MEETING MINUTES

Meeting/ Project Name: Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council Business Meeting & Tour
Date of Meeting: July 08, 2026 **Time**: 1:04 p.m. – 3:08 p.m.
Minutes Prepared By: Greta Dige (Zoom AI Summaries)
Location: Missoula County Ecology and Extension Office 1075 South Ave W Missoula, MT 59801

1. Meeting Objective

Business Meeting & Tour

2. Attendees

Council Members: Joel Farkell, Amber Burch, Jeff Brennan, Kellieann Fillingham, Bill Curran, Jeff Littlefield
Agency Representatives: Adam Sieges – FWP, Micheal Hamel – DNRC, Jason Allen- MDT, Lori Witham – APHIS (virtual), Monica Pokorny – NRCS (virtual)
Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) Staff: Jasmine Chaffee, Greta Dige, Josh Wagoner, Lori Leaf, Brooke Mills, Halle Gardner, Kima Traynham (virtual), Amanda Coyle (virtual)
Guests (in-person):

3. Topics

Welcome:

Jasmine welcomes everyone and completes introductions.

Minutes Review/Action Items:

Council meeting and grant hearing minutes from March 9-12, 2026, were reviewed. All action items were completed. **Joel Farkel moved to approve the minutes as written; Amber Burch seconded the motion; minutes were unanimously approved.**

Program Updates:
Jasmine Chaffee provided a noxious weed program update by starting with a SJ 42 review by providing what has occurred over the last year. It is now to the point where the council meeting is meeting to if and what legislation they will bring next session regarding changes to weed law. Jasmine pulls up the drafts for the advisory council to review starting with Draft PD 0029 for appropriations and are as follows:

- $600,000 for early detection and rapid response for crews.
- Where it mentions Montana Invasive Species Council should be Montana Department of Agriculture and will need to be corrected.
- $200,00 for statewide education campaign that would be hire a second educator in the state to have one in the east and west.
- $300,000 to statewide biocontrol efforts for Melissa Maggio's program.
- $100,000 to FWP, DNRC, and MDT for management of state-owned lands. Spurred by not all agencies having dedicated full-time weed managers or state weed coordinators.
- $220,000 to Montana State University Extension research development.
- $105,000 to the Montana Natural Heritage Program of the State Library.

These are intended to be perpetual funding, and it was clear that EDRR and education was the most

effective in the state. The last was to be funding for county weed districts but is not shown.

Jasmine then brought up the second draft of legislation PD 0028 containing changes to the county weed act.

- Changes to definitions added gravel and material,
- Under weed district board changing a "may" to a shall have a weed coordinator,
- Power and duties of the board eliminate supervising a coordinator as they are employees of the county.
- Embargo: Currently is just for forage run through the certified forage program. It would add gravel and materials to the section, giving more options to limit infested material in their county.
- Non-Compliance: Gives weed districts an option to assess a fine of $250/day up to $5,000 for every day that the weeds are not managed. Gives an option to put some financial burden on those landowners who choose not to respond. If complaint goes all the way through the non-compliance process changing %25 to %05 to match what DNRC has.
- Sources of Money: Looking to change a "may" to a shall provide sufficient money to the weed district. This won't change the $1.6 mils or $100,000 requirement.
- Noxious Weed Management and revegetation plans: Touches on the need for weed and revegetation plans prior to disturbance and that need a weed plan approved by the weed district before permit goes through. Focus on prevention.
- Eliminating the provision that excludes land banking.
- Noxious Weed Trust Fund: Takes what was brought forth last legislature but does not contain $10 million. Any funds transferred in are considered a part of the trust fund and allows ¼ of the interest to remain in the trust fund to allow it to grow.

She offered to send out the drafts if anyone was interested. EQC will be reviewing the drafts to see they wish to do with them for the upcoming session. Michael asks if the land banking provision was for DNRC? Jasmine responds no as the reference was in section 7 of the county weed act. Amber states she has had a hard time fully understanding this piece and Jasmine mentions that she reach out to Amy for clarification.

