

**Stillwater Valley Watershed Council**  
**PO Box 112**  
**Absarokee, MT 59001**

# Stillwater Valley Watershed Council

## Stillwater Valley Watershed Council

**ABSAROKEE**

**FISHTAIL**

**DEAN**

**NYE**



**We are a volunteer group of local residents and interested representatives who are working together to enhance the quality of our rural Montana lifestyle by protecting, restoring and conserving our abundant natural resources, through good stewardship and community involvement for this and future generations.**

## How the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council got its start....

The Derby Fire impact zone has gained attention by landowners, agency personnel and concerned sportspersons and thus became the catalyst for the development of the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council (SVWC). This council was established when volunteers and other concerned citizens realized that the impacts of the Derby Fire reached beyond the burn zone and included adjacent ranch and public lands. The SVWC has expanded from the original goals of noxious weed control to looking at the entire watershed and taking a comprehensive approach to the cause and effect of land changes. This has resulted in increased participation by government agencies, non-profit organizations and private land owners (both large acreage and small lot owners) along the Stillwater River and its tributaries as well as the formation of numerous committees within the Watershed Council.

## CURRENT GOALS OF THE STILLWATER VALLEY WATERSHED COUNCIL

**NOXIOUS WEEDS** ~ Reduce and control the noxious weed population in the Stillwater River corridor. To truly make an impact and save the Stillwater River Watershed from being invaded by noxious weeds, we need help from all residents and visitors to this precious ecosystem.



**WATER QUALITY** ~ Improve the quality and supply of water in the Stillwater River Watershed. Balance water needs and availability, both recreational and agricultural, through shared sacrifices and water conservation and contamination prevention.

**FOREST HEALTH** ~ Mitigate fire by improving the health of our forest.



## What does the SVWC have to offer? A message from SVWC members...

If you are interested in, or want to learn about your community and get to know your neighbors then you need to get involved in a community group. The Stillwater Valley Watershed Council is a great one to join, or at least visit....we are VERY welcoming! Bud and I have worked our way up the learning curve in a hurry, and it happened after attending a watershed group meeting. The education we have received thus far has been a fun adventure. We have learned that a "watershed" is a term used to describe an area that is fed and nurtured by a particular water source, and that water is the mainstay of any environment. We have learned a lot about noxious weeds and invasive species and the damage they can cause. We've participated in "weed walks", informational picnics, work and learn floats down the Stillwater River, and observed helicopter spraying of noxious weeds in the valley; all in the short time since we joined the SVWC. We have also learned more about living and interfacing with the natural and wonderful wilderness that brought us back to the Stillwater Valley.

With so many people seeking retreat and respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, we need to make sure we learn how to preserve our environment so that we, and future generations, can enjoy living/visiting this last best place! The Stillwater Valley Watershed Council encourages the education and active participation of members and others living or visiting the area to maintain the health and wealth of our pristine rivers, lush forests and prairies and abundant and diverse wildlife.

Please come and visit us, you never know who you might meet or what you might learn!

*Bud and Becky Chenault*

## NOXIOUS WEED TRUST FUND GRANT UPDATE:

In 2010, seven landowners in conjunction with the Stillwater County Weed District received a matching grant for \$32,000 to control noxious weeds in the Midnight Canyon-Trout Creek Weed Management area. 27,000 acres encompassed this project where leafy spurge and knapweed spread as a result of the Derby Fire. Heliworks, from Deer Lodge, was contracted to control the majority noxious weeds on the treacherous terrain. This project will continue through 2011.



Leafy Spurge infestation, June 2010 - before control



Leafy Spurge infestation, October 2010 - after control



Helicopter spraying, summer 2010

## High school student volunteers to monitor flea beetle control on leafy spurge

I am Jamie Nelson, a sophomore from Luther. I am pleased to be doing a project in conjunction with the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council on controlling leafy spurge using biological control. This project began back in May when we released different species of flea beetles into varied leafy spurge infested locations. Throughout the summer we monitored the success of the flea beetle on the control of the leafy spurge. Observing the beetle release sites confirmed that the flea beetles were doing their job as there was an obvious increase in spurge mortality. We will again go back to each site in the spring to determine the prevalence of beetles in these areas. This project will span over several years in order to more accurately monitor how well the introduced flea beetles control the leafy spurge and also document their movement and survivability. I am excited to see the progress in the coming year! **Jamie**



