

Weed Management at State Parks and Fishing Access Sites

The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has controls to manage weeds on state parks and fishing access sites. The audit identified areas for improving the department’s weed management efforts.

Audit Findings

The Parks Division (division) within the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (department) is responsible for management of Montana’s state parks and fishing access sites (FAS). This performance audit focused on the department’s weed control and management efforts on those lands.

Weed Infestation Rating for Department Regions 2 and 3 State Parks and FAS October 2008		
Rating	# of Sites	Percent
No Weeds Observed	11	18%
10% or less	44	73%
10% to 25%	3*	5%
25% to 50%	1*	2%
More than 50%	0	0%
Not Determined ¹	1	2%
Total	60	100%

¹ One state park was being inventoried by the division and information was not available.
* All FAS

Source: Compiled by the Legislative Audit Division.

To evaluate weed management activities, we interviewed department personnel, county weed district officials, and personnel from other state and federal land management agencies. We also accompanied county weed officials on site visits to state parks and FAS and used their expertise to estimate the extent of weed infestations in two department regions. County weed officials estimated potential impacts from state parks and FAS on adjoining lands. We concluded the department has controls in place to manage weeds and promote compliance with the good neighbor policy, which statutorily seeks a goal of no impacts on adjoining lands from impacts such as weeds.

Audit Recommendations

We also determined the department can improve its weed management efforts. The following bullets highlight audit findings and recommendations.

- ◆ **Prioritize weed inventories.** Division staff informally inventory weeds to identify the location and size of weed infestations, but do not formally document their inventories for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The department and the Montana Department of Agriculture have a cooperative agreement to fund a weed intern to inventory weeds at FAS. However, at the current rate it will take the department approximately eight years to have a completed inventory for FAS. Also, the department has conducted minimal weed inventory efforts at state parks. We recommend the department increase its weed inventory efforts to benefit monitoring and evaluation of weed infestations at state parks and FAS.
- ◆ **Update regional weed management plans.** Regional weed management plans are six or more years old and are outdated. The department should update regional weed plans to reflect the department’s 2008 statewide weed management plan and increase consistency among the department’s seven administrative regions.
- ◆ **Implement on-site weed management evaluations.** The department relies on informal controls to monitor and evaluate weed management efforts. The department should implement weed reviews of selected state parks and FAS, and include system stakeholders in the review process. This would help the department to better monitor and measure the effectiveness of weed management efforts and improve accountability to the Montana Department of Agriculture and the legislature.
- ◆ **Educate and formalize funding processes.** The department maintains fund reserves for unexpected maintenance activities, including

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weed control. However, some regional personnel were unaware of or reluctant to request additional funds for unexpected weed control costs. There appeared to be a breakdown in communication between some regions and headquarters in Helena. The department should educate and communicate to regional personnel the availability of reserve funds for unexpected weed control costs and establish a process for requesting and prioritizing disbursement of these funds.

- ♦ **Obtain county weed district inspections of proposed land acquisitions.** State law requires the department to obtain weed inspections by county weed district officials before obtaining new lands for state parks and FAS. While the department conducted environmental assessments, which included an assessment of weed conditions, it does not comply with state law. The department should obtain and document weed inspections by county weed district officials to comply with state law.

For a complete copy of the report (08P-11) or for further information, contact the Legislative Audit Division at 406-444-3122; e-mail to lad@mt.gov; or check the web site at <http://leg.mt.gov/audit>