Moving on to the next program update, Jasmine discusses the forage program. She reports losing a lot of extension agents and eastern weed districts are less and less fulltime, so forage program is struggling. She received approval to hire a seasonal employee to assist with inspections and covering the program across the state. Next week is the Woody Invasives Tour in Billings with the morning being a boat tour followed by a panel and discussions in the afternoon. Moving forward AgCorps will change a little with two members for education; one in the east and one in the west. The position in the east will help Megan to focus more on the east side of the state. The AAT program has changed with Lori taking over the operations of the program in hopes to stabilize it.

Council members updates: Jasmine received a couple of applications with one being approved Clayton Marlow who will fill the Noxious Wee Free Materials. She is reviewing another applicant to see where they could fit on the council. Dan Lucas retired with Ben Hauptman set to be his replacement thus leaving Granite County weed coordinator vacant.

Grant Monitoring and Site Visit Update:
Greta Dige started by letting the council know of David Weaver's retirement and Montana State

University has appointed new contacts for his grants. His CABI grant (Russian Olive) is going to Jeff Littlefield while the others will go to Robert "Bob" Petersen. The site visit planned for later in the summer for saltcedar at Fort Peck to see diorhabda is most likely canceled for now. Completed four monitoring visits while site visits have had a slow start. Discussed the most recent trip to Carter County where she saw the Capital Project and visited Georgia Harrison's research project. They were installing 108 plots and will be an interesting project to watch.

She states on today's tour they visited five grants and hoped the council had a good time seeing them. For the rest of the summer there are more visits planned along with training in the future. FY27 county reservation emergency grants are posted.

Program Updates:

- Lori Leaf gave a summary of summer activities starting with weed pulls as well as assisting with county conservations districts. She has been working to reconnect with all the AAT programs to let them know we are still here. Has 6 new signs with one being for the Farmers Union Camp and Yellowstone River Park Association. Redesigning the wanted posters with the first being rush.

- Halle Gardner has mostly been working with Pull Your Share and have taught over 300 kids in classrooms. When finished with Farmer Union Camp will be at 600 kids on weed pulls. She has attended 11 different pulls. As the summer continues will transition to tabling at events.

- Brooke Mills has been monitoring and completed 3 sites. Expect to have at least another 3 sites by end of summer. She oversees keeping the survey working and the maintenance involved with it. Brooke updates the dashboard and is working on getting last year and this year's information up. Hoping to get out in the fall to map phragmites and the baby's breath she saw just now.

- Josh Wagoner provided an update about the EDRR program and others agency partners will give updates about those. Did some trails with Envu for blueweed and rush this spring. Water hemp and Palmer have no new reports this year but found big locations last year that are being worked on. Plamer and water hemp have been treated and may need to be retreated. Reports that in some test 2, 4-D killed plants while other showed some dicamba resistance. Has had a lot of requests for training and hopes that will change to field work. He mentioned taking a trip to Idaho to see news species then going recently to look at phragmites.

Member Updates:

- Jason Allen: Business as usual in most areas. Blueweed has been found in new areas as well as common bugloss showing up in Yellowstone County. Foreman found one mature plant so will monitor the site. A patch of blueweed was found at the edge of Park County. He was able to clip and bag it then worked with Theresa Pospichal to have it treated and will continue to monitor the site. It is bad that blueweed is moving east. He knew ventenata was in the counties out east but not past Yellowstone. This summer ventenata was found in a 2-mile section in the right of way in Treasure County. Jason notified the coordinator who is working with landowners in the area so may see an application for this area in the next grant cycle. New this year is Summer Pheasent eye. It was discovered this species has been at its location for approximately 40 years. The area was treated and looks great; however, it was likely spread elsewhere by fencing contractors. He visited with Kellieann and was disappointed with how much ventenata was in

the right of way in Ravalli County. MDT is treating zone one to keep it from moving elsewhere, as adjacent properties had a lot and it would take a lot of funds to get it under control. Jason asked Josh if there was anything he missed. Josh reports scotch brome being found in Seeley Lake followed by Jason updating the group about his scotch brome sites. He discussed the research program through University of Montana (UM) where they are building an AI program to help with finding weeds like rush skeletonweed using a drone. Results thus far have determined when vegetation is green it is difficult to determine the different weed species. The program works better when most vegetation is yellow and rush is green making it easier to spot. MDT purchased a wingtip drone and needs to practice with it more. Jason flew the scotch brome site and sent UM the footage to use in the AI program.

