

# Adopt a Trailhead Montana

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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **65 AATM sites since 2015**
- **35 total AATM partners**
- **Chapters of the Montana Back Country Horsemen have adopted 18 trailheads across the state**
- **There is at least one AATM kiosk on each of the 7 national forests in the state of Montana**
- **A total of 23 AATM kiosks are located on Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' State Parks**

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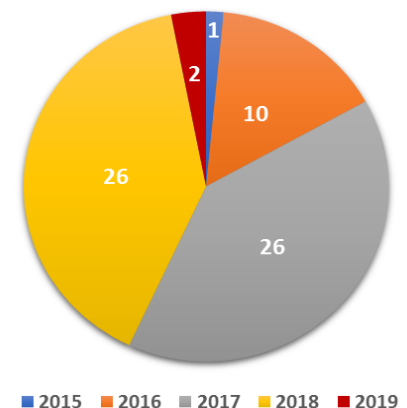
## Humble Beginnings

Adopt a Trailhead Montana or (AATM) is a cooperative volunteer program to help protect Montana's trails from further spread of noxious weeds. The program started in 2015 with one AATM kiosk installed on the Lolo National Forest at the Rattlesnake National Recreation Site outside of Missoula. Since then, a total of 65 AATM kiosks have been installed across Montana. The AATM program was started with the intent to increase awareness of site specific weeds and to gain volunteer involvement at trail-

heads. Noxious weeds can be a problem at trailheads because these invasive plants thrive in disturbed areas. Repetitive disturbance at trailheads provides the perfect habitat for noxious weeds to become established and increases their ability to spread. When an infestation occurs at a trailhead, noxious can weeds slowly make their way up that trail system, often hitchhiking as seeds in treads of mountain bike tires, ATVs or other motorized vehicles; in the socks, shoelaces or gear of hikers and hunters, or in

the hair or fur of pack animals. A great prevention tool for noxious weeds is to control them in small areas, which helps reduce their spread to weed free areas, AATM is doing this!

AATM locations



## How to Adopt?

The AATM program relies on the dedication and involvement of volunteer groups from across the state. Groups interested in participating need to be organized and have good support from their membership for an AATM project to be successful! Membership must be willing to perform removal of noxious weeds at least once

per calendar year at the site selected. To adopt a trailhead, a group must first select a trailhead, select 4 species to feature on signage, provide group name, logo, trailhead name, latitude & longitude, the name of the county the trailhead is in the land management agency information. Once provided, signage can be developed and a work day

can be organized for installation.

For more information about AATM and to adopt a trailhead, contact Shantell at 406-328-4785.



## Blackfoot River Weed Awareness Campaign

Karen Laitala, Powell County & Blackfoot Challenge Weed Coordinator



AATM kiosk at Russell Gates FAS

*“This project has been a great success due to the well-established volunteer group and the high volume of visitors to the site.”*

Powell County Weed Board, North Powell Conservation District, Blackfoot Challenge, Powell County’s Blackfoot River Cooperative Weed Management Area, Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign (MNWEC), and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks worked together to conceptualize, design, construct, and install a trailhead sign and boot-brush combination kiosk in August 2018.

The project was initiated to educate and increase awareness of noxious weeds among river access and river corridor users and help reduce their spread. This project benefits both residents and visitors that access the Blackfoot River (BR) and the Blackfoot River Recreational Corridor (BRRC) at, or at points

above, the Russell Gates Fishing Access (RGFA). The BRRC encompasses 26 miles from the RGFA to Johnsrud Park fishing access site and is part of a cooperative agreement between private landowners and public agencies providing public access within the Corridor up to 50 feet above the high-water mark. The kiosk and weed pulls also promote cooperation between both Powell and Missoula County resident land owners, recreationalists and public agencies seeking to conserve the natural resources provided by the river by decreasing the spread of noxious weeds along the river corridor riparian areas and into the uplands.

