

July 22, 2005

Dear Interested Citizens:

Thank you for your interest in a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to cooperate with a plan of the Missoula County Weed District to perform weed control on 51 acres of State lands along the Clearwater River during the 2005 and 2006 growing seasons. The weed control project would target Yellow Flag Iris growing along the Clearwater River from Salmon Lake to Highway 200.

Enclosed is a decision document in which FWP and DNRC explain their rationale for implementing the treatment of Yellow Flag Iris as proposed. The agencies prepared a draft environmental assessment for that portion of the project affecting State lands administered by FWP and DNRC. We received no comments from the public during the well-advertised public involvement process, and accept the draft environmental assessment as final.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

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**DECISION NOTICE**  
**Yellow Flag Iris Control**  
**July 20, 2005**

**Proposal**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) proposed to cooperate with a plan of the Missoula County Weed District to perform weed control on 51 acres of State lands along the Clearwater River during the 2005 and 2006 growing seasons. The weed control project would target Yellow Flag Iris growing along the Clearwater River from Salmon Lake to Highway 200.

Yellow Flag Iris is a pond and garden ornamental plant that was originally brought to the United States and Canada in the early 1900s. Although YFI is a relatively new problem in Montana, it has been listed as a Category 3 noxious species in the state. Category 3 noxious weeds are known pests in nearby states and are capable of rapid spread and render land unfit for beneficial uses. Management of Category 3 weeds focuses on education, early detection and immediate action to eradicate infestations. Additionally, YFI has been identified by the Blackfoot Challenge as a high-risk noxious weed capable of causing significant infestation problems in the Blackfoot drainage over the next five decades.

The existing YFI infestation is suspected to have originated from private ornamental gardens or ponds on the south end of Salmon Lake. From at least 1998 to 2005, YFI has spread from Salmon Lake downstream, affecting approximately five-miles of river corridor between Salmon Lake and Highway 200 in Missoula County. The YFI populations are located in a narrow corridor along the river edge. The density of infestation ranges from trace amounts to high levels of infestation.

The Missoula County Weed District, FWP, and DNRC are responding to the County Noxious Weed Management Act, Title 7, Chapter 22 of the Montana Codes Annotated (MCA, 2003), which requires all land managers, both public and private, to eradicate Category 3 weeds. According to the Missoula County Weed District (Otten, 2005), the Proposed Action would include:

- Application of 15-20% concentration glyphosate herbicide (Rodeo®) with LI700® surfactant and drift control agent by wiper and backpack-sprayer methods to treat both aquatic and terrestrial infected areas, respectively, in early summer 2005;
- Possible repeated treatment of approximately 10% of the original treatment area in 2006; and
- Revegetation of highly impacted terrestrial areas with native riparian plants.

### **Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process**

FWP and DNRC prepared an environmental assessment pursuant to MEPA. These documents were made available during a 21-day public comment period that began on June 16 and ended on July 6, 2005. FWP and DNRC advertised the public comment period and the availability of the proposal documentation by a legal notice entitled PUBLIC NOTICE and verification of publication has been received from the *Seeley-Swan Pathfinder* (June 16, 2005), *Helena Independent Record* (June 12, 2005), and *Missoulian* (June 12, 2005). A feature article on this proposal and opportunity for public comment was published in the June 16<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Seeley-Swan Pathfinder*. The documentation (EA, etc.) was available in its entirety on FWP's Internet web site ([www.fwp.state.mt.us](http://www.fwp.state.mt.us)) beginning on June 20. FWP and DNRC distributed 40 hard-copies of the documentation immediately before the public comment period began, and responded to all additional requests for copies as they were received. Included in the initial mailing were landowners with property adjacent to the proposed action.

### **Summary of Public Comment**

FWP and DNRC received no comments in response to the release of the environmental assessment.

### **Corrections, Clarifications, and Updates to the Environmental Assessment**

No corrections, clarifications, or updates to the environmental assessment were identified during the public comment period.

## **Decision**

Utilizing the environmental assessment and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP and DNRC that addresses the concerns and issues identified for the proposed control of Yellow Flag Iris. In light of public comments and internal agency review, we accept the draft environmental assessment as final.

For reasons explained below, we have selected the proposed action as the alternative that best meets the mission and project objectives of FWP and DNRC. Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

The Yellow Flag Iris infestation on the Clearwater River is at an early stage that provides an opportunity for eradication. Methods of control are appropriate and pose a low, short-term risk to the environment. Delays in control actions will allow the infestation to spread and increase the loss of biological diversity in this productive natural ecosystem. If the infestation spreads, the financial impact of control will greatly increase in the future, as will the potential biological consequences of control (due to increased amounts of herbicides required to address the greater extent of the infestation). Hand pulling the iris risks breaking off the roots and rhizomes to spread downstream, and may actually be detrimental as a control action. Under Montana law, landowners are responsible for controlling noxious weeds on their properties. In consideration of these findings, the proposed action is the most appropriate one for this situation.

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