of falling slowly to the ground. Tissue paper, tape, pipe cleaners, and cotton balls are some of the materials they choose from, with reminders of how the maple seed spiral and dandelions float with an umbrella-like shape. Prototypes are tested and modifications are made. Each design is unique.

The finale to our time is creating a “seed pop,” each student will bring home to plant. Clay, soil, and sunflower seeds are rolled into a ball with tiny, cute, colorfully gloved hands.



Popsicle sticks with names are poked in the center, and the pop is enclosed by waxed paper twisted with instructions to plant after the freeze in anticipation of spring growth.

Programs such as this are the foundation for a better understanding of plant ecology and identification. Critical functions that will aid in the thoughtful decision-making of managing productive landscapes in their futures. Involving and exposing students throughout their education with fun and creative programs is the first step to a more well-informed population!

‘Tis the Season

Get Involved, learn something new, meet new people!



YOUNG CHEFS
GINGERBREAD CHALET WORKSHOP

DECEMBER 6TH 10 AM - 12 PM

Open to all ages and abilities!
Families welcome!

HONEYBERRY CULINARY CLASSROOM



Craft a traditional Yule Log

Happy Holidays!

Blooms & Brews

December 16th 6 - 8 p.m.
Limited registration

Keep up to date by visiting our calendar
[Calendar of Events](#)



ROCKY MOUNTAIN GARDENS

MISSOULA
MONTANA

Season Highlights from the Garden

Alex Brown, Program Coordinator



Learning in Community

We couldn't be more grateful for the level of public participation we have experienced this past year.

We hosted nearly **30 educational programs** in the Gardens, covering a wide range of garden topics. These programs included hands-on workshops, garden walks, and lectures, and had over **250 attendees**.

The Value of Volunteers

Our volunteer opportunities provide another avenue for education. Just this season, we have hosted over **90 volunteer events**, with volunteers accounting for over **1,250 hours of labor**.





On the Ground

The Berry Patch Takes Shape



Ed & Fern's Berry Patch, sponsored by Kate Supplee, is planted with a wide range of berry varieties that thrive in Missoula's unique climate and offer the best fruit production.

This year, in addition to planting, we installed an arbor that will trellis vines and provide additional shade to the Gardens.



Brandon Zook (left) and David Boden (right) assemble the hardy kiwi arbor, a timber frame structure designed by David, owner of Chisel & Mallet Woodworking.



The Garden City Florascaping team leads a volunteer event laying patio pavers under the arbor

Visit, volunteer, or join a workshop. Whatever brings you to the Gardens, we hope to see you soon!





Putting the Garden to Bed

Sandy Perrin, Plant Clinic Coordinator

Sarah Holden, MSU Missoula County Extension Horticulture Agent

As nights cool and leaves turn, it's time to prepare our gardens for winter. **"Putting the garden to bed"** ensures plants survive Montana's long, cold season and return healthy next spring.

Watering & Fertilizing

Slowly decrease water as plants go dormant and avoid pruning until after leaves drop. Hardy Zone 3–4 plants benefit from a final deep watering in late fall, along with a phosphorus-only fertilizer to encourage root growth. Evergreens especially need one last soak before the ground freezes.

Protecting Tender Plants

Less-hardy Zone 5 plants need careful treatment, don't keep them actively growing with extra water, nitrogen, or pruning. Protect roses and evergreens from winter wind and sun with burlap, shading, or anti-transpirant sprays like WiltPruf. For container plants, tip pots on their sides in a protected spot, bury them in sawdust or bark, or bring them indoors after treating for pests.

Trees, Shrubs & Mulch

Young trees are prone to bark splitting in winter. Wrap trunks in light-colored material or paint with diluted white latex to reduce sunscald. After a hard frost, mulch around plants with compost, straw, pine needles, or leaves. Roses need special care: mound soil above the graft union, then cover with at least two feet of loose mulch.

