MEETING MINUTES

Meeting/ Project Name: Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council - Business Meeting and Grant Hearings
Date of Meeting: March 9-12, 2026 **Time**: 1:03 p.m. (3/9) – 8:33 a.m. (3/12)
Minutes Prepared By: Greta Dige
Location: Delta Hotel, Helena

1. Meeting Objective

Council Business Meeting / Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant Hearings

2. Attendees:

Voting Members: Amber Burch, Kellieann Fillingham, Jeff Littlefield, Dana Weatherford, Bill Curran, Jeff Brennan, Joel Farkell
Advisory Members: Brenda Witkowski – BLM, Robert Thompson – BOR; Michael Hamel – DNRC; Adam Sieges – FWP; Jason Allen - MDT; Darrin Boss -MSU - AG Experiment Station; Dan Lucas - MSU Extension; Monica Pokorney – NRCS; Erik Norderud - APHIS
Virtual: Natalie West- USDA-ARS
Montana Dept. of Agriculture (MDA) Staff: Kima Traynham, Jillien Streit, Ian Foley, Jasmine Chaffee, Greta Dige, Josh Wagoner, Lori Leaf

3. Topics: Agenda and Notes, Discussion, Issues

Welcome:

Kima Traynham, Department of Agriculture (MDA), Ag Services Bureau Chief, called the meeting to order. Introductions were made both in the room and on Zoom.

Minutes Review:

Kima reviewed the minutes from the November 12th council business meeting. Amber Burch moved to accept the minutes as written, Joel Farkell seconded; minutes were approved.

Application and Hearing Updates:

Greta reminded council for new local cooperatives they won't have a funding history with them as they are new. There are two continuing local cooperatives with updates Prairie County Houndstongue project is adding an herbicide, and the American Fork is adding a new boundary. Herbicide pricing review was done a little differently this year by looking at all prices. If there were corrections the impact was very minor so kept request amount as is. She mentioned the typical counties who differ from state bid prices are the Beaverhead, and Park counties. Granite County has only the aerial mixes were not state bid. All rates looked okay though new program puts chemicals in alphabetical and those should be all fixed. Updated project acres for Trout Creek and Yellowstone Saltcedar as those were missing and added. Clark Fork River project had an herbicide mix of 0 acres so removed it and added a letter of interest from DEQ. Chestnut Valley is a new area, though does have funding history as parts of the area were under the Soldier Creek project.

July council tour: Will be in Missoula starting at 8:00 am and going till 3 pm. Will be securing rooms as Missoula will be busy. What we will be seeing is Working Dogs for Conservation, Clark Fork River, youth education program and their rush project on July 8th. Finally, she introduces the final

monitoring protocols and gave a copy to all members.

Council Member Updates:

Monica Pokorney - NRCS: Still working through their conservation programs for noxious weed control projects. Last year spent $3.5 million on noxious weed projects that went on through NRCS does not include CRP. This year, still in the process of determining if they should be using TIPS, the targeted implementation programs, or if any landowner can now come in and apply for EQIP program funding. There is a new regenerative pilot program, which is about regenerative agriculture, which will also be focusing on noxious weed control. Working on education as there has been some confusion at field offices with knowing they need to not only address state-listed noxious weeds, but county ones as well. They are working on getting the information out in technical notes.

Jeff Littlefield - Biological Research & Control Rep: No updates

Erik Norderud – APHIS: No updates unless you want to hear about grasshoppers. Contact us for interstate biocontrol tickets as that will be gearing up in the next couple of months.

Joel Farkell - Herbicide Dealer/Applicator Rep: No updates

Robert Thompson – BOR: Can now submit noxious weed contracts and have some in the hopper with counties.

Adam Sieges – FWP: Annual report is posted on the website now.

Amber Burch - MWCA Rep: MWCA annual conference was well attended. Working with a group for EQC. Did a working session during conference for the Environmental Quality Council to look at the Noxious Weed law to review in the interim session. A group is working with legislators of that committee. Non-compliance is a big issue from that, so there is a survey out there for weed districts that we're trying to get all the weed districts input on, if they're using non-compliance, if they are, how is it working? If they're not, why not? Then held a working session to take that information back to the council. Funding is a big thing and a hope to fund statewide projects. If you're interested, I would encourage you, you can be on those calls that we have, you can be involved in any capacity that you would want to stay informed. They need input from everybody. Next meeting Dave Brink and Bryce Christiaens will be presenting more from a weed district standpoint.

