

Mitigation of Noxious Weed Impacts in Cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service in Montana

Submitted by: **Montana Department of Agriculture**
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INTRODUCTION

This program has been developed to manage invasive plant [noxious weed] infestations in association with fire management, fuels reduction, and restoration projects and provide a minimum of 25 jobs in Lincoln County. Invasive plants compete much better than native plants in disturbed areas and move into non-disturbed sites once established. Weed infestations in Montana increase the incidence and spread of fire, reduce the value of range for wildlife use and domestic stock, and reduce soil-holding capacity.

Funding will be used for weed management, fuels reduction, and restoration on private, tribal, and state lands in areas associated with federal lands. The program will be administered through the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund grants program within the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) and in conjunction with Lincoln County Weed District. The MDA will comply with the Montana Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) in administering this program.

The objectives of the program are:

- 1) early detection and eradication or control of new invader noxious weeds;
- 2) monitoring and preventing the spread of small populations of new invaders associated with federal lands;
- 3) monitoring pre-existing infestations and preventing the spread of state-listed noxious weeds in areas associated with federal lands; and
- 4) working to reduce fuels for wild land fire management;
- 5) implement restoration projects to promote native species.

The weed management programs funded will focus on state-listed noxious weeds and encourage cooperation between state, tribal, and private landowners. This will reduce the introduction of noxious weeds and newly introduced weeds and, if established, to work towards eradication.

METHODOLOGY AND ANTICIPATED RESULTS

Major Activities and Tasks

-- Support the Coordinated Invasive Hawkweeds Program. In western Montana, invasive hawkweeds are a growing threat. A multi county/agency effort is underway to contain these invasive species. This will increase our effectiveness and help contain this species to areas currently infested. The project implements a coordinated approach, control of invasive hawkweeds, and facilitates education and integrated hawkweed management across the state.

Who: Lincoln County

Budget: \$104,000

-- Support a biological control project in North West Montana that will supplement an existing integrated weed management program that includes herbicide treatment, biological releases, and educational efforts. The Lincoln County High School Bio-Control Program will serve as an educational link to Plum Creek, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Department of Transportation, private landowners and provide other land managers with an additional option of weed management. In addition, this project will coordinate the efforts of agencies and landowners who have used bio-control by mapping and monitoring those sites. The project will also be utilized to provide data to local, state, and federal stakeholders thus eliminating the chance of duplicated efforts.

Who: Lincoln County

Budget: \$10,000

-- Support the coordinated Rush Skeletonweed Program. The project is an effort to map, treat, and monitor known Rush skeletonweed sites. A multi county/agency and private landowner effort is underway to contain and eradicate this invasive plant. The goal is to restrict statewide occurrences of Rush skeletonweed sites to Lincoln, Sanders, Lake and Ravalli Counties and eradicate populations within those counties. This program will provide seven people to survey and treat Rush skeletonweed. Three workers will be dedicated to survey and treatment of known areas of infestation. Two workers will be dedicated to survey work in areas that have not had any plants or areas that have not been surveyed before.

Who: Lincoln County

Budget: \$50,000

-- Support a Fuels Reduction/Restoration Program. This program will provide fuels reduction/restoration to residents outside other grant areas. Current fuels reduction programs provided in Lincoln County have little or no noxious weed management or restoration associated with them. This program will combine the two programs by following the fuels reduction programs with noxious weed control and restoration to promote native species growth. Projects will be determined by a forester from the RC&D program and the Lincoln County Weed Program Manager.

Who: Lincoln County and RC&D

Budget: \$50,000

-- Support a City Weed Crew Program. Noxious weeds in a small rural town are not a priority due to the lack of funding. This program will provide a dedicated weed treatment person to three Cities in Lincoln County. Training and technical assistance will be provided by Lincoln County Weed District.

Who: Lincoln County

Budget: \$39,000

-- Support a Fuels Reduction/Restoration Program in cooperation with Plum Creek Timber Company. In recent years Plum Creek lands in Lincoln County have experienced wild fire activity. This program will provide fire rehab and noxious weed control to these areas.

Who: Lincoln County and Plum Creek Timber Company

Budget: \$60,000

-- Oversight of the programs, including review of grants and applicable environmental information; development of local grant agreements; review of required reports; field inspections of the projects; and final approval of payments.

Who: Montana Department of Agriculture - Noxious Weed Staff

Timeframe: On-going for the term of grant

-- Weed control activities, including herbicide applications, mechanical and cultural projects, revegetation, and biological controls.

Who: Lincoln County, Montana Department of Agriculture, and other Cooperators.

Timeframe: The funding for the majority of the control work will be distributed throughout the spring and fall, beginning in 2009 and continuing through 2011

Anticipated Results

It is expected that weed impacts in areas associated with federal lands will be significantly reduced or eliminated through these programs. Areas with the potential for invasion by new invader species will be protected. Education on the impacts of noxious weeds and the importance of prompt weed management will be enhanced.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Montana Department of Agriculture – grant program oversight and administration of the grants at the state level.

Lincoln County Weed District – local organization of weed management areas; administration of grant funding at the local level.