Lawns & Perennials

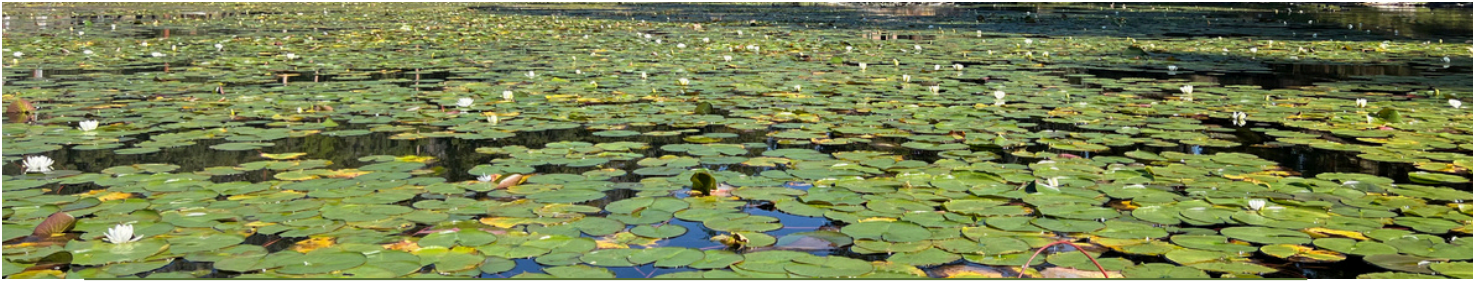
After the last mowing, spread a ½–1 inch layer of compost across your lawn. Fall is also an excellent time to divide perennials that are overgrown or blooming less vigorously—aim to do this six weeks before the ground freezes so roots can settle in. Don't forget to pull invasive weeds and dispose of them in the trash, not the compost pile.

Taking these simple steps now will make spring gardening easier and help your plants thrive when the snow melts.

Are you interested in learning more about gardening in your community? Sarah Holden hopes to offer a gardening series or perhaps Master Gardener Course in the Seeley Swan Condon areas this spring. If interested in learning more or helping get a class going in your area, email sarah.holden1@montana.edu.

For more local gardening advice, contact the Missoula County Extension Office at (406) 258-4205/ 258-4213 Plant Clinic or visit missoulaeduplace.org.





Season Recap – Aquatic Invasive Species District

Clarissa Orton, AIS Coordinator

The 2025 field season has come to an end. This summer, the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) District worked to protect our waters by operating the Clearwater Junction Inspection Station in Partnership with MT FWP, monitoring for invasive mussels, and managing invasive Fragrant Water Lily (FWL).

The hardworking inspectors at Clearwater Station had a busy season - they conducted **27,293 watercraft inspections in 2025**. On busy days, they inspected over **400 watercrafts in a day**, looking for standing water, plants, tiny invasive larvae, sediment, or anything else that could hide an invasive hitchhiker. The network of inspection stations across the state stopped over 36 invasive mussel fouled boats from entering Montana waters. These inspectors play a crucial role in preventing invasive species, especially invasive mussels, from entering Montana's waters.



Invasive Mussels like quagga, zebra, or golden mussels could cost the state over \$230 million in mitigation and lost revenue, according to the Flathead Lake Biological Station. They can additionally affect native species, agriculture, hydropower, property values, and more. To prepare for a potential invasion, the AIS District and many of its partners conduct early detection monitoring - routinely testing high-use waterbodies for invasive mussels in attempts to minimize the spread.

This summer, the AIS District sampled for invasive mussel



veligers- the larval form of the mussels - every three weeks throughout the summer, at 22 sites, across four lakes. Additionally, they conducted one round of environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling. eDNA is DNA that has been shed by an organism (for example, hair, skin cells, and excrement) that can be found anywhere in the environment. To collect eDNA from a water body, a filtering net is drug through the water, capturing organic material into a small cage. That small amount of water is then put into a tube and sent to the lab, where they check to see if the invasive species' DNA is present in the sample.

In addition to monitoring for invasive mussels, the AIS District also monitors and manages Fragrant Waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata*). FWL is an ornamental species and is therefore often initially introduced by the plant trade. In 2010, FWL was designated a noxious weed; since then, it has spread to the majority of lakes along the Clearwater Chain. This invasive can create dense mats that make recreation dangerous, outcompete native species, decrease water quality by contributing to nutrient loading and sediment, and decreased oxygen.