Micheal Hamel – DNRC: Update from trust lands standpoint developed a new document for weed management plans for non-compliance on state land, especially with the troublesome less fees, or especially if there's high-priority meat management initiatives, EDRR species, all that fun stuff. The form essentially makes sure there's management being done by our lessees on our state trust, and it would also oversee the county districts as well, so they must get their sign-off as well. Otherwise, we're getting ready for the field season, doing some more mapping of the weeds on state trust lands. Cooperative weed agreements with counties for those that are expiring will be updated every two years.

Dan Lucas - MSU – Extension: I guess the only thing I can think of from MSU is, new president, for

the broadcast effort as they're entering a new effort to build a strategic plan for MSU's future efforts, moving into the future, and there will be a listening session. They've already began on campus, but there will be listening sessions around the state, and it's an opportunity for you to elevate Environmental health and noxious weed management, that's an important issue, and have that be part of the strategic plan, whichever she can move forward to be president.
An opportunity to elevate things to interest. The ones around the state are in the planning phase and will be coordinated through extension agents.

Jeff Brennan - Agricultural Crop Production Rep: Seeing results back on herbicide resistance weeds specifically Group 1 herbicides. This group is now having resistance issues. Not a good scenario. Just wanted everybody to be mindful that we still have a problem, and it's not being addressed at the field level.

Dana Weatherford - Livestock Production Rep: Nothing to report

Bill Curran - At-Large Member: Continues with some of Jeff's comments. It's not being addressed at the national level, either. I am involved with a group called GROW, Get Rid of Weeds.
That's a national group. We focus on, herbicide-resistant weeds. And every year, we work with a group called Take Action, and they produce this poster. It has all herbicide classification by mode of action. Handed out posters for members to take.

Kellieann Fillingham - Western County Rep: The western area side of the state, we're finding new infestations of EDRR all the time, and trying to be working on those. There really isn't anything major going except for that, so rush, blueweed, tansy, we are getting it.

Brenda Witkoski – BLM: Just finished up with receiving our budget and doling it out.
Will be able to do contracts and assistance agreements this year with our counties and with other contractors to try to get some weeds killed. She is still filling in for the Miles City Field Office, so double hats on that one. A lot of staff took the early retirement option so are trying to get, you know, we can do contracts and stuff but trying to get people to be able to review the contracts, or to put out the contracts, or to monitor the contracts. Those, those people are far and in between, so, to try to get work done on the ground We're lacking in that, so… we're doing our best, but… That's… that's what's happening.

Jason Allen – MDT: They are prepping for the season and ready. They got a new wing trip drone for mapping, applying that, we haven't got the spectral imaging piece yet. Will be working with the University of Montana on building some AI, so you can plug it into there and hopefully start mapping some rush skeletonweed and that’s it.

Natalie West – ARS: Nothing to report and hopefully some news in July.

Darrin Boss - MSU - AG EXPERIMENT STATION: Montana State University, Montana Ag Experiment Station is doing quite well. Enrollment seems to be going in a good fashion, up. The College of Ag is 10% of the entire enrollment, so that's encouraging. If there's one place that this committee can probably help us with, is to recruit students that are in noxious weeds, environmental impacts, natural resource range conservation. The experiment station is doing quite well. We're the largest granting expenditure anywhere, you know, all throughout the university, and so that's

a little over $54 million, which makes me feel like our faculty and our staff are doing their jobs, hustling grants and monies.

Budget Review/Review of Hearing Protocol/Deliberation Discussion

Meeting documents were reviewed by Jasmine, including an overview of the noxious weed program budget and estimate of funds available for FY 2026 Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant awards. Allowable non-grant expenditures, calculated at 12% of the prior year grants awarded from fund 02068, were reviewed.

Previously allocated and pending 2026 grant awards and expenditures were reviewed:

State Special Revenue	$2,305,167
MDT Pass Through Funds	$100,000
FY24 EDRR Grants Y3 Funding & FY25 EDRR Grants Y2 Funding	($189,571)
Council Expenses (estimate)	($14,000)
Non-Grant Expenses	($225,280)
Special County/Reservation Awards (estimate)	($412,500)
MDT Pass Through Distribution to Counties	($100,000)
General Fund	$90,397
Forest Service- FWEED23, INFRA23	$519,422
Reverted Funds	$33,321
Balance Available for 2026 Hearing Awards	**$2,106,956**

Historic information related to program revenue, grant hearing requests/funding history, and unspent awards were provided to the council.

