

Montana Natural Heritage Program Report February and March 2015

Prepared for the April 8, 2015 Commission meeting
By Allan Cox, Lead Program Manager

This report represents accomplishment of Montana Natural Heritage Program staff.

Goal One—Content

1. MSL acquires and manages relevant quality content that meets the needs of Montana library users.

- The Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center of the MTNHP has updated its status map, which can be found at http://mtnhp.org/nwi/images/wetland_status.jpg. To date, nearly 2.8 million acres of wetlands and riparian areas have been mapped by the center.
- MTNHP is currently completing statewide mapping of invasive Russian olive from high-resolution aerial imagery. The NRCS and county weed districts are engaged in Russian olive eradication along eastern Montana rivers. This mapping will help the NRCS identify distribution patterns and “hot spots.” Once the mapping is complete (late March) we will analyze a suite of landscape factors that may explain why Russian olive is more dense in some areas than in others.
- The MTNHP Ecology/Spatial Analysis Lab completed a new, mid-resolution land cover map of the CMR National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding grasslands and shrublands. With low-resolution maps currently in use, all shrublands are potential sage grouse habitat. This new mapping will allow land managers to make more informed and accurate assessments about the amount and availability of sage grouse habitat on managed lands. We also completed a project to identify likely high-integrity wetland areas on BLM lands statewide, using recently updated landscape disturbance metrics. These sites can be used as benchmarks against which the condition of other BLM wetlands can be assessed.

Goal Two—Access

2. MSL provides libraries, agencies, and its partners and patrons with convenient, high quality, and cost-effective access to library content and services.

- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, updated the MTNHP database and on-line applications and NatureServe's Biotics 5 database with the BLM's revised Sensitive Plant List. To keep our data accurate and up-to-date the MTNHP maintains the federal status information on each native plant.
- Botanist Andrea Pipp, along with Information staff members Martin Miller, Braden Burkholder, and Karen Coleman collaborated on making new plant observations and species occurrences available to clients through requests and web applications. This task had been on hold since the departure of our previous botanist in August, 2013.

Goal Three—Training

3.1 MSL provides appropriate trainings and training resources so that the best use can be made of the resources offered.

- Allan Cox, MTNHP Lead Program Manager, provided two workshops to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Air Permitting Section. The first training was an overview of the program and its information resources. The second workshop was a session on how to use MTNHP web applications, especially the MapViewer. The DEQ Air Permitting Section depends upon MTNHP data and information in the preparation of its environmental assessments for projects the Section is responsible for reviewing and permitting.
- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, provided training to the Montana Weed Council Association & Weed Applicators on the MTNHP website applications pertinent to their work: how to request data, using the MapViewer, SOC reports, and the Montana Field Guide.
- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, taught a lichen identification class through the Montana Native Plant Society in Missoula. The class was taught to 18 amateur and professional botanists. Teaching strengthens the botany network and skill-sets of those who survey and identify lichens in Montana, which facilitates the process for MTNHP to obtain lichen data.

- Bryce Maxell, Senior Zoologist, trained 20 FWP, and 2 BLM staff on Natural Heritage Program web information resources in Miles City on February 12th.
- Bryce Maxell, Braden Burkholder, Scott Blum, and Shannon Hilty provided a day-long training workshop in February in Helena on “Montana’s Bat and White-nose Syndrome Surveillance Efforts: with an emphasis on recording and analyzing bat echolocation calls” that was attended by 50 individuals from a variety of state and federal agencies and consulting companies.

Goal Four—Consultation and Leadership

4. MSL provides consultation and leadership to enable users to set and reach their goals.

- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, obtained funding from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to finalize the process for determining Coefficient of Conservatism values (C-values) for native wetlands plants. C-values form the basis for conducting floristic quality assessments, which are carried out by restoration biologists, botanists, and wetland mitigation specialists. The process involves organizing a panel of 6 expert Botanists which will meet on March 23rd.
- Bryce Maxell, Senior Zoologist, was asked to give a talk on Montana’s bat acoustic surveillance efforts during a keynote session on acoustic monitoring of bats at the National Joint Bat Working Group Meetings in St. Louis, Missouri on March 5th to an audience of over 250 bat researchers from across North America.
- Bryce Maxell, Senior Zoologist, was asked to give a plenary talk at the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society Meetings in Helena on February 25th that provided an overview of some emergent infectious diseases of concern to Montana’s nongame species to an audience of approximately 150 wildlife professionals.
- Bryce Maxell, Senior Zoologist, led statewide bat and harlequin duck working group meetings at the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society Meetings in Helena, Montana on February 25th.

Goal Five—Collaboration

5. MSL promotes partnerships and encourages collaboration among its users.

- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, provided review on a new thistle publication written by Montana State University staff to promote awareness of native thistle species (common and species of concern) that are look-alikes to exotic species.
- Andrea Pipp, MTNHP Botanist, is conducting a taxonomic review of Montana specimens of the stalked-leaved monkeyflower (*Mimulus ampliatus*), a species of concern. This review is in response to name changes proposed by NatureServe.
- Heritage Zoology staff continue to provide consultation to a multi-agency collaborative effort to document the year-round distribution, activity, and conservation status of Montana's bats. In February and March, Heritage staff provided a consultation to FWP staff and Montana State University professors regarding roost habitat research needs for Montana bats.

Goal Six—Sustainable Success

6. MSL is efficient and effective (measured against user outcomes), and is engaged in fulfilling its mission.

- In early March, MTNHP staff Allan Cox (Lead Program Manager), Andrea Pipp (Program Botanist), and Karen Coleman (Biological Data Systems Coordinator) gave presentations before the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund Board. The presentations were in support of two grants totaling \$30,000 that the MTNHP is requesting from the Trust Fund. The funds would support data input and management, and the review and updating of vascular plant state ranks and species accounts.
- Four talks and 2 posters were presented by current and former MTNHP Zoology staff at the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society Meetings in Helena February 25-27th. Braden Burkholder gave a presentation and a poster on Montana's bat acoustic surveillance efforts: pre-white-nose syndrome. Ellen Whittle gave a presentation and poster on bat use of bridges in western Montana which received honors as the best student presentation and best student poster. Bryce Maxell gave presentations on Montana's bat roost surveillance efforts and the results of the 2014 statewide winter-breeding owl and Harlequin Duck surveys.



MONTANA WETLAND COUNCIL

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Karen Newlon
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March 19, 2015

Dear Karen,

Congratulations! The Montana Wetland Council's Stewardship Award Team has selected MNHP's Montana Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center for a 2015 Montana Wetland Stewardship Award for exemplary professionalism and dedication to wetland conservation. The Team was very impressed with the Mapping Center's accomplishments and commitment to provide critical information about Montana's wetlands. We are honored to recognize the Montana Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center with our award in 2015.

This year's celebration will be held on Thursday May 28, 2015 at the State Capitol. I will be in touch with more details, but for now, please plan to spend the day at the Award Celebration as our guest. There will be time during the day for you to share the accomplishments of the Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center with your colleagues and some of Montana's government leaders.

We plan to host an exciting Awards Ceremony at the Capitol for the presentation of the 2015 Wetland Stewardship and Watershed Coordination Council Awards. We look forward to honoring you and celebrating the exceptional accomplishments of the Mapping Center. Thank you for your contribution to wetland and riparian conservation stewardship!

Sincerely,

Lynda A. Saul, PWS
Wetland Program Coordinator

c. Allan Cox. Montana Natural Heritage Program