AIS Update - continued



The AIS District is monitoring the impacts of FWL on the Clearwater chain of lakes and is taking action to reduce its presence. A highlight of our efforts in the 2025 season was a pull event done in partnership with the Forest Service, Montana Conservation Corps, and MT FWP to decrease FWL in Holland Lake and Creek, and Lindbergh Lake. This is a challenging task that requires reaching into the sediment of the water body and carefully pulling up the root of the lily without breaking it. FWL can produce rhizomally, via stems that spread under the soil surface, forming shoots that grow new plants, and fragmentally, meaning any broken piece of root can create a new population of lilies. At this event, there were over 15 people filling trash bags full of FWL time and time again. To learn more about FWL, check out our website!

Remember to **CLEAN, DRAIN, and DRY** all watercraft and gear before going from one waterbody to another!



FALL GARDEN TO-DO CHECKLIST



- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Reduce watering gradually as plants prepare for dormancy. | ☒ Wrap young tree trunks or paint with white latex to prevent winter sunscald. |
| ☒ Hold off on pruning until plants are fully dormant. | ☒ Mulch after a hard frost; use compost, straw, pine needles, or leaves. |
| ☒ Water deeply one last time before the ground freezes. | ☒ Compost top-dress lawns with 1/2-1 inch after the last mow. |
| ☒ Protect roses and evergreens with burlap, shading, or anti-transpirant sprays. | ☒ Divide perennials at least six weeks before the ground freezes. |
| ☒ Overwinter containers: tip on their sides, bury in sawdust/bark, or bring inside (treat for pests first). | ☒ Remove invasives and dispose of them in the trash, not compost. |

Pest Alert Phone Line
406-258-3820



First Annual Horse Farm Tour & Storytelling Event

Natalie Sullivan, MSU Missoula County Ag, Equine, & Livestock Agent

Turning up the drive off Marshall Canyon Rd, attendees were met with a bright MSU Extension sign and arrows pointing the way to the equestrian property on the fringes of the Lolo National Forest. They parked and followed the driveway past the hay barn, the fall colored trees, down the hill through the garden, and through the sacrifice area to the indoor arena. Breeders, trail riders, horse show competitors, dude ranch owners, conservationists, and even one county commissioner were greeted by the Harper's dog, Rusty, and encouraged to peruse the line of tables advertising the plethora of resources sponsored by Montana State University Extension, Montana Farmer's Union, Missoula Conservation District, Backcountry Horseman of Missoula, and Montana Forestry Consultants. The crowd grew beyond expected numbers, and the first annual Horse Farm Tour and Storytelling event commenced!

The educational portion of the Horse Farm Tour started at the Harper's sacrifice area well placed on high ground between the hay barn and indoor arena. Three pairs of equine eyes stared back at us from around the geothermal water tank. The audience learned that a well thought out, improved sacrifice area is the very first step towards a productive land management plan. A sacrifice area, appropriately sized for the herd and amount of use, is where traffic is heaviest and nothing grows. Sacrifice areas are central to water, shelter, and hay storage. Natalie explained that she thinks of all horse properties, big and small, as having three equine friendly areas; a sacrifice area, a "garden", and a "flex" area. The "Garden" is how she thinks about the greenest and lushest part of your horse property. This is where land stewards, wanting green grass for their horses 6 months of every year, spend the most time and energy- as you would a vegetable or flower garden. You weed it, water it, and most importantly, protect it from overgrazing. The "Flex" zones are areas where you give yourself some grace.

These could be alleyways to greener pastures, pastures that get heavier use due to life and circumstances, and generally are not as productive as the "Garden". There were many "ah-ha" moments throughout the presentation.

The group continued out to the Harper's rotational grazing area, where we discussed manure spreading, soil testing results, strip grazing principles, and so much more! It's beyond the scope of this article to describe all of the principles that the group learned, but suffice it to say that Dan and Natalie were a dynamic duo. Both had used rotational grazing systems for years and had made a lot of mistakes, but had learned from them and made constant improvements to the health of their horses, land, and soil. The major benefit of a well-thought-out grazing management system is LOTS of green grass year after year after year!

After much Q&A and observation, the group returned to the indoor arena, the fall light quickly fading outside. As dinner plates were being scraped clean, Natalie and Marge Harper went to the front of the arena and settled into seats. Guided by Natalie's interview-style questions, Marge recounted her memories of community philanthropy, including acquiring and formalizing the agreement between the Missoula Horse Council



Craving more? Check out our blog!