- Amber Burch: She reports being in a podcast with Josh on Northern Ag Network which was fun. She took Josh and Connie in a helicopter to look for dyer's woad as the Park County and the Sweet Grass site almost makes a straight line and wanted to check the area. They covered a lot of ground, finding nothing suspicious. Located a single flowering blueweed plant south of Dillion and was 60 miles from the other site so will need to watch those locations.

- Joel Farkell: Weather has been difficult this year for everybody. It will be interesting to see how people from the crop and range and pasture get things finished up. It will be interesting to see what kind of fall we'll have.

- Jeff Brennan: Reports on weather related issues lack of moisture and frost. Somethings that did show up were Russian weed aphid. They are finding more crop weeds in certified weed seeds. Some is to poor field management and certification not only for goat grass, palmer amaranth and water hemp.

- Mike Hamel: Mike reports finding jointed goat grass in a half-acre to acre on a piece of state trust ground near Corvalis. The area receives a lot of unpermitted recreational use and suspects it came in with those activities. He will be going tomorrow to map and maybe pull then coordinate with the Hamilton unit treat it this fall. In the DNRC world Megan trained fire fighters on mapping and monitoring as they go into very difficult areas they can help with activities. Mike discussed how he is doing more weed stuff and revamped their prioritization of weed infestations, especially EDRR and 2A species not found in common areas. He is working on getting everyone on board with the new weed management plan in place for leases. They held the first division wide weed training yesterday and had a good turnout with 15 in attendance.

- Adam Sieges: Nothing to report other than spraying weeds.

- Bill Curran: Discusses his involvement with the group called GROW. There are interesting news articles that come out weekly. Bill believes the council would be interested in the articles on some of the pigweeds. Reviews a recent article called Palmer Amaranth Plagues Farmers with Herbicide Resistance and that is features what is happening in Idaho. Then mentions another article called Crisis at the Birdfeeder discusses what is going on in the west about birdseed being a common why to spread. Josh mentions birdseed was discussed as the palmer working group. Jasmine mentioned that water hemp was added to the department's restricted seed. Jeff Brennan mentioned how the restricted seed will be identified. Jasmine describes when it comes

into the state the pigweed seed is identified then sent off for testing for identification. Bill asked if testing was done out of state and Jasmine confirmed that it is.

- Jeff Littlefield: Jeff starts by mentioning David Weaver's retirement being sooner than expected. Bob Peterson and Jeff inherited his projects with Jeff taking the CABI passthrough work with Russian Olive while Bob took over saltcedar and toadflax projects. David has several technicians and grad students working on the projects so work will continue to the end of the cycle. Bill asked if there was discussion about replacing David. Jeff mentions David's focus was weed stem saw flies so that will remain the focus. The position is not scheduled to be filled till next year so this fall they will work on the position description but as to how much of biocontrol it will be is hard to say and is dependent on who fills the position. Bill asks if there is a way for citizens to influence the process to try to elevate the work for biocontrol at MSU. Jeff Littlefield mentions the USFS lab in Bozeman will be transferred down to Fort Collins. He summarizes his work for the whitetop mite and is transitioning it to Melissa's program. Other projects he has been working on are bringing in a mite that David has been working and rearing an oxeye daisy moth. Both are waiting for a release permit from APHIS and hopes these will come later this year. A project not funded by Montana is biocontrol on Russian thistle with a mite. Most of the work has been in California and are developing releases across the US. Jasmine asks how many biocontrol agents he has worked on start to finish. Jeff states that it is not many only a handful with whitetop and bradyrrhoa for rush skeletonweed. He informs the group when testing in quarantine is if species feed on other weeds then more field testing is needed and is why partnering with CABI and others is key.

