

OUTDOORS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2023 | helenair.com | SECTION C



Bullfrogs are native to the central and eastern United States, but invasive in Montana.
BILL BUCHANAN, USFWS



Emerald ash borer
USDA



Populations of feral swine in Canada have come increasingly close to Montana's northern border, and officials have deployed an early detection strategy to try to find them.
NRCS

INVASIVE SPECIES watch list

Montana's top 10 includes bullfrogs and saltcedar

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Invasive species come in all shapes and sizes, affecting Montana's ecosystems as they may outcompete native plants and wildlife.

The Montana Invasive Species Council, a governor-appointed group of scientists, resource managers and outdoor industry professionals, recently released "Montana's Invasive Species to Watch List" ahead of National Invasive Species Week running from Feb. 20-26. The list came out of the committee following a state-wide summit of experts last year.

Many states and provinces maintain a "top 10" invasive species list, said Bryce Christiaens, manager of the Missoula County Weed District and chair of the council. This is the first such list for Montana, which will be used as an educational tool for people who live, work and recreate in the state, he said.

"The list represents that broad spectrum of invasive species threats to Montana's economy and biodiversity," Christiaens said. "Unfortunately, they are typically introduced as a result of human actions or behavior. This list allows us to target messaging around changing behavior, and tying it to a specific species and its economic threat. It also allows us to highlight the excellent work

that managers across local, state, federal and tribal jurisdictions are doing to survey, prevent, or manage those species and their threats."

The council discussed the list at length during its meeting last December as it focused in on species that not only present threats themselves, but also highlight a category of invasives and particular ecosystem types that are impacted. The purpose of the list is not to necessarily to inform experts working on detection and prevention, but to raise awareness of both widely and some lesser-known invasive species, members said.

The recently released list includes nine species. Liz Lodman, who administers the council, said they were still considering fish species moved illegally, commonly called "bucket biology." Some species are already in Montana, while officials are trying to prevent others.

Bullfrog

Bullfrogs are native to the central and eastern United States, but invasive in Montana. In addition to preying on native wildlife, they can carry the chytrid fungus that may infect other frogs and amphibians. A removal project is currently underway in the western part of the state.

Eastern heath snail

Found in Cascade and Judith Basin counties, the eastern heath snail feeds on and may contaminate crops as well as clog agricultural equipment.



Above: Flowering rush is a reed-like invasive plant with pink flowers that can grow up to 5 feet tall and has been detected in Flathead Lake and parts of the Clark Fork River.

GAIL HAMPSHIRE

Left: Throughout the spring and summer a saltcedar shrub produced thousands of small white to pink flowers. It is possible for a mature saltcedar plant to produce 500,000 seeds per plant. Saltcedar seeds spread very easily due to the tuft of hair attached to them, this hair allows them to float via air and water.

RAVALLI COUNTY WEED DISTRICT PHOTO



Emerald ash borer

While not yet present in Montana, in other parts of the country the emerald ash borer has killed ash trees planted in urban areas. Officials have targeted firewood as one potential way the insect spreads. Preventing firewood importation from out of state is

needed to keep from transporting the insect and other pests.

Feral swine

Where feral swine have taken hold in the U.S. and Canada they have been nothing short of destructive. Populations have exploded across the southern U.S.

with extensive damage to cropland and wildlife habitat. Populations in Canada have come increasingly close to Montana's northern border, and officials have deployed an early detection strategy to try to find them quickly.

Please see **INVASIVE**, Page C2



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OUTDOORS JUST FOR KIDS

Collared cougar tracked swimming to island



Cats don't like water. At least that's the belief. If you have ever tried to bathe a cat, you may know this for a fact.

One cougar in the Pacific Northwest has dunked that fairy tale. The male cougar had been captured and fitted with a collar as part of the Olympic Cougar Project. The collar sends signals to scientists, showing where the big cat traveled.

This collared cougar swam about a half mile across the ocean to reach an island. The scientists then figured out how many other islands a lion could

reach by swimming that far in the Northwest. They found more than 6,000 that a swimming cougar could reach by "island hopping."

Cougars have also been seen on four other islands that are about a mile-and-a-quarter from another island or the mainland. Given that distance, another 775 islands were estimated to be within the reach of swimming cougars.

It's maybe not surprising they are good swimmers when you remember male cougars can weigh up to 170 pounds and are strong enough to kill larger animals like elk and mule deer. Female cougars

may weigh up to 120 pounds.