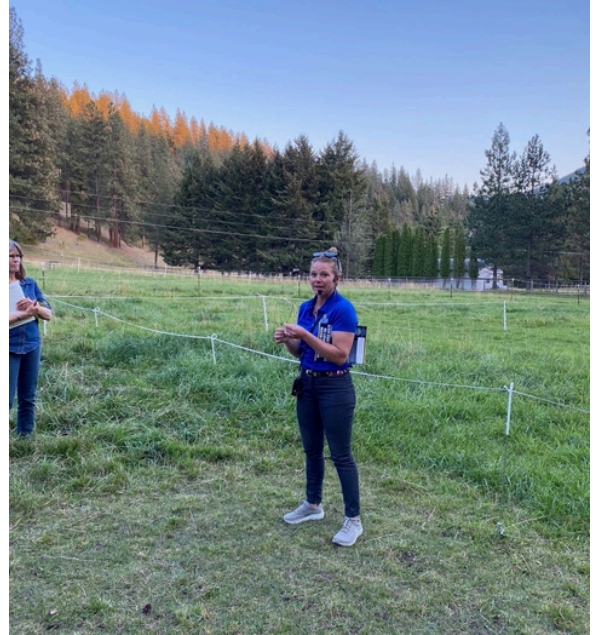
www.missoulaeduplace.org



Farm Tour & Storytelling continued

and Missoula County for the property now known as the Big Sky Horse Park. Marge was absolutely central to the development of the Big Sky Park, and we are eternally grateful for her work. Next, Dan stood up and told of the time that he and Marge bred their very fancy Arabian mare to a Jack, and basically were excommunicated from the Arabian horse club. Everyone chuckled. Finally, our very own **county commissioner, Juanita Vero, stood up and, like a pro, told a story titled "Hybrid Vigor"**. Much to the audience's delight, the story wove together Juanita's demographic story of heiress and ranch hand with her training of a morgan/mustang cross horse on the ranch. The story was magical and, at its conclusion, was met with wild applause.

The first annual horse farm tour and storytelling event was a wonderful success. The team of local organizations are excited to bring these hands-on, visual learning experiences to Western Montana next year.



Natalie Sullivan, Msla Co. Extension Livestock Agent

Review of the New York Times Article, "A Plague of Pest is Coming for California"

Tyler Brett, Biocontrol Technician



Biocontrol is becoming more well-known with time, and even the New York Times has recently touched on it. In this piece, I will go over my views on an article published by Andrew Zaleski titled **A Plague of Pests Is Coming for California. Here's How to Stop It**. A link to the article can be found at the bottom of this piece. In this article, Zaleski describes how the introduction of biocontrol insects has benefited North America both environmentally and economically. Before I get into the article, I want to start with why I believe biocontrol is important for our landscapes. I grew up in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana, where I watched noxious weeds outcompete the native species every year. Luckily, biocontrol, the use of non-harmful, non-native species to combat harmful non-native species, offers a longer-term and more sustainable solution to managing the populations of some of the noxious weeds.

In Montana, Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) has become prolific throughout the state. As a solution, several biocontrols have been released to help mitigate the plant and have shown great success. Now it may seem like a radical solution to introduce another non-native species to fight one that was also previously introduced, but it's crucial to understand all the years of testing that is completed before their release to ensure the biocontrol won't attack any native species.

At the **Montana Biocontrol Coordination Project**, we work with what's called classical biocontrol. This is the use of non-native, host-specific natural enemies to control invasive species. Our work specifically is towards

noxious weeds. **Over 500 biocontrols have been released worldwide** following testing procedures that are continually becoming more complex. Only three, which are less than 1%, according to Zaleski and the available data, have had negative impacts on native populations.

Furthermore, Zaleski also found that biocontrol is extremely cost-effective. In his article, he quotes Juli Gould's findings that, "economic analyses have shown that although all projects do not succeed, biocontrol has such a positive benefit-to-cost ratio that it is still worth pursuing." In his article, Zaleski also mentions Jennifer Andreas, the biocontrol specialist for the state of Washington and a professor at Washington State University. **Andreas conducted a study in 2020 that found that for every dollar spent on weed biocontrol resulted in an \$8 return on investment**. This comes from all the positive impact biocontrol has on weeds by reducing the cost for other forms of control and management.

I agree with what Zaleski had to say in his article. It's very easy to follow, understand, and very informative. I would recommend it to anyone who has a NYT subscription and is bored or somewhat curious about biocontrol. It's a great tool for weed management and should be used and talked about more often. With more biocontrol usage, we may see the end of all noxious weed monocultures, helping to restore our native habitats and species.