- Kellieann Sweeney: Rush skeletonweed treatments done last fall look good. Blueweed, rush skeletonweed, and bugloss billboards have been great, and people calling and resulted in new blueweed locations with no new sites with the other species. For ventenata she is finding it all over the county meaning it has been there for a very long time. Reports Missoula County, Josh, and MPG Ranch have just started looking for rush and hopes no new sites are found. She has just learned about jointed goat grass and is sending staff along with forest service to attend DNRC's site tomorrow to become more familiar with it. Kellieann mentions her concerns about the fiber optic lines going in especially with out-of-state contractors and the possibilities of what they could be bringing in. Michael asks about the fiber optic lines and if they would be covered under the proposed legislation? Jasmine says she believes it would be. Jason mentions it is a very tough situation to keep track of. Kellieann mentions she reviewed a subdivision where they did great with getting in their weed plan, however when she arrived onsite to inspect the area, the developer already removed vegetation leaving the area as dirt. As a result, she wouldn't sign the plan until they met certain conditions. She notified the planning office and provided a sign to notify people not to disturb the soil prior to the plan being signed. Jason brought up MacDonald Pass and the situation with fiber optic lines going in potentially bringing new species like ventenata.

- Monica Pokorney: NRCS has a lot of different weed contracts this year and has spent $8 million on invasive and noxious weed treatments. Much of the funds are treating large areas of ventenata down by Big Horn and Carbon Counties. Many different contracts include weed treatments as part of the overall management plan such as forest management plans including weed treatments for roads and burn piles. There are 70 contracts so far and that is only a third of them. Hopefully this month they will find out whether their contract will be through the TIPS

process or if it will open and be more diverse per county. Lots of noxious weed treatments are going for NRCS.

- Lori Witham: APHIS was able to hire enough seasonals this year so have been able to help with biocontrol collections and will get others outside of pest detection trapping and grasshopper survey activities. Assisting Melissa with out-of-state shipments like creating shipping labels. Then in preseason handling shipping out all those orders from other states. Provide funding for three different biocontrol programs.

Work Session:

Jasmine began by mentioning the items of focus which were grant guidelines with the meat of the session focusing on applications and scoring rubric. It was about 6-7 years ago then added the scoring a few years ago. The bulk really hasn't changed much. She broke those present into groups of two to review the application and the scoring rubric to if anything needs to updated or edited:

- Kellieann and Lori on Local Cooperatives,
- Bill and Jeff Littlefield Research,
- Adam and Mike Development,
- Jeff Brennan and Joel Education, and
- Amber and Jason EDRR.

Groups were given 15 minutes to review their applications and criteria. Those online were encouraged to do the same.

Jasmine reconvened to have groups report what they found:

- **Local Cooperatives:** In application details under the annual monitoring details, it says EDDMapS West and should just be EDDMapS. The application works well for weeds east to west and north to south no issues. Evaluation Criteria: **#7:** states "Lists additional and/or in-kind match for project (50% match is required for herbicide, seed, and related labor only)" with one option being 0 with no match. Jasmine clarifies the question refers to additional match and not the required match. This was added a few years ago so may need to be revisited in November. Projects are not eligible if they don't have 50% match. Jasmine asks council to look at the other funding opportunities for November. **#6**: Joel wants to see more weight on electronic mapping data vs paper maps that are marked on. It is getting easier to digitize mapping with geospatial data. Jasmine mentions there is even a person who can help digitize maps. Joel mentions he is torn on long-term projects that some are slow to load data and even from the commercial side. The tipping point would if is already in EDDMapS or easy to transfer into it. Really wants to look at it. Jasmine recommends looking at the ranking. Joel states to increase form 0-5 to 0-10. 1-3 Paper maps, information is transferable to other platforms, ultimate is if all data in EDDMapS and anyone can pull it up. Jeff is in support of weighting differently based on paper versus digital.

- **Research:** Bill starts by mentioning the six areas in the state weed management plan. How often are they updated, developed, and how is input received. He would like increased communication between research entities and the populus. Mentions looking at the weights on questions because some are more important than others. The Methods for analyzing, testing, and evaluating question is standard stuff for research projects so is it worth 10 percent. Maybe look at increasing weight on the state weed management plan and have stakeholders involved. Jeff makes a comment about looking

at all the different types of proposals as there is a wide variety and expertise that goes into them. For research it is what researchers do for a living and are more apt to make sure criteria are met. Jeff brings up artificial intelligence programs to the overall quality of the proposals and how it may need to be addressed. Jasmine agrees and states that if it hasn't happened already, it will. Jeff states as it becomes more common how do we approach it ethically as it is a great tool though can be missed. He mentions then in reverse the juddery that goes into reviewing them, where programs, projects, or proposals have priority is to focus on those. Recommends coming up with priority areas to help address research topics for locals. Greta mentioned the note about providing a letter of support.