Jamie releasing flea beetles on a leafy spurge plant

**Stillwater County is a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family. We hope this program will help enhance the quality of your life. Respect your neighbors' livelihood and property, and be aware that your actions impact your neighbors, human and otherwise.**

## HOW YOU CAN HELP....

**The Stillwater Valley Watershed Council relies on people like you to match project funds and provide essential operating support. In order for you to benefit from SVWC's programs you are encouraged to become a member. Annual dues are \$25.00 and must be paid by March 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.**

**Please consider donating to our non-profit, tax deductible organization.  
Send membership or support to SVWC, PO Box 112, Absarokee, MT 59001.**

*WE ARE TRULY THANKFUL TO THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN OR ARE CONSIDERING A GIFT!*

## Chairman's Message, continued from page 1

The SVWC has already grabbed the attention of several non-profit organizations that have accepted our grant applications and generously funded our group. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Noxious Weed Trust Fund and Watershed Planning Assistant Grant have been our largest financial partners to date, with matching funds to the grants coming from our Stillwater Valley neighbors who have jumped on the watershed wagon. In 2010 these funds were used for extensive helicopter spraying, in addition to the ground spraying done by both contractors and private land owners. The valley is being blanketed by spurge bugs that were purchased at a great discount through the negotiating skills of Jim Visser. These bugs have been distributed by mule and horseback, ardent hikers, and accidental tripping by some of our more clumsy volunteers.

A significant amount of time was spent on 4-wheelers by Noel Keogh, Doug Robinette and Paul Donohoe surveying and mapping the many miles of fire breaks created during the Derby Fire. This was especially important, as new stands of noxious weeds were discovered and sprayed during their inspection. These patches of weeds were most likely introduced by firefighting equipment from other parts of the state and nation.

The SVWC succeeded in mixing business with pleasure on several occasions. One float trip involved numerous rafts launched from different areas to map noxious weeds located along the entire length of the Stillwater River from the Stillwater Mine to the Yellowstone River. A second float trip was organized by Noel Keogh to pull weeds along the shoreline from the Stillwater Mine down to the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Cliff Swallow Fishing Access. Upon arriving at our destination, one of the participating land owners invited us to his cabin for snacks and refreshments. Another event organized by several of the land owners in the Riddle Cliff sub-division bordering the Stillwater River was a road side "Weed Awareness" picnic where free soda, burgers, hot dogs and dessert was offered to all interested parties that stopped to see the display boards and many brochures regarding weed management and identification. These were all great days and new friendships were developed due to a common interest of improving the environmental health of the valley.

Our efforts in 2010 focused on Trout Creek and Bad Canyon. In regard to 2011, we have submitted another grant request to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for the Beartooth Front tributaries located to the east of the Stillwater River extending to the East Rosebud. More educational events are also planned!

BILL

## SVWC's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pitchfork Fondue & Auction Fundraiser

On August 14<sup>th</sup> the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual fundraiser event. There was a great turnout of Stillwater Valley Watershed residents and friends for the pitchfork fondue BBQ that took place at David and Sandra Joys' along the upper reaches of the Stillwater River. A lot of fun was had with the friendly competition of the weed rodeo held prior to the dinner. Contestants got the opportunity to hone in their skills of identifying and roping weeds as well as going on a weed scavenger hunt, learning and meeting new people along the way. The fundraiser portion was a huge success as numerous donated items were auctioned off. An original Tom Wolfe oil painting was the top selling item which fetched \$1,400. Thank you to Noel Keogh for his stellar auctioneering skills as well as the generous donors and purchasers who helped the watershed council to raise over \$4,000. These funds will help support our future endeavors throughout the watershed.

The fun didn't stop at the fondue, the following day a float and pull took place on the Upper Stillwater River. Yet another competition was held to see which raft could pick the most knapweed (on a pound basis). Numerous rafts filled with enthusiastic weed fighters participated in the daylong event.



## Mountain Pine Beetles in Montana. What can you do?

By Dr. Peter Kolb

The bark beetle outbreak experienced across the entire western portion of North America is the result of multiple ecological factors converging at the same time. Under what is characterized as the average forest and climatic conditions of the past century, the pine beetle exists as a chronic population within pine forests, colonizing and killing trees that are incapable of defending themselves due to a variety of physiological, genetic or environmental factors. Depending on the populations of these pests, persistent bark beetle populations may be kept in check.

