



File Code: 2900

Date: October 21, 2013

Patricia Murdo
Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Ms. Murdo:

The U.S. Forest Service supports the Montana Noxious Weed Seed-free Forage Program (NWSFF), and the purpose of this letter is to emphasize the importance of this program for weed prevention on national forests and other lands in the state. A strong NWSFF program is critical to the implementation of sound and cost-effective cooperative weed management for the following reasons:

- 1) It is an essential part of the integrated weed prevention program that protects Montana's agricultural and recreational interests.
- 2) Neighboring states (Idaho, Wyoming, North Dakota) maintain state NWSFF programs, which in turn benefit Montana by reducing the risk of importation of infested hay containing new invader weed species not yet present in the state. By having a similarly strong program in Montana, we are contributing to a more effective, broader program that is critical for the prevention of weed spread across state lines.
- 3) Short-term cost savings, through curtailment of the program, would produce a higher probability of long-term cost increases caused by the introduction and further spread of noxious weeds. Further spread would threaten agricultural, public and private lands throughout the state and result in increased control costs for all land owners and managers. Prevention is always more economical than control once weeds have become established in previously weed-free areas. This is particularly true in wilderness and other backcountry areas, where costs for weed management are inherently higher.

While the funds from our pesticide program have declined, the Montana national forests contribute varying amounts of time throughout the year from about 162 professionals and technicians with labor and materials valued at approximately \$105,000 annually. These contributions help implement the Montana NWSFF program in a variety of direct ways that include:

- 1) National Forest weed managers and field staff provide information, education, compliance inspections and prevention services to outfitters and guides, contractors, hunter groups/individuals and numerous Backcountry Horsemen chapters.
- 2) Weed program leaders and staff work with county weed districts to successfully implement the program.



- 3) Public education, including our annual funding contribution to the Montana Noxious Weed Education Campaign, which is used in part to pay for education materials related to the NWSFF program.
- 4) Law enforcement, which provides on-the-ground support for successful implementation of the program on all national forests in Montana.
- 5) Wilderness rangers provide on-the-ground compliance inspections, information and education to backcountry users regarding NWSFF requirements, as well as key enforcement coverage in remote areas and trailheads.
- 6) ATV rangers, recreation and campground technicians are trained in working with stock users and help to reinforce the weed seed-free forage message with forest users, as well as providing compliance inspections.
- 7) Resource professionals such as range managers, soil scientists, hydrologists and botanists are key players in the implementation, monitoring and quality control for the use of weed seed-free straw and mulch during revegetation, restoration, road stabilization, post-timber sale and erosion control projects, as well as numerous post-fire emergency rehabilitation projects.

Region 1 of the U.S. Forest Service strongly encourages the state of Montana to maintain an operational NWSFF program. It is an essential weed prevention tool tied to an effective interagency program that provides direct on-the-ground economic and ecological benefits.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Please contact Steve Shelly, (406) 329-3041, sshelly@fs.fed.us, with any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas A. Schmidt (for)
FAYE L. KRUEGER
Regional Forester

cc: Steve Shelly
Gilbert B Gale
John Hagengruber