- **Development:** Mikes reports no issues and feels it is sufficient.

- **Education:** Jeff Brennan begins by discussing the evaluation criteria and there are no examples with or more and two or more. Has edits for "vague and lacked detail" to just vague or provides minimal information. He would like to see examples to assist with understanding what is being asked. Joel mentions for all of them to look at points spreads. He agrees with comments on Research.

- **Statewide EDRR:** Amber begins with the application for the Project Overview section on Coordination, Prevention, Detection, Rapid Response, or Control if a table could be made along with short descriptions for each. She mentions checking the order of criteria and application to make sure they are the same to assist with flow and not jump around so much. Her final comment was regarding #10 on the evaluation criteria. She mentions it feels that if the application is lacking your area already dinging them in those sections, then again for this question. She wonders if this could just be the presentation instead of the application.
  Jason asks everyone how they have scored the collaborative resources question. He states he scores state, federal, private separately and wants to see all of the types. This year he noticed the question has "and/or" and thinks he has been scoring this question wrong and wants feedback from the group. Bill says he views each as one; state as one then private landowner as one. He thinks is more is better, but what happens when only private landowners how are those scored. It was determine this question applies to all applications where it is listed. Michael reports he sees if the applicant list a lot private landowner as being hirer than ones that list only a few private landowners they don't get a very good score. Amber suggests needing to add instructions to clarify that applicants can list supporters as well and not just those that would receive cost share in hopes to get letters of support. It was determined more explanation would be the best route rather changing the application. Jasmine mentions though the question remain as to what you are looking for. Amber states she scores private as one, BLM as one, forest as one. Jasmine states they are required to have three cooperators at least and landowners were viewed as one source and was how it was developed. Jason brings back up the statement and/or statement. Amber recommends removing the and out. Jasmine recommends making that change then leave what is the parenthesis.

  Joel revisits question 10 where is says: This application was well prepared, the group is well organized, and the project reflects a likelihood of success in meeting the goals and objectives set forth. He is wondering if there could be scoring that would include the actual presentation. Some applications are written well but the presentation doesn't go well. Would like to see language to put where it is weighted how the presentation was. He highlighted continuing projects successes and challenges. Kellieann suggests leaving it opened to allow the review to choose. Jamine commented that criteria is sent out to the applicant so scoring should be spelled out. Jasmine mentions switching to application to presentation. Joel agrees with presentation and wants to stress for applicants to

present on the project and not just about funding. Jasmine says staff will word smith something and bring back a version for review at the next meeting.

With no further comment on applications, Jasmine goes over the items that were not able to be reviewed in the meeting. Grant Guidelines and what she wants to have them review is the project types so the explanation cover what the grant is. Monica and Lori will send any comments through email. Joel mentioned to look at the funding caps as well. Greta mentions she has been working on a deliberation SOP that will explain the caps and hopes to get out early. Jasmine mentions from November to March those can be fine tuned at that time. Greta asks if the changes would impact the current grant cycle. Jasmine responds it depends on how the November session goes as to and if a draft can be created.

Greta mentions possible locations for next July's site tour and business meeting were Montana State University Campus, which is to see the Plant Science building and get a tour of the Department of Agriculture's Lab or Stillwater County. If the council could think of anywhere else to go, and if not maybe choose from these two options.

Jasmine reminds the council of upcoming meetings: November 10th Business Meeting to be held virtually. Grant hearings will be March 15-19th at Montana Heritage Center in Helena across from the Department of Agriculture office. She reminds the council to send ideas for tours to Greta.

Other Business/Public Comment:
No public comment or other business.

Adjourn
Amber Burch motioned to adjourn, Jeff Brennan seconds; meeting was adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

4. Action Items

1. Draft all recommended changes for application and evaluation criteria.
   Assigned: Greta/Jasmine Due Date: November 2026 Status:

2. Draft Deliberation SOP
   Assigned: Greta Due Date: November 10, 2026 Status:

3. Council review applications and evaluation criteria for further comments or proposed changes.
   Assigned: Council Members Due Date: November 10, 2026 Status:

4. Council review descriptions for project types in grant guidelines for changes if needed.
   Assigned: Council Members Due Date: November 10, 2026 Status: