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Spring 2016 Newsletter

Fire Risk Information Night



On June 8 from 6:30-8:30 pm, West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District invite you to hear about fire risk in our area from Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) staff. ODF will give a presentation on how to make the areas around our homes and the rest of our properties more “fire safe.” Information will also cover topics such as how to best burn woodland slash and debris in brush piles. Skyline Ridge residents need to get a permit to burn slash piles, and ODF can help you determine how to best go about getting approval. They can also visit your property to give fire risk assessments. Come with questions!

In addition to the fire information, our ODF foresters have information on Forest Practices Notifications and share stories of some of the local fires that have occurred in recent years.

After the ODF presentation, staff from the Conservation District and Forest Park Conservancy will also share information on a new grant providing financial assistance for quite a bit of this type of fire risk reduction and forest restoration work. We're excited to share some ideas on how we can help with

invasive weeds, forest thinning, and habitat enhancements and we welcome your thoughts on how we can help. Contact District Forest Conservationist Michael Ahr for more information; michael@wmswcd.org or 503.238.4775, ext. 109.

Invasives Watch: Goatsrue



If your garden is like mine, I'm constantly pulling errant weeds that have invaded from neighboring yards or started from airborne seeds. One particularly aggressive invader to keep an eye out for now is goatsrue (*Galega officinalis*). It is a federal, state and locally listed noxious weed (USDA Noxious Weed, ODA Class "A" & Portland 'Required Eradication' Species).

Goatsrue is a deep-rooted perennial legume that regrows each year from the root crown. Mature leaves come off the stem directly across from each other and have a final, or terminal, leaf at the end of the stem. (This is called pinnately compound). Goatsrue can grow to 3-4 feet (unusually tall for a member of the pea family). Goatsrue can easily be distinguished from other peas by its hollow stems and terminal leaflet. In the photo below, you can see the terminal leaflet of the goatsrue specimen on the left, as opposed to the tendrils on the similar looking pea species on the right. Another feature is pointed leaflets; however, other pea species also share this

sighted in just a few locations the Portland metro area. The known locations and its aggressiveness make this a detection and control. Each plant can produce up to can be viable for up to 10 introduced in Utah in the late spread to a couple of adjacent Northeastern US and the parts of the plant are toxic to



trait. Goatsrue has been in Oregon, but all within limited number of documented priority species for

15,000 seeds which years. Goatsrue was 1800s and has since states, as well as the Pacific Northwest. All livestock.

Primary Bird Nesting Season



Starting in mid-April each year we encourage homeowner to curtail land management activities to lessen the impact on nesting birds. The primary nesting season in the metro area is usually from April 15 to July 31 when most of our songbirds, woodpeckers, waterfowl, and other bird species are nesting with eggs and newly hatched young. They like to make nests in the shrubs within or on the edge of forests. Several species also nest in grassy areas or near streams and wetlands where we work on restoration projects. This is why we ask landowners to delay mowing grass and invasive shrubs like blackberry or laurel until mid-August or September when possible.

How do you know if you have nesting birds on your property?

This can be tough since birds like to hide their nests really well. First, pay special attention to the healthy layer of shrubs along the edge of your forest. See if birds fly out of the shrubs as you walk through your fields or in and around the forest. If a bird lets you get as close as 5-10 feet before it flies away, it was likely protecting a nest. Take a moment to look around to locate the nest, but don't touch it.

We also encourage landowners to wait until August 15 to cut and/or spray brushy vegetation. Keep in mind that September is often the best season to do this work anyway as spraying will be more effective on species such as blackberry and scotch broom. So, for now, hold off on the cutting and spraying. Instead, go grab your binoculars and enjoy these warblers, wrens, and other feathered friends.

Lawn Conversion



Do you have a vision of turning part of your lawn into an area that provides more habitat for wildlife and greater stormwater benefits? Taking out lawn also cuts down on pollution from gas mowers, such as dripping oil and harmful air emissions. Now is the time to start the conversion process so that you can plant and seed your new landscape this fall!

Check out our new [*Meadowscaping Handbook*](#) for site preparation methods and replanting ideas that will help out our native pollinators and beautify your landscape!

Pollinator Monitoring



For several years now, we have seen troubling reports coming out about serious declines in honey bees, Monarch butterflies, and many native pollinators. The district works with landowners to install native pollinator habitats in an attempt to help improve this situation. Now, we have another exciting opportunity coming up this spring and summer to help pollinators. We are launching a volunteer pollinator monitoring program.

A group of eleven dedicated volunteers will learn pollinator identification and monitoring techniques from local Xerces Society experts. Then they'll practice and apply the training by monitoring pollinator diversity at some of our pollinator habitat enhancement projects. The information we gain from this work will help us track pollinator diversity, abundance, and habitat health at our restoration projects, and help us understand long-term trends in seasonal pollinator population levels. Registration is already full for this year's volunteer team, but if you are interested in participating next year, contact our Conservation Technician, Laura Taylor (laura@wmswcd.org or 503.238.4775, ext. 112) to learn more and add your name to our contact list for this opportunity.