If cougars aren't afraid to swim across ocean waters, it's a safe guess that neither rivers or lakes would stop a cougar from going where it wanted to travel.

The research in the Pacific Northwest, in this case the state of Washington, was done by Panthera, a group dedicated to protecting wild cats. Other names for cougar include mountain lion and puma. To learn more about large wild cats, check out Panthera's website at panthera.org.

— Brett French, french@billingsgazette.com



JENNIFER STRICKLAND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

A plot of land filled with the invasive plants *ventenata* (the grass) and sulfur cinquefoil (the yellow flower.)

Invasive

From C1

Flowering rush

Flowering rush is a reed-like invasive plant with pink flowers that can grow up to 5 feet tall and has been detected in Flathead Lake and parts of the Clark Fork River. Invasive aquatic plants degrade habitat and may block irrigation infrastructure. Officials say cleaning watercraft and preventing aquarium and ornamental pond releases is important to preventing the spread of invasive aquatic plants.

Saltcedar

Saltcedar is a tall woody shrub found along the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. As it infests riparian areas the plant may displace native willows and cottonwood. It comes with a host of maladies, including increased soil salinity, high water usage and in dense stands, alteration of stream channels and floodplains.

Zebra mussels

Montana responded swiftly when larvae of aquatic invasive mussels were detected in two waterbodies in 2016. And while no detections have occurred since, the risk to the state's waterways and the potential of hundreds of millions of dollars in impacts if

they invade has led to the state continuing to remain vigilant. Watercraft inspection stations, promoting clean and dry watercraft, as well as testing continues to be the focus of prevention efforts.

Ventenata

A noxious winter annual grass, *ventenata* is found from northwestern to south-central and southeastern Montana. As a smaller grass it can easily go undetected, but like many invasives it can degrade rangeland and pastures and decrease agricultural production.

Legislators are only considering one policy bill this session dealing with invasive species. Sen. Mark Noland's Senate Bill 293 would allow posters on invasive species to be displayed at Montana's rest areas, creating another tool in the state's publicity campaign.

"I had quite the eye opener to what this potential danger could do to our state," Noland said of his bill. "I was scared about this ... we could lose everything. So I want you to remember that, we could lose everything, so what we're doing in this bill is we're trying to make awareness, it's education."

Tom Kuglin is the deputy editor for the Lee Newspapers State Bureau. His coverage focuses on outdoors, recreation and natural resources.

GET INSIDE

Exploring a world of music

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Who knew the lyre was so popular? The stringed harp-like instrument was developed in Iraq around 3,300 BCE. It also spread to Greece and Africa, reinvented and adapted to different materials as it migrated around the globe.

Want to know more? Visit the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix where the human passion for music is celebrated in a unique center. Visitors can see and hear a collection of 5,300 instruments on display from around the world.

"The Geographic Galleries focus on major world regions: Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, Latin America, Europe, and United States/Canada," according to the museum's website. "Many of the instruments displayed are rare examples, the finest of their kind, historically significant, or part of distinctive musical cultures. Video monitors

with footage of musical performances show instruments played in their original contexts."

Inside the Artist Gallery, visitors can see instruments and displays featuring artifacts from the collections of Elvis Presley, reggae musician Bob Marley and drummer Buddy Rich.

The craft and artistry that goes into some of the instruments is as creative as the variety of sounds that are produced. It is so overwhelming, I'd recommend taking either a full day or two to fully appreciate the collection.

The museum is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. A one-day pass is \$20 for adults. After checking in, guests are given headphones that allow them to tune in at each display and hear a variety of music. The museum also features a 300-seat concert hall.

If you have to be inside for a day, this is a fun place to do it. For more information or to plan a visit, log on to mim.org.



BRETT FRENCH, BILLINGS GAZETTE

This aged stringed instrument from the province of Baluchestan in Iran is called a gheychak or ghaychak. It is also played in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

YOUR SHOT



LES BLAZEVIICH PHOTO

Les Blazeovich photographed these two mallards reflected from their log perch in a Missoula pond.