2026 Application Breakdown

Funding Type	Number of Applications	Funding Request Total
Research	3	$184,652
Education	9	$242,322
Development	6	$288,295
Local Cooperative (New & Cont.)	26(7/19)	$1,125,807
EDRR & Statewide Education 3yr	8	$493,382

Funds requested for the 52 submitted NWTF grant applications totaled $2,114,865 resulting in the need to cut $ 7,909 in requests.

Reviewed county weed districts budget. Greta mentioned that 50 counties applied and 4 out of 7 reservations applied. Currently the Crow Tribe does not have a contact person for the program.

Director Jillien Streit and Darrin Boss joined the meeting. Director Streit thanked everyone for being at the meeting and the time and dedication they take each year going through, evaluating these applications, making sure that we see results. She appreciates staff for their willingness to educate her in the last year. Dr. Streit reports she is very disappointed that we didn't receive the additional funding last year that was passed through. That was a surprise to all of us as a department when that happened, but the balance of the budget was very important to the governor. So we'll continue to advocate for it. Highlights the funding dashboard and easy it was

for the public to view the projects and what is going on. She reports seeing so many Noxious Weed posters now that she didn't notice before taking this position and being here, but the outreach that you guys have is phenomenal, so keep it up.

Jasmine reviewed the conflict-of-interest statements and hearing protocol with the Council. She provided the council with a document that shows the percentage of grant reviewed the deliberation caps for the 2026 grant hearings. The council will deliberate on each funding opportunity type separately and award funds in each category up to the cap, once all grants have been recommended for funding the council will have an opportunity to award uncommitted funds to any funding opportunity type.

The deliberation discussion was brought up in the November meeting and decided to revisit during this meeting. Monica had emailed Greta and Jasmine, after the last hearing, some questions about how we review deliberations, the CAPS, kind of the EDRR, the statewide grants, and so she was not able to attend that meeting. Jamine turned over the conversation to Monica to present her comments after deliberations last year. Monica mentions caps and when the percentage is lower than the minimum request amount of $75,000, it is giving the impression that the projects won't be funded. If you do an average, and there are years when there are zero applications for an opportunity, we just continually see a decline in some of the categories. She wants to see funding available to maintain the diversity in projects for the available funding.

Bill asked how the caps were established. Jasmine reports caps are an average of previous years funding going back to 2017. Monica mentions for research last year being low. There was $1.8 million available, but only were going to fund $57,000 in research, and feels it can be better by setting a side at least 10% of the budget. Amber mentions her understanding of the cap was to give a guideline and its intent was not to be a hard limit as to what to fund but just a guideline. Jasmine confirms the cap is to be a starting point. It is so that at least each category has funds set aside for them to give them something. Monica mentioned last year the discussion was not about that, it was because there wasn't enough to fund the project fully, so they were looking to cut their budget in half to fund to the 3%? Though the project was funded fully, the discussion was whether to fund all or part of it. She would like to see all opportunities be funded at a minimum of 10%. The discussion will be brought up later in the week. Michael stated if 10% is set aside and not used it could go towards other projects. Amber doesn't disagree and doesn't know if the average is working but it was the starting point and maybe the starting point needs to be a minimum. The positive thing to come out of this was each funding opportunity is compared only to that funding opportunity. Joel is impressed with how the caps work, and no one had anticipated there would be zero applications for funding opportunities. Most of the council members have been through this enough so there could be tweaks. In looking at education, research and development could have a 10% base and EDRR is around 20% and then locals would be 50%. If look at zero applications turned in could then drop off the low years. The initial intent for reviewers was to look at research vs research and not the others. Jeff Brennan mentions he quickly calculated the average, removing the high and low years and it came out to 9.5% to see if things would change and it did. There is value in research and more needs to be done.

Another point to discuss is the statewide EDRR weeds. These were moved out of local cooperatives, as these are salaries rather than treatment so moved to a three grant rather than one. Being a statewide EDRR task force there are now 5 counties applying for statewide funds

but used at a county level. Should these be consolidated into one? Should there be central coordination? And these are just questions. Or, at what point, is a species moved from an EDRR species to ongoing management, because some of the EDRR species are now hundreds of acres. Not saying that it's not important, it is, it's, like, high priority, but these are just questions, what you think about how they actually fit in these categories.