Initially, this project was in response to a request from landowners to inform and engage river visitors in their

ongoing efforts to stop the introduction and spread of noxious weeds. An Adopt a Trailhead Montana kiosk was installed at the FAS/campground which is also the site of a biennial weed pull that has been taking place every June and August for the past 20 years. The fishing access site is an area of frequent concentrated activity in a relatively small area and the resulting repetitive disturbance provides ideal habitat for noxious weed establishment. Controlling weeds in this relatively small area is an effective tool for reducing and preventing spread along the river. The boot brush and educational sign encourage users to clean their shoes when entering and leaving the site, showcases simple steps that reduce spread, and raises awareness while people brush their shoes clean.



Dave Burch of MDA speaking during the AATM event dedicated to the memory of Greg Ames

## Old Gun Range Trailhead Dedication

Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign

In July 2018, the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) partnered with the City of Helena Parks & Recreation Department, and the Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign (MNWEC) to adopt the “Old Gun Range” trailhead outside of Helena. This trailhead was adopted in memory of Greg Ames,

longtime state employee and Ag Sciences Division Administrator for MDA. Greg introduced the idea of the Adopt a Trailhead Montana (AATM) project to the MNWEC in 2015 and was a champion of the project from the very beginning. Instead of the traditional recognition sign that adheres to the front of this

special kiosk, MDA requested a plaque for the back of the kiosk that highlights Greg’s dedication to the AATM program and to his lifelong commitment to combating noxious weeds in Montana’s back country and trailheads.

# Region 4, State Parks AATM a Huge Success!

Josh Wagoner, Region 4 State Parks, Maintenance Supervisor



**AATM kiosk at First Peoples' Buffalo Jump**

As the Maintenance Supervisor for the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 4 Parks., job duties include managing the noxious weeds on 9 state parks across north central Montana and Northwestern Energy property along the Missouri River corridor. All of these lands are managed with a noxious weed budget of roughly \$8,000 per year. The sheer amount of acreage, the distance between sites, and the lack of manpower and money make this a huge challenge, which necessitates creative solutions and strong partnerships. The Adopt a Trailhead Montana (AATM) program has provided me with both.

I first heard about the AATM program a few years ago at a weed management training in Helena. Shantell Frame-Martin, the Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign Coordinator, gave a presentation on the program and I immediately knew it was something I wanted to get involved with. Little did I know what a wise, if lucky, gut feeling that would be. I reached out to her there and then, and soon after we were working out details for kiosks. Fortunately for me, she bent over backwards to pull the necessary strings to get us started, showing great persistence and patience, and almost nothing was required of me.

Next, all I had to do was select specific weeds at several sites across a variety of my parks for the educational signage. Before long kiosk frames, boot brushes, and completely customized and very attractive and full color signs arrived at my office. After that, we purchased 4x4 posts, did some digging and tamping, and secured everything with the hardware that came with the delivery from Shantell. Upon installation, we were proud owners of 12 educational trail kiosks across 5 State Parks. And believe me, these are truly unique and good-looking kiosks, which people began to use right away as evidenced by the dirt on the boot brushes.

The next steps involved connecting with the public—this is where things got good! The first group who jumped on board were the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Club; not only did they adopt a trail, they adopted a large section of land on both sides of their trail. Since then they haven't just done one weed pull a year—they come over and over throughout the year, sometimes multiple times per week. This partnership enabled us to remove weeds on a piece of land that is filled with extremely interesting native plant communities, full of forbs and shrubs, without the collateral damage that would've occurred if I would've had to use herbicide. Because of the great success of this partnership facilitated by the AATM program, this group was recognized by Montana State Parks as volunteer group of the year and they were celebrated at a banquet, as well as recog-

nized with the group name plaque AATM provides for each kiosk. The program has even helped me help other land managers. Just last week a person reached out to me. Each kiosk has contact information on them and informed me of several locations of purple loosestrife, a priority 1B weed and a very big deal on the Missouri River around Great Falls. I was able to pass on this new infestation information to the Cascade County Weed Coordinator for treatment.

Last but not least, I'm grateful I joined up because of the working relationship and friendship I've developed with Shantell. She excels at giving others the tools to be successful, and she makes it both fun and painless. I've had to put very little into this program in order to reap huge rewards. If you see her around the state helping educate us all about noxious weeds, thank her, and if you see one of her kiosks, take the time to look at the pictures and give it a read, clean the weed seeds off your boots, and know who you have to thank for it being there.

