



**Gallatin County Weed District  
Regular Monthly Meeting  
May 07, 2009**

**Board** members present were Bob Hofman (Chairman), Jeff Littlefield, Fred Bell, Keith Mainwaring, Craig Morgan and Commissioner Joe Skinner. **Others** present were Sam Rogers (property owner), Dennis Hengel (District Coordinator), John Ansley (Education/Enforcement Coordinator) and Rosemary Perry (Secretary).

**Minutes.** As there was not a quorum present at the April meeting the March and April Minutes were addressed. Fred Bell moved to approve both March and April Minutes as submitted, Keith Mainwaring seconded and the Minutes for the March and April meetings stand approved.

**Budget.** The list of Claims was on the Monthly Report. Fred Bell had a question on the \$1000 payment to Teton County Wyoming. Hengel explained that the payment was for the educational brochure "Why Should I Care". This is an excellent outreach tool that the Weed District uses as it addresses a broad spectrum of audiences.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

Bell asked if there had been any action regarding the acquisition of the map plotter from the City. Hengel informed him that there was another entity in line for it and due to budget constraints he had to let it go.

Bob Hofman asked about the status of the rental program. He received a call from a member of the public asking if we were no longer providing the rental program. Hengel stated that we had received calls requesting sprayers for cheatgrass control. Hengel explained that the rental sprayer program has been designed for noxious weed control. The startup date normally has been the first week of June because at this time the noxious weeds are at a growth stage that is appropriate for treatment. Hengel did not have the sprayers available for cheatgrass treatment because: (1) cheatgrass is not on the noxious weed list (2) the herbicides used for control need to be applied in the fall (after the first hard frost). If applied in the spring the herbicides will severely damage desirable grasses. In addition, Hengel said that he is reluctant to de-winterize the sprayers early enough (March) for effective cheatgrass spraying due to freezing problems. Once de-winterized there is no storage area to prevent the sprayers from freezing when cold weather arrives and the freezing cold will damage the sprayers. There was a lengthy discussion regarding the pros and cons of the rental program. The consensus of the Board was that the rental program is an essential outreach tool and that the sprayers need to be made available for general pasture spraying of nuisance weeds and for spring treatment of cheatgrass.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

- 1. Public Comment/Other.** None.
- 2. Monthly Report Q & A.** There was a question about Ansley attending a pine beetle workshop in Whitehall. This was a workshop put on by the Forest Service. Ansley attended

the workshop due to the number of questions the Weed District has been receiving about the current epidemic of pine beetles damaging trees. The Weed District is also referring questions on this topic to the Conservation District as the Conservation District has compiled a list of list of businesses to refer people to for tree spraying, removal, etc.

3. **Commissioner Report.** Commissioner Skinner remarked that he would have comments during the budget discussion.
4. **Budget.** Hengel asked the Board to address the Budget Memo that he had sent out regarding Options for meeting the guidelines of the Start-Up budget. During the pervious week both Hengel and Mainwaring had met with Commissioners Murdock and Skinner to discuss the Weed District budget. Hengel told the Board that the Weed District will be putting in their budget requests by May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Commissioner Skinner wanted the Board to realize that the Weed Department is not the only one dealing with budget cuts. He had some suggestions for operating with the financial problems and felt that these hard times will bring out innovation and time efficiency. There was lengthy discussion regarding the pros and cons of the three (3) plan options as developed by the staff (Hengel, Ansley, Perry). Option One: Retain three FTE positions, reduce spray technicians by half, and also significantly reduce operations. Hengel and Ansley would amend their workload to increase participation in spraying county properties. Option Two: Similar to Option One with the exception that Perry would also participate on spraying county properties. Option Three: Follow recommendations of the Start-up Budget and reduce permanent staff from three to two FTE's, have minor reductions in seasonal spray technicians and minor reductions in operations.