Kellieann states there is a main point of contact which is Josh, but doesn't know how counties would hire a person. She doesn't know how they would make it all work if broken out on the county level rather than having a main state coordinator. Josh mentions it being hard to find an EDRR person locally as it is a lot of resources and weed crews are having difficulty finding seasonal staff. Monica mentions a difference being whether it's is well established, so one can still go to other counties and manage there as well. There are hundreds of acres of rush skeletonweed now. Kellieann states maybe it is specific to the weed as rush is very difficult and will never go away, just need to keep it at bay so it doesn't get out of control like in surrounding states. Greta mentions what she is hearing is removing the statewide from the EDRR funding opportunity. Josh mentions there is less common reed than dyers woad but recruiting folks to lead a task force is difficult as it is a unique situation when you get someone that's willing and able to take over species. Counties probably don't want their weed districts to spend much time outside their county.

Kellieann mentions Greta's comment about dropping statewide from the EDRR as in the early days blueweed was only in her county and they were the resource to help. Jasmine states there's more discussion there, because maybe there's a point where it's not EDRR anymore, so maybe we need to set those definitions. So maybe those need to be pulled out of the trust fund and funded in a separate way. There are things to do and thinking of different ways that we can handle these. Will review later.

Protocol Review Wednesday, March 12th
The meeting was opened at 8:33 a.m. by Kima Traynham.

Jasmine reviewed conflict of interest and the deliberation protocol once again noting how each funding opportunity will be deliberated on separately with a funding cap.

Grant Award Deliberations
Application deliberation order was determined by the combined application review scores submitted by voting members and advisory members, separated by funding opportunity type. Deliberation order and cap: Development at 11.57% or $243,852, Education at 7.59% or $159,995, Local Cooperatives at 52.24% or $1,100,722, Research at 7.46% or $157,253, and EDRR & Statewide Education at 21.13% or $445,134.

The deliberation process began. Voting proxy for Director Streit was given to Kima Traynham in the event of a tie vote.

Director Review of Funding Recommendations
NWTF grant funding recommendations from the Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council totaled $2,145,715 for 52 of the 56 grant proposals. Recommendations will be provided to Director Streit for review and approval. 2026 Funding Recommendations are attached.

Other Business/Public Comment:

Jasmine revisited items that were discussed on Monday about deliberations, and how, in our EDRR projects and the language around those. We've talked about caps, and maybe that's not the best word for that. So, think about all those things, and then at our next meeting, we will have more of a working session. Next meeting will be a tour in Missoula and encourage all to attend with tour in the morning and meeting in the afternoon. She wants the council to review scoring and applications in case things need to be changed. Updated grant guidelines, council SOP and put more meat in them especially about deliberations, create council descriptions for each position.

Joel asked when applications will be posted. Greta mentioned funding opportunities posted in September. Joel stated that the application review happens with enough time to make the changes needed as there is a lot. Jasmine said the November meeting will be virtual and are a lot of updates. In November is enough time if we change scoring and guidelines. Council SOP descriptions and deliberations can be finalized in November. For those that can't attend the meeting will be online. Darrin Boss, mentioned if the group would come up 4-5 research needs this would help focus the researchers in what they should be looking into.

Jasmine mentions council appointments: still have rec/wildlife, noxious weed free materials, MWCA, and at large position, and Eastern Coordinator applications are due at the end of May. Travel forms fill them out and had them in and if they forgot to get last summers' please get those in.

Please start thinking about the summer 2027 tour ideas. Joel recommends Stillwater and another one to look at is the Montana State University campus.

Public comment:
Greta thanks council for taking their time to review and comment of applications.

Motion to adjourn made by Amber Burch and seconded by Bill Curran. Meeting ended at 11:59 a.m.

4. Action Items

1. Review applications and evaluation criteria for possible changes to 2027 application cycle.
   Assigned: Council Due Date: July 8, 2026 Status:

2. Update Grant Guidelines
   Assigned: Greta Due Date: July 8, 2026 Status:

3. Create Council description for each member
   Assigned: Council/Staff Due Date: July/November 2026 Status:

4. Update Council SOP specially deliberations
   Assigned: Council and Staff Due Date: July/November 2026 Status: