South Douglas News

South Douglas Conservation District

Summer 2020

Assisting cooperators to adopt, implement and promote conservation practices which encourage good land stewardship and the protection of natural resources.

SPRING CHIPPING DAY—A SUCCESS

We chipped for 30 landowners, June 10 and 11. Starting in Waterville, the second day we finished close to Rock Island. This free service reduces fuels that could catch fire in and around homes. The Wildland Urban Interface is a term to describe the border between human development and wild vegetation. Many factors—expanding housing developments, drought conditions, summer lightening storms and human inattention—can aggravate fire risk. Landowners can do the work of limbing up trees and cleaning brush into manageable piles that the chipping company can readily convert into mulch for home use. Or composting.

We will have another chipping event in the fall. **We would like to devote one day to Badger Mountain residents**. As one of the few forest stands in Douglas County, it is an area that could use some fuels reduction. This (did I mention free?) service could help protect buildings and forest settings. Talk to your neighbors to spread the word. More tips for preparing for fire in this newsletter.

Contact us at 509-745-9160 for more information.

What is a biocontrol? See Page 2

The NCW Fair may be cancelled for the year, but they are planning a virtual livestock auction to support our 4-H and FFA students. Watch their website or Facebook page for more information.

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WHAT IS BIOCONTROL?

Biological control is the application of one living organism to control another living organism and usually involves an active human role. It is a self-sustaining and long term treatment method for treating invasive plants. The insects used as a biocontrol are plant specific and only attack certain plants. There is less cost compared to other methods of control, such as pesticides. While not completely eliminating the invasive plant, it can be used for control. Continuing monitoring by the land owner is necessary to determine the success of the program.

Most of the biocontrol projects are for larger infestations, so the control bugs can multiply and continue to feed on the weeds. The bugs are normally not native to the United States, but neither are the plants they feed on. Diffuse knapweed (see related article) was first discovered in 1907 in an alfalfa field in Washington State, but is a native of the Eastern Mediterranean countries. So that is where the bugs originate. Insectaries, or bug nurseries, have been established to grow the populations locally.

Biocontrols are available for many of our invasive weeds—knapweeds, dalmation toadflax, thistles, with mixed results. If you are interested in these controls let us know. If you are in the Foster Creek Conservation District boundaries, give them a call. They have had a successful program for several years.

COST SHARE PROJECTS

Most of SDCD funds go to cost share projects throughout the district. We have funded windbreaks, livestock waterers, dams, terraces, fuels reduction, irrigation upgrades and more. The projects are designed to improve water quality, decrease erosion, and protect natural resources within the district. For example, designing a dam up on the Waterville Plateau can not only keep the needed moisture on the field, but prevent run-off that could flow downstream and eventually hit the Pacific Ocean. Granted that probability is small, but if you live near streams and rivers, the chance of run-off is greater.

<u>This Year's Projects:</u>

- Dam to prevent erosion on edge of field.
- Grassed waterway to slow run-off and keep the moisture in the field.
- Fuels reduction—removing fire prone junipers and replacing with grasses to prevent erosion. Volunteers can help complete the project.
- Upgrade from standard orchard to micro sprinklers.

If you have a project in mind or need assistance in deciding what to do, give us a call.

BIOCONTROLS FOR KNAPWEED
KNAPWEED WEEVIL

What is it?

Larinus minutus
Coleoptera: Curculionidae

Larinus minutus (seedhead weevil), a native weevil of Europe, was cleared and first released in the United States in 1991. The weevil has been released in several states, including Washington, as part of a biological control program to control **spotted** and **diffuse** knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa* Lam. and *C. diffusa* Lam.).

What do they look like?

L. minutus is a brown-grey weevil with a very large, bulbous snout. *L. minutus* measures 4-5 mm in length. They are strong fliers and disperse throughout the entire knapweed patch in several years. When the adults first emerge from the knapweed seedhead they are light grey with some yellow fuzz on their bodies.