After much discussion the Board Unanimously decided on Option One with a few revisions. The following are comments from the general discussion: Littlefield moved to eliminate the cost share program for the balance of FY'09 and for the upcoming FY'10. Morgan seconded and the motion carried. In addition, the Board recommended to implement as much savings as possible in this fiscal year to be used a cash carryover for the FY 2010 budget. Littlefield had a question regarding the funding of the seasonal crew. Were the four (4) employees supposed to start in FY'09 and work through FY'10 or were we hiring a full crew now and cutting back to four (4) after July 1<sup>st</sup>? Hengel stated that we have not hired a full complement of seasonal positions in participation of the reductions in FY 2010. Currently, we have only hired eight (8) seasonal positions. If necessary, we could reduce additional positions. Commissioner Skinner asked if any county roads could be skipped for a year. Hengel stated that the county roads have no major infestations of noxious weeds and that almost any of the roads could be treated on alternative years. The county roads have scattered plants of noxious weeds with the exception of Canada thistle. There are some infestations of Canada thistle 5-10 feet in diameter also scattered along the road system. Bell stated that it has taken the Weed District a long time to get staffing to this level and he does not want to lose that. He felt that we should eliminate the cost share program, cut back on seasonal spray techs and maintain the FTE's. Bell also expressed a concern that the Commissioners and Finance need to understand that if the Board cuts back to 4 seasonal spray techs in order to balance the budget, the savings need to stay within the weed budget. Morgan stated that we should keep the FTE's and cut back on the seasonal help. He also stated that he would like to see the limited boom spray program continued and the District should ask for extra chemical. There was discussion regarding helicopter treatments in rural areas. This is a cheaper method of treatment. Mainwaring stated that we should go with Option One and plan a fall spraying for

whatever isn't treated in the spring. Littlefield stated that we should go with Option One as it is hard to replace a trained workforce. He is more optimistic about a budget turn around. Hofman stated that he would like to see Option One as he does not want to lose trained staff. Hofman suggested that the Administrative Secretary could remain full time during the summer and even hours out in the winter to meet ¾ time levels. Hofman would also like to see the gravel pit program continue.

Recap: Overall, the Board stated that to meet the budget reductions of the Start-Up budget the Weed District should retain all three FTE positions, reduce seasonal positions, reduce operations, implement as much cash carryover in FY 2009, eliminate the Cost Share Program, and continue with the Rental Sprayer Program. Also if necessary, reduce the Administrative Assistant position to ¾ time. However, the Board decided to request an additional \$10,000 so that the current funding levels of the herbicide budget be maintained. Hengel stated that he would take the Board recommendations to Blackman and develop the budget within the discussed guidelines.

#### **5. Round Table.**

- Hofman brought up the topic of moving the office over to the shop area. Bell has had the offer of a free 14x70 mobile home. The staff needs to check on moving and installation costs.
- Hengel remarked that Gallatin County has received stimulus package money for energy efficiency projects and he has submitted five (5) proposals to the county for reducing energy costs at the Weed Shop:
  - a. Lighting replacement
  - b. Replacement of the old furnace
  - c. Replacement of the old hot water heater
  - d. Replacement of the overhead doors w/insulated doors
  - e. Installation of Cor-Bon insulation
- Hengel stated that he had a weed booth at the Back Country Horseman (BCH) workshop at the Fairgrounds on Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. The BCH was conducting an equine safety workshop and had requested that the Weed District have our weed booth at the event. The BCH are strong advocates of protecting Montana's natural resources from noxious weeds and the weed booth was very well received.
- Ansley stated that he would be working a station at the Farm Fair (May 13-14, Ed Brainard's ranch) again this year. 600 students (4<sup>th</sup> grade) will attend the fair.
- Ansley and Hengel will participate in the Watershed Festival (Saturday, May 16) at the Fish Technology Center by the "M."

The meeting adjourned at 3.30PM.

The next meeting will be June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary Perry, Secretary  
Dennis Hengel, Coordinator