[Opinion | A Plague of Pests Is Coming for California. Here's How to Stop It.](#)



Youth in Restoration Program - Season 12 Follies

Avery Adams, Youth Crew Lead

What do you get when you put together four high school students, a Honda Pilot with questionable reliability, and **43 days in the field**? The Youth in Restoration program! With the conclusion of the 2025 summer field season, the Youth in Restoration (otherwise known as YIR) program wrapped up its 12th year. This program provides high school students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the field of natural resource management, all while getting paid to do so. This summer, the YIR program ran for a total of 9 weeks, and the crew was able to work with 15 different organizations and build relationships with an even greater number of professionals in their fields of expertise. This means that each day brought a new unique adventure.

Does wading around in swampy water and sticking your hand down into muddy pits sound like a fun day for you? Maybe not, but when the crew got the opportunity to help out our Missoula County AIS coordinator up at Holland Lake, removing invasive fragrant waterlily plants, it ended up being one of their favorite workdays of summer! This project was in collaboration with the Flathead National Forest Service, as well as the help of a Montana Conservation Corps team. The goal was to clean up the outflow stream from Holland Lake. Without intervention, the invasive waterlily has the ability to outcompete native species and cloud the water, not allowing the typical amount of light to reach the bottom. This can have devastating effects for other plant species as well as wildlife that call these waterways their home.

If you don't like walking in water all day long, how would you like being rained on for two days straight in the backcountry? Well, the youth crew also knows all about this. For the past couple of summers, the crew has been able to join the **Great Burn Conservation Alliance** in a three-night, four-day backpacking trip. This year, the

crew was led by Chris Prange to Kid Lake, where they setup camp, then were able to travel up and over the state line between Idaho and Montana to help with backcountry campsite inventories, hand pulling noxious St. John's Wort, and even completing a few Pika (think a mix between a rabbit and a hamster) patrols. So, although it was raining for the first few days, it was nothing some sturdy rain gear couldn't help! Also, after a summer full of hot sunny days, the cooler weather was an appreciated break. Another thing to note, it made the views much more special on the way out when the skies were finally clear! The full bushes of huckleberry also made the workdays much sweeter!



Youth in Restoration continued

During the other **38 days of the season**, the crew helped build and remove fence on **DNRC** land, collect all different types of seeds for the **Forest Service and BLM**, spent three nights in the **Bob Marshall Wilderness** helping with trail clearing, and got up close and personal with collecting biocontrol bugs. I would also rightfully provide the job title of “bumblebee wranglers” to all of my crew members after numerous bumblebee surveys, where we were lucky enough to find two Western Bumblebees! If you know, you know. The crew members showed up each day curious, dedicated to learning, and not afraid of doing the hard work. I’m sure the worn-out work gloves are a testament to that.

Sounds fun? If you know of any high school students ages 14-18 who would be a good fit for this program, we will be opening applications for next year starting in the spring! Keep your eye out on social media or our website for updates.



Statewide Woody Invasive Species Management Plan Released for Public Comment

Montana — The Woody Invasives Working Group is pleased to announce the release of a public-comment draft of the Woody Invasive Species Management Plan for the state of Montana. All interested parties are encouraged to review the Plan and submit comments at woodyinvasives.mt.gov. Comments must be submitted by 5 PM (MT) on Sunday, December 7, 2025.

The Plan is focused on three woody invasive species in Montana: common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), and the resident saltcedar complex (*Tamarix chinensis*, *T. ramosissima*, and all associated hybrids). This document outlines management priorities, describes treatment and removal best practices, and identifies short- and long-term objectives. It serves as the product of collaboration from the Woody Invasives Working Group, comprised of dedicated natural resources managers and partners from across the state.

The Woody Invasives Working Group was funded in the 2023 Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant cycle. The Working Group consists of over 200 stakeholders, including staff from local, state, and federal agencies as well as weed districts, conservation districts, academia, and other NGOs.

To learn more about the woody invasive species in Montana and view education and outreach materials produced through this collaborative effort, visit woodyinvasives.mt.gov.

Invasive Species Action Network, a 501c3 nonprofit based in Livingston, has been contracted to coordinate this effort. For more information, visit stopais.org.