**“AATM is all about partnerships, helping others help themselves, and it's effective. I can't say enough positive about it or recommend it highly enough.”**



**AATM kiosk at Camp Baker on the Smith River**

## Old Gun Range Trailhead

Greta Dige, City of Helena Parks & Recreation



Greta Dige showcases target species at the AATM dedication event in 2018.

*“By having regular weed pulls, this location has seen a huge reduction in the size of weed infestations.”*

In spring 2017 the city was approached by the Department of Agriculture because they were interested in adopting a trailhead in Helena as part of Montana Noxious Weed Campaign’s Adopt a Trailhead program in memory of

Greg Ames, fellow employee and weed fighter. The site selected was the Old Gun Range Trailhead (OGRT) as it is a hub for hikers and bikers to access the South Hills Trail System. AATM has benefited this site as it has provided reoccurring weed

pulls that have been working in tandem with targeted spot treatments of herbicide. By having regular weed pulls, this location has seen a huge reduction in the size of weed infestations. Finding regular volunteers has been a challenge, so when the AATM program was brought to my attention, I jumped at it. Weed removal by hand pulling from volunteers is a key component of the city’s IPM practices as hand pulling allows us to remove weed seeds and target areas where spray is tricky to apply or may damage unde-

sired vegetation. It has been wonderful working with MDA—they are a fantastic group of energetic people who have planted the idea of creating a “Weed Army” to send to locations to pull weeds also known as AATM. Prior to the weed pull on 7/2/19, a total of 300 pounds of weeds had been pulled at the OGRT location. Since the kiosk was installed, over 2,500 pounds of weeds have been removed from this location. AATM has been a huge benefit at the Old Gun Range Trailhead.



Boot brush station with a tray filled with gravel underneath to catch seeds and dirt.

Boot brush stations are becoming more and more popular as a tool to both raise awareness about invasive species and to reduce the spread and establishment of new infestations. Often placed at trailheads, these boot brush stations offer education about local invasive species while inviting outdoor enthusiasts to remove foreign material including seeds that can be stuck on their shoes BEFORE and AFTER their adventure into the forest.

## Boot Brush Stations: Are they effective?

Written by: Chris Evans, University of Illinois

Original article can be found at: [info.playcleango.org/blog/boot-brush-stations-are-the-effective](http://info.playcleango.org/blog/boot-brush-stations-are-the-effective)

This type of spread prevention practice is similar to equipment cleaning, using only local firewood, and inspecting boats at ramps. Spread prevention aims to change behaviors to eliminate even the slightest opportunity for an invasive species to establish. This type of management avoids the costs and time of controlling or eradicating intact infestations.

**But, are boot brush stations really effective?**

This question keeps popping up - does the simple act of swiping your feet in one of these boot brushes actually accomplish anything? And if installed, will people actually use them? In hopes of answering these questions, the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area (which is located in Illinois) and partners started a **small research project a few years ago to take a closer look at our boot brush program.**

Continued on next page...

In 2006, the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area and partners started



Grow results from soil collected under kiosks

grew the seeds found in these dirt samples for comparison. The community of seeds under the bush brushes was very different than the seeds found in dirt just along the path. So, **based on this data, we determined these brushes ARE removing a lot of seeds from boots.** A win-win!

installing boot brush stations in southern Illinois. Today, there are over 50 boot brushes on the ground at trailheads across the region. If you go for a hike in southern Illinois, chances are, you will see one of these stations and hopefully use it!

Knowing these stations were being used, our research started out as a fun project. We began by collecting the mound of dirt that accumulated under the boot brush and then looked at what seeds were found. Specifically, we cold stratified the dirt to mimic the winter rest that many seeds need, and spread out the dirt in flats. In a greenhouse, we began growing out each of the seeds to see what plants would sprout.

Surprisingly, we found 39 different species growing in those mounds of dirt, including 14 exotic plant species. Among the exotic species, **we found two of our top target invasive species growing under boot brushes**, garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) and Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)!