L. minutus attacks both spotted and diffuse knapweed with a slight preference for diffuse knapweed.

Life Cycle

Adult *L. minutus* weevils emerge in late spring from the ground litter where they have been hibernating. The female weevil must feed on the flowers of the knapweed for ovary development. Therefore egg laying begins after the knapweed has started to bloom. The eggs hatch within three days and the larvae begin feeding on the flower and migrate to the seeds and commence feeding. The seeds are consumed and when development of the larvae is complete the larva pupates and emerges from the seedhead as a new adult. Development from egg to adult takes about four weeks. The newly emerged adults feed on the plant foliage and eventually go into the soil and ground litter to hibernate for the winter.

Do they work?

L. minutus larvae destroy up to one hundred percent of the seed in an infested knapweed seedhead. This weevil along with other seed feeders will further reduce the seed that spotted and diffuse knapweed are dependent on for reproduction, dispersal, and survival.

Where can I get them?

The Washington Department of Agriculture has availability and you can also contact us and we can help.

Conservation

Release sites need to be preserved in the future, not only for natural weevil rearing, but also as a food source for the biological agent. Please remember that biological control does not eradicate the invasive plant. The weevil and target plant will reach a point of equilibrium and co-exist. As the population of the weevil increases you can collect weevils and relocate them to new target areas. I and Dr. Bob Gillespie collected and introduce these weevils on Brays Landing in Orondo, WA in 2014 on my property. We released about 150 weevils. Today this weevil covers acres of land in this area. The weevil does travel on its own and has proven to be an excellent controlling agent for knapweed.

Citation Sources:
by R.F. Lang, USDA-APHIS-PPQ, Bozeman Biocontrol Facility, Forestry Sciences Laboratory, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717- 0278.
And personal experience and writing by Michael S Lesky

FIRE SEASON IS HERE

Whether your home is in the forest or on the edge of the city, you can follow several steps to defend your home from wildfire. We are all at home more this year and it is a good time to take a look around.

- Rake leaves, dead limbs and twigs. Remove any leaves and litter from under structures. Clear all flammable vegetation.
- Remove any branches that extend over the roof. Limb up your trees fifteen feet off the ground. South Douglas CD provides a free chipping service spring and fall to get rid of those branches.
- Consider fire resistant trees and shrubs—normally deciduous that have more moisture.
- Stack firewood at least 100 feet from the house. Clear any combustible material within 20 feet of structures.
- Mow grass regularly. Or plant a pollinator lawn to promote diversity.
- Ask the power or cable company to clear branches from powerlines.
- Store gasoline, oily rags and other flammable materials in approved safety cans a safe distance away from the base of buildings.
- Clear a 10 foot area around propane tanks and barbeques.
- Make sure you have hoses that reach to the far corners of your property if need arises.
- Review your homeowner's insurance policy and prepare/update a list of your home's contents.

Free Firewise Assessments

We can come to your property and evaluate your fire risks and strengths. The 15-30 minute review can alert you to simple things you can do to reduce fire hazards. Call us and we can schedule an appointment.

POLLINATOR WEEK—JUNE 21-27, 2020

Pollinators are responsible for 1 out of 3 bites of food we eat each day. But pollinators are struggling for survival. There are many reasons for this but more nectar and pollen sources provided by more flowering plants and trees will improve their numbers. Not just bees, but butterflies, birds, bats and other pollinators across the country will benefit if you take the **Pollinator Pledge**:

1. Grow a variety of bee-friendly flowers that bloom from spring through fall.

2. Protect and provide bee nests and caterpillar host plants.

3. Avoid using pesticides, especially insecticides.

4. Talk to my neighbors about the importance of pollinators and their habitat.

Check out the Xerces Society website for excellent information on pollinator habitat and encouragement.

South Douglas Conservation District

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Please Remember to Recycle