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**9 Ways You Can Help Protect Montana's Natural Resources from Invasive Species**

HELENA, Mont — February 25-March 3, 2019, is National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW). The event raises awareness and identifies solutions for invasive species at the international, national, state, tribal, regional, and local level. The Montana Invasive Species Council (MISC) encourages Montanans to observe the event by learning about ways to help prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species in their everyday lives and work.

Invasive species include plants, animals, insects, and other organisms that cause economic or ecological harm to a new environment in which they have been introduced. Invasive species cause problems in their new environment because predators, competitors, parasites, and other natural controls do not exist in the new range, allowing them to multiply and spread at alarming rates.

In Montana, the newest invasive species of concern are zebra or quagga mussels that were detected in trace amounts at Tiber and Canyon Ferry reservoirs in the fall of 2016. A report commissioned by MISC estimates Montana's economy could see more than \$230 million in annual mitigation costs and lost revenue if invasive mussels become established in the state. Montana is also impacted by other invasives such as: New Zealand mudsnails, houndstongue, cheatgrass, and Eurasian watermilfoil—which are among the wide variety of invasive organisms threatening agricultural productivity, forest health, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and property.

“Invasive species are most often accidentally introduced and spread by humans” said Bryce Christiaens, MISC chair. “By recognizing this fact and taking simple actions, we can all make a difference in helping to protect our water and landscapes from the threat of invasive species.”

The United States Department of Agriculture has shown that invasive species cost the U.S. more than \$137 billion annually, through crop damage, fisheries reduction, forest health impacts, and management. Montanans can take simple actions to help prevent the introduction and spread of noxious weeds and invasive species. Here are 9 simple tips that you can follow to help.



On your next walk, **watch for noxious weeds**. If you spot some in your yard or while walking in your neighborhood, notify your [county noxious weed control board](#).



**Clean your hiking boots**, bikes, waders, boats and trailers, off-road vehicles and other gear before you venture outdoors to stop invasive species from hitching a ride to a new location.



**Dispose of unwanted pets**, aquarium plants or water, science kits or live bait **the proper way** and NOT by dumping them into waterways. Released pets often suffer a slow death in winter, or may become invasive and damage our wildlife and agriculture. When it comes to unwanted pets or live bait, letting it loose is never the right thing to do. Visit the council's Don't Let It Loose Web page to [learn the proper ways to dispose of unwanted pets and plants](#).



**Buy firewood where you'll burn it**, or gather it on site when permitted. Remember not to move firewood from the local area where harvested. Visit the [Don't Move Firewood](#) website to learn about the potential dangers of moving firewood.



Protect Montana's fisheries by **not moving any fish from one water body into another**. This will prevent spread of fish diseases and also protect fisheries from non-native predatory fish.



Use forage, hay or mulch that is **certified as weed free**. Visit the Montana Department of Agriculture Web site [to see details of its certification program](#).



**Plant only non-invasive plants in your garden**, and remove any known invasive plants.



**Volunteer to help remove invasive species** from public lands and natural areas. Contact your local state, county or city parks and recreation department, or county MSU Extension office to learn more.



Don't pack a pest. Certain items obtained abroad may contain invasive insects, pathogens, or weed seeds. When traveling abroad, review travel guidelines on items that should not be brought back to the United States. Learn more about what you can bring home by visiting [dontpackapest.com](http://dontpackapest.com).

**Kenzi Smith, Washington Recreation and Conservation Office**

In recognition of NISAW, MISC will be hosting an education and outreach event at the State Capitol from 10-2 on March 1, 2019. For more information contact Stephanie Hester at 406-444-0547 or [shester@mt.gov](mailto:shester@mt.gov).

The Montana Invasive Species Council is a statewide partnership working to protect Montana's economy, natural resources, and public health through a coordinated approach to combat invasive species. For more information about MISC, visit [misc.mt.gov](http://misc.mt.gov).

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