One of the most important factors affecting bark beetle populations is climate. Under harsh winter conditions (-30 to -40 F) overwintering beetles or larvae experience significant mortality. Cool, moist summers can reduce beetle activity and larval development. When climatic conditions cycle into warmer and dryer trends, beetle populations are favored with less winter mortality and faster, more efficient reproductive cycles. With mild winters, early springs and longer summers, perfect conditions for bark beetle survival and reproduction are combined with a landscape covered with a large population of mature host trees. The stress of overcrowding coupled with drought equates to the perfect bark beetle environmental conditions.

Management solutions for this epidemic have been demonstrated. Multiple studies have shown that thinning forest stands to alleviate the impacts of light and water competition has resulted in increased tree vigor and a successful decline in beetle populations. Decreasing the size of similar tree age and size patches of host trees has been successful as well because younger age trees are not suitable hosts for the majority of bark beetle species. Other resolutions include increasing the diversity of tree species in forest patches or using pheromone traps to control the populations. Nonetheless, this epidemic needs to be controlled. Forests suffering from large scale bark beetle outbreaks accumulate significant amounts of dead wood. It is estimated that trees under the attack of mountain pine beetles topple over within 2-10 years, creating an abundance of fuel for wildfires.

Dr Peter Kolb, Montana State University Extension Forestry Specialist is both an applied researcher and educator; the above excerpts were taken from Dr. Kolb's 2009 Hearing before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power about the "Mountain Pine Beetle: Strategies for Protecting the West". The entire article is available at [www.westinstenv.org](http://www.westinstenv.org).

**Dr. Kolb will be speaking about the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic at our January 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.**

**Please come join us!**

Year	Acres Burned	Acres Severely Affected by Bark Beetles
2000	1,160,145	103,920
2001	146,819	223,892
2002	110,309	450,134
2003	736,809	493,785
2004	18,445	730,782
2005	103,294	1,213,602
2006	1,017,118	1,000,289
2007	778,079	948,517
2008	123,943	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,224,961</b>	<b>5,164,921</b>

# Stillwater Valley Watershed Council

## WINTER 2011 NEWSLETTER

### OUR MISSION

We will provide an open forum in which all interested parties may work in a collaborative effort to sustain our rural quality of life and protect and enhance our natural resources. We are committed to research and educating our Valley residents and the public about our watershed and the steps we can take to preserve and maintain the integrity of the river, the land and the beauty of our Valley. We will endeavor to bring together public, private and government resources, funding and grants to achieve our goals.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bill Mytton, Chairman  
Noel Keogh, Vice Chairman  
Theo Yanzick, Secretary  
Judy Bostedt, Secretary  
Greg Frokjer, Treasurer  
JO Hash  
Tom Kirch  
Mike Lorash  
Sandra Peck  
Doug Robinette  
Tim Schaff  
Olaf Sherwood

### CONTACT

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406.570.4905

### Message from the Chairman, Bill Mytton

The initial impetus for the SVWC formation was the Federal Government's Emergency Fund resulting from the Derby Fire. The funds were made available to land owners in order to address re-fencing, re-seeding grasses, cutting of burnt timber, and noxious weed mapping and control in order to get this area of Montana back into a viable position for the historical ranching and recreational communities that inhabit the valley. After the Federal Emergency Funds were put into place, many people involved with that effort realized that the issues resulting from the fire and past land management strategies would require continued stewardship in order to keep the Stillwater Valley as one of those "Last Best Places" we hear about in Montana. Hence, the previous committees and groups coalesced into what is now known as the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council. The area of interest includes tributaries of the Stillwater River that define the entire watershed from the mountain tops to the confluence at the Yellowstone River. *Continued on page 3.....*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**January 20<sup>th</sup> ~ Potluck chili feed @ Nye Fire Hall**

**5:00 pm Board of Director Meeting (open to the public)**

**6:00 pm Dinner**

**6:30 pm Council meeting with speaker**

**Speaker: Dr. Peter Kolb, MT Extension Forestry Specialist**

**\*Addressing the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic**

**February 2011 ~ Pesticide Applicator Education Day**

**Summer 2011 ~ Spray Day for small tract landowners**

**Summer 2011 ~ Watershed Tour**

If you would like to help plan any of the above events or have future project ideas please let us know!