Our ideal volunteer can attend an all-day training with a half-day follow-up in the summer. He or she should have an eye for detail and enthusiasm about pollinating insects. Volunteers commit to monitoring a couple of sites several times throughout the season, collects and enters data and works with landowners to schedule visits and discuss

pollinators.

Guest Feature: Sustaining butterflies in your urban garden

by Celeste A. Searles Mazzacano, Ph.D., CASM Environmental, LLC



Urbanization, habitat degradation and destruction, and widespread pesticide use is harming many different species of butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera) in North America. However, if planted and maintained properly, even small urban gardens can provide much-needed habitat and refuge for a variety of Lepidoptera that share our city's habitat. Multiple habitat patches also create green and flowering corridors that facilitate dispersal and connectivity of local butterfly and moth populations.

Around 100 species of Lepidoptera have been recorded in Multnomah County; like birds, these different species have differing seasonalities, from the first somber Mourning Cloaks and pale blue Azures of springtime, to the bright Golden Anglewings and Painted Ladies of summer, through the Woodland Skippers, Monarchs, and Red Admirals that continue flying through early fall.

Making your garden a welcoming place for butterflies requires a few simple considerations. Adults need flowering plants to provide nectar for food and surfaces to lay their eggs, so a diversity of plants with extended bloom times will ensure that species will have the energy they need throughout the season. Adult butterflies also need a source of water, salts, and minerals that they can access without falling in and drowning. In the wild, they get these resources from dung, rotting plant or animal matter, or wet muddy soil (giving this behavior the name of "puddling"), and it's not unusual to come across a group of swallowtails gathered around a drying puddle in the middle of an urban walking path. Sometimes butterflies land on humans to delicately sip their sweat! You can easily provide for their needs in your own garden by filling a shallow container such as a terra-cotta or plastic plant saucer with sand or small gravel, moistening it thoroughly with water, and burying it to the rim in a sunny, sheltered spot. The shallow pan will dry out quickly, so be sure to re-fill it on a regular basis.



Because butterflies are cold-blooded, they need a few patches of undisturbed bare soil or light colored flat rocks as warm basking surfaces. You may often see butterflies perched in a basking spot early in the day, slowly moving their wings up and down as they raise their body temperature sufficiently to be able to fly and feed. A few shrubs and trees will provide shelter from excessive heat and bad weather, create overwintering sites, and supply some additional caterpillar food sources.

Caterpillars (larvae) are plant-eaters, and depending on the species, they may have a broad or restricted range of host plants. California Tortoiseshell caterpillars, for example, feed exclusively on *Ceanothus* plants, and Monarch caterpillars can only consume *Asclepius* milkweed, while the host range of the more generalist Lorquin's Admiral larvae includes willow, serviceberry, and Douglas spirea. Remember, feeding damage is a sign that your butterfly habitat is doing its job! Native plants evolved along with our native species to be able to handle the seasonal feeding damage of caterpillars. Remember too that caterpillars are a tasty nugget for many songbirds, so expect a little predation to happen as well.

Adult nectar and larval food plants that can sustain many of our most common Portland species include herbs such as tarragon, fennel, parsley, and mints; "weeds" such as stinging nettle, thistles, and clover; native wildflowers such as bleeding heart, columbine, lupines, aster, yarrow, milkweed, and goldenrod; shrubs such as Douglas spirea, mock orange, red-osier dogwood, elderberry, wild roses, and huckleberry;

and trees such as willow, bigleaf maple, aspen, cascara, and madrone.

Above all, reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides, and spend plenty of time in your garden getting to know the local species. Once you know which species are most active in your area, you can tailor your plantings even further to help meet their needs. With a little time and care, you too may be able to celebrate what the poet Robert Frost once called “a blue-butterfly day here in spring”.

(Photos courtesy of Celeste A. Searles Mazzacano)

Calendar of Events

Living on the Water: Meeting for Floating home owners & managers

Wednesday, May 25, 6-8 pm, Rocky Point Marina Clubhouse, 23586 NW St. Helens Hwy.

Join us as we introduce our new handbook for floating homeowners and marine managers and talk about ways to protect our natural environment while living on the water. Hear from local experts on water quality and vegetation and habitat management and get your free copy of our new publication, “Living on the Water.”

Fire Risk Information Night

Wednesday, June 8, 6:30-8:30 pm, Skyline Grange, 11275 NW Skyline Blvd.

Join us for a presentation and discussion on ways to protect your home and other structures from fire this summer. Hear tips and advice from Oregon Department of Forestry, West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District and the Forest Park Conservancy.

State of the Watershed Celebration!

Saturday, June 18, 6-8 pm, Tryon Creek Nature Center, 11321 SW Terwilliger Blvd.

Join the Tryon Creek Watershed Council for an Open House featuring information tables for you to learn about projects in the Tryon Creek watershed from partners, volunteers, and landowners. It will be a fun evening of learning, networking, and celebrating Tryon Creek. Light refreshments provided.

Multnomah Days

Saturday, August 20, 9 am – 4 pm, SW 35th Ave and Capitol Hwy.

Come visit us at our booth at Multnomah Days! This annual event is a celebration of the Multnomah Village neighborhood and includes a parade, information booths, food, music and activities for kids.

Happy Spring!

Compiled by: Carolyn Lindberg; carolyn@wmswcd.org