WESTERN MONTANA ICE FISHING REPORT

MATTHEW KIEWIET matthew.kiewiet@lee.net

Top Picks

Bitterroot Lake: Kokanee fishing has been going good at both the north and south ends of the lake. A good place to start would be in 100 feet of water. Look for most bites in that magic 40-foot range below the ice. Early mornings have been best using Swedish Pimples or Hali jigs with glow hooks. Be sure to know the kokanee regulations on Bitterroot before you head out. — *Chancey and Dave's Fish Camp, Evergreen*

Holter Reservoir: Perch action continues to be great out from the BLM boat ramp, Log Gulch and Departure Point while using Swedish Pimples, Hali or other flashy jigs and maggots near the bottom in 25-45 feet of water. Some nice rainbows are being caught at the Gates of the Mountains while using various ice jigs tipped with crawlers in shallow water. A few burbot are being caught while using cut bait near the bottom at night. The Gates of the Mountains has 10-12 inches of ice and the rest of Holter has around 15 inches of ice. — *FWP, Helena*

Around western Montana

Ashley Lake: The smaller kokanee are still biting, with limits being somewhat common especially during the early morning hours. Tie on a Swedish pimple, Hali jig or something similar, and start fishing in about 100 feet of water. Most bites have been from fish cruising the water column about 40 feet below the surface. There have also been some perch coming out of Ashley while fishing the bottom in



COURTESY PHOTO

Fred enjoys a productive day of ice fishing on Georgetown Lake earlier this year. Dog dad Carver Fishman says Fred "loves to fish."

about 40 feet of water. — *Chancey and Dave's Fish Camp, Evergreen*

Canyon Ferry Reservoir: Rainbows are being caught 15 feet deep out from the Silos and around Duck Creek while using silver and pink or red jigs with worms or maggots. Walleye and perch are being caught between Duck

Creek and Confederate in 35-45 feet of water while using pink, red or yellow Hali jigs or spoons with red hooks tipped with night crawlers, perch eyes or maggots. An occasional ling is being caught along with the perch and walleye on the bottom. Stay away from the pressure ridges on the south end

If you go ...

Conditions and ice thickness can change. Due to deadline constraints, these are not up-to-the-minute reports.

Check with a local tackle shop or trusted source while planning a trip.

of the reservoir. There is over 20 inches of ice from the Silos down to the ponds, 18-20 inches of ice around Duck Creek and the north end has 3-5 inches of ice, but it is pulling away from shore around Shannon. — *FWP, Helena*

Flathead Lake: Lakers have been on the chew near the west shore around state park as you head toward the mouth. Drop a big, whole dead fish down to the bottom or pitch a jig with cut bait in anywhere from 50-100, and you'll have a good shot at those lake trout. There may be a few pike to be had but overall, pike fishing has slowed down quite a bit across the board. — *Chancey and Dave's Fish Camp, Evergreen*

Georgetown Lake: Even before the recent cold snap, Georgetown had 20-plus inches of ice and 14 inches of snow cover. It's been limit-style rainbow trout fishing, with both rainbows and salmon cruising around in the 4-12 foot range below the ice. The lake trout bite at Silver Lake was completely shut off. — *Duane's IceFishing Rentals*

Hauser Reservoir: A few perch are being found out on Lake Helena while using white and pink Hali jigs with maggots or crawlers. Most

rainbows continue to be caught at the Causeway Bridge area and Black Sandy while using various colored jigs or ice flies tipped with crawlers 6-8 feet below the ice. An occasional burbot is being found from the Causeway Arm to Black Sandy while using cut bait near the bottom. Sixteen to 18 inches of ice has been reported. — *FWP, Helena*

Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir: A few kokanee and perch are being picked up while using Hali or Swedish pimple type ice jigs tipped with red maggots or corn in 16-45 feet of water. Sixteen to 18 inches of ice has been reported. — *FWP, Helena*

Lake Mary Ronan: If you're looking for some fish to filet for the frying pan, look no further. The perch bite has been very dependable with most fish averaging about a half-pound. Over the course of the day, anglers will pull in a stand-out or two that will be pushing a pound or more. Find a spot in about 35-40 feet of water and give it a try. You might also pick up a kokanee. If you catch a pike, FWP asks that anglers kill and report it. — *Chancey and Dave's Fish Camp, Evergreen*

Whitefish Lake: The lake trout bite has been getting better and better. Whitefish continue to show up in great numbers as well toward the state park side. Forty feet below the ice has been the magic depth most days. There is plenty of ice. — *Ray Ward, Kalispell*

Matthew Kiewiet is the managing editor for the Independent Record and The Montana Standard.