To expand on our research, we also took samples of dirt found along the path that outdoor recreationists would take. We

Now, while conducting this research, we noticed how fast the bristles were wearing down and how quick the mounds of dirt built up. A great problem to have because we then knew these brushes are being used, a lot. It answered the question that if installed would people use the boot brush stations. We decided to take the next step in our research and really dive into the question about people using the stations. Our research concluded that **if the boot brush stations were broken, dirty, unkept, or have weeds growing around them, people do not use them.** Regular maintenance is a must! This does add on extra cost however, the costs to maintain will out -weigh the cost for eradicating invasive species!

Here are a few simple tasks to keep your boot brush stations in top shape:

- At a minimum, **clean the boot brush signage and replace worn bristles at least once a year.**
- **Remove and properly dispose of the dirt mound** that will accumulate under them. We added a large, shallow box at the base filled with gravel to help keep the area clean and dry. Replacing

the gravel every year or two really helps keep the brush stations in nice shape.

- **Remove and properly dispose of weeds** that grow around the boot brush station.
- **Fix any broken parts**, tighten loose screws and simply keep the station sturdy and kept up.

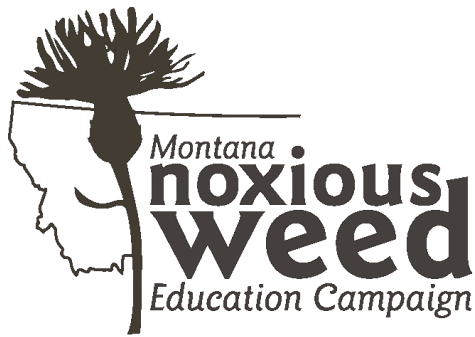
On busier trailheads, consider more regular maintenance or even installing multiple boot brush stations to prevent hikers from passing them up because of lines. No one enjoys standing in lines.

**“We found 39 different species growing in those mounds of dirt, including 14 exotic plant species.”**

Overall, our research has proven that boot brushes stations have become a great tool for raising awareness about invasive species. They have empowered many to take action and know they too have a role to play in helping to prevent the spread of these pesky hitchhikers. In conclusion, if you or your organization are considering installing a boot brush station, just know – if you install it, they will be used!



**Weeds growing under an educational boot brush kiosk.**



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The Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign (MNWEC) started in 1996 with the goal of educating the public of Montana about the economic and environmental impacts of noxious weeds, while encouraging public participation in ecologically based integrated weed management.

The MNWEC is a grassroots campaign that works directly with federal, state, county and tribal land management agencies and organizations and other non-governmental organizations to produce noxious weed educational materials.

“To educate the people of Montana about the economic and environmental impacts of noxious weeds while encouraging the public to participate in ecologically based integrated weed management.”

## Thank You AATM Partners!

- Beaverhead Deerlodge NF
- Beaverhead Trails Coalition
- Bitterroot Back Country Horsemen
- Blackfoot Challenge
- Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation
- Butte BLM Field Office
- Cabinet Back Country Horsemen
- City of Helena Parks & Rec
- City of Livingston
- Custer Gallatin NF
- Dillon BLM Field Office
- Flathead Audubon Chapter
- Helena-Lewis & Clark NF
- Kalispell DNRC
- Kootenai NF
- Lolo NF
- Makoshika State Park
- Missoula Back Country Horsemen
- Missoula County Weed District
- Montana Back Country Hunters & Anglers
- Montana Dept of Ag-PMB
- Montana WILD
- Montana Wilderness Assoc.-SW Wildlands Chapter
- Mountain Sky Guest Ranch
- MT FWP, Region 2
- MT FWP, Region 3
- MT FWP, Region 4
- Northwest Back Country Horsemen
- Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Program
- Powell County Weed District
- Rattlesnake Trail Users
- Selway-Pintlar Back Country Horsemen
- Smith River Weed Volunteers
- Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon
- Youth in Restoration



For more information about AATM or how to adopt a trailhead, contact Shantell at 406-328-4785.