

Don't See Red When You See Purple!

By Diane Johnson, Townsend District Range Technician

Expect to see knapweed when you pass through Whites Gulch. That's because it is part of the Townsend Ranger District Noxious Weed management program treating noxious weeds with insect biological control agents.

Formally known as classical biological control, this method focuses on introducing natural enemies from the weed's area of origin to local plant populations. Biocontrol suppresses host weed populations, but generally does not eradicate them. Because biocontrol is self-sustaining, it is highly effective on dense weed infestations covering large areas.

We have already released several species of knapweed insect agents in Whites Gulch. Seed-head feeding insects and root-boring insects have been released in areas where spraying weeds is difficult or impossible. Now we will establish an insectary, which will be used to supply biocontrol agents to other infested sites.

Several criteria should be met to establish an insectary:

- The weeds inside the insectary must be protected from herbicide spraying, grazing, and disturbance by vehicles.
- The weeds must be contained and not allowed to spread.
- The insectary must not be adjacent to private land.
- The weeds should not be visible from a road.
- There should be only one dominant noxious weed species in the insectary.

The lower mine reclamation area in the Whites Gulch drainage meets all the criteria listed above, except D. The Whites Reclamation area makes an ideal insectary site because the insects do well, establishing and proliferating because this is a well-protected site. Knapweed roots in this location are also large enough to accommodate the root boring insects. The reclamation area is in a riparian area so the weeds stay green longer than in the upland sites, and the adult insects can stay active longer eating foliage or nectar.

The mine reclamation site is a place where

spraying herbicides has been counterproductive to the Townsend Ranger District's efforts to establish willows and other riparian vegetation. Biocontrol of weeds will fit nicely into both the goals and environmental restrictions of the project area. The first few years an insectary site will look like no treatment has been done. Then about the 4th year we expect the knapweed to look stunted; instead of 3 ft. tall it will be 2 to 2.5 ft. tall. The density of the knapweed patch, the size of the plants, and the number of flowers per plant will all gradually decline. In 10 to 15 years there should be a few scattered knapweed plants in the area. At this stage of the project, the remaining plants are expected to be only about 18" tall, have few flowers and the knapweed should be unobtrusive.

A successful biocontrol treatment will not eradicate the weeds but will keep the plants at a "tolerable level" so that the weeds are a part, but not dominant, in the plant community. So please be patient when you see 'purple' in Whites- the bugs are on the job.

The Gould Helmville Trail, A Cooperative Project

By Ernie Lundberg

Early day miners pioneered two track roads into many areas on the Lincoln Ranger District in search of gold. Some of these roads have been upgraded and are present day system roads while others have become trails and some are overgrown and gone. The eastern end of the Gould Helmville Trail #467 is one of those primitive roads that remain a trail. In the 1980s the trail was closed to full size vehicles, but remains open to motorcycles, ATVs, and snowmobiles as well as all non-motorized uses. The trail runs along a ridge on the north boundary of the Nevada Mountain roadless area and offers views of both the Helmville and Lincoln valleys.

The trail has received very little maintenance over the years, with the result that some rutting has occurred and the trail is two ATVs wide in places. Bob Bushnell, a member of the Lincoln Ponderosa Snow Warriors Snowmobile Club applied for and received a Montana Trails Grant to perform maintenance on the Gould Helmville Trail. The proposal included using a crew from the Montana Conservation Corps. The Forest Service



agreed to design and supervise the work project.

Dave Payne, Recreation Planner in the Helena SO, volunteered to assist with the project design. Our primary objective was to control existing

erosion and try to prevent future erosion. We staked locations for water bars and drain dips. Drain dips are the preferred method of water diversion because they require less maintenance than do water bars. The Ponderosa Snow Warriors used their ATVs to distribute treated logs to the water bars locations.

The Montana Conservation Corps crew arrived at the trailhead on Monday, August 16 and set up their camp. We held a safety meeting, identified potential hazards and discussed ways to mitigate the hazardous situations. Following our meeting we hiked a mile down the trail to discuss the project. I told them the trail was staked to the junction with the Prickly Trail #487 and I wasn't sure if they would be able to accomplish all the work, particularly because we had also flagged areas where large ruts needed to be filled in, and where unauthorized user-built trails needed to be

closed. The crew was very enthusiastic and ready for hard work. We spent Tuesday morning cleaning and improving the existing drain dips close to the gate. In the afternoon we constructed some drain dips that would rival in size and quality those a small excavator would build. It was pure pleasure working with such a cooperative crew each day. As the crew hiked along areas worked in previous days, they would stop and touch up spots without being told to do so.

The Ponderosa Snow Warriors came on Wednesday to look at the trail work and transported tools, lunches and water up the trail for the crew. The crew was anxious to meet the Snow Warriors—after all what does a Snow Warrior look like? They also wanted to personally thank the people who made it possible for them to work on this project. The crew did an excellent job and accomplished all the work that had been identified. On Friday afternoon, as part of their education, I took them on a tour of the snow-tel site and Granite Butte Lookout.

The trail is safer and will be more enjoyable for all users. We thank everyone involved for all their hard work and support in accomplishing this project.