

Changing Seasons

November 15, 2012

By Joann Wallenburn, Clearwater Resource Council

A few inches of new snow in the valley and more in the mountains. I'd say that's a pretty clear sign that winter is just around the corner. Time to top off the wood pile, and also time to take stock of volunteer efforts from this past field season and start thinking about those we'll start in the next .

Aquatic Invasive Species

All indications are that we managed to dodge the AIS bullet for another year; another year without the expense of mitigating an invasion. Let's continue saving that money. Although I just sent the last of the lake samples to be tested for the invasive mussels to Helena we have no indication of any new organisms showing up in the routine monitoring. I'm conceding that the Aquatic Invasive Species monitoring gear that is still deployed in Salmon Lake and Lake Inez will have to overwinter and be retrieved next spring.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize a very key piece of our local efforts to prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species to our lakes and streams. The Fish, Wildlife, and Parks boat inspection station at Clearwater Junction was by far the busiest station in the entire state. As of September 24, most stations had ceased operations, 21,247 boats had been inspected statewide. Of those, over 6,000 were inspected at Clearwater Junction. Awesome job and "thank you" to Al Rogers, Gary Pelletier, Curt Winther, Jim Goudzwaard, Jeff Lacey, Darrell Graham, and Mike Better. Sure hope I didn't miss anyone! A very big part of what they do is to inform boaters of the threat to our waters and simple steps boaters can take to reduce the risk of transporting an aquatic invasive species. Linnaea Schroeder, of MT FWP, stated in her regular report, "...crews are reporting that more and more boat owners are showing up at stations with their plugs out, and boat owners are saying that is a direct response to the information they have received from previous inspections on the importance of having a drained and dry boat. Again, great job by our crews in getting that vital message across to the public. " Most of the guys I've asked have indicated they want to work the check station again next summer. If you'd like to join them, keep an eye out for the job announcement which is planned to go out in January. The station operated 12 hours a day, 7 days a week from mid-May to mid-September.

Adopt A Lake

Adopt-A-Lake activities have also shut down for the season. Six of our lakes were regularly sampled throughout the summer thanks to many of our neighbors who volunteered to help. After the data are entered and evaluated, the Clearwater Resource Council will share the results and what we learn from them with the community.

The Clearwater Resource Council has been talking, almost incessantly it may seem at times, about concerns about the condition of our lakes and how much they can absorb before deteriorating, perhaps dramatically. Some of you noticed the green stuff that was all over the surface of Salmon Lake for several weeks last month. That was a blue-green algae bloom. Such blooms have been reported intermittently on Salmon Lake, as well as Seeley Lake and Placid Lake as far back as the 70's. However, this is two years in a row that Salmon Lake has had a late summer blue-green algae bloom, and the extended duration of this bloom was not typical.

Earlier this year, a colleague shared a story about Lake Delton, WI. Where the community was concerned that tourists would object to the pea-green color of their lake due to the algae and tourism dollars would drop, so they spent \$30,000 to dump 500 gallons of blue dye into the lake. While this may seem humorous at first, it really is a sad tale about the decline of their lake.

Adopt a Stream in 2013

Want to help learn more about our lakes and the watershed to make sure they remain as remarkable in the future as they are now? You can adopt a stream in 2013.

For those of you who have followed the growing knowledge and concern about the lakes of the Clearwater valley, you know that we have some serious concern about the “nutrient load” or the amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous that enter the lakes each year. Those nutrients act as fertilizer in the lake and can influence the amount of algae growth (like the bloom in Salmon lake), the clarity of the water, the oxygen concentrations important for fish and other organisms, and other conditions that matter to people who love to be around lakes. Our lakes are showing signs of stress and we need to start tracking the nutrients that may influence those conditions. Those nutrients come from two primary sources, the watersheds and streams draining to the lakes, and the groundwater surrounding the lakes. We need to begin to estimate how much comes from each source to understand where the most important sources in the watershed are. We are looking for volunteers to help with one season of water quality sampling of streams across the Clearwater Basin. Sampled streams will include upper tributaries of Trail Creek, Morrell Creek, Deer Creek, the Upper Clearwater River and others. The project will be closely tied to ongoing work at the Seeley-Swan High School and work in the watersheds supported by the Southwest Crown of the Continent Forest Restoration Project. Volunteers will collect water samples and record other information regularly (from once a week to once a month) through the spring and summer of 2013. Because the samples need to be collected from each stream at the same time we need multiple volunteers that have the flexibility and the ability to travel to these sites on a regular schedule. If you are interested in volunteering with this project you can contact Joann Wallenburn (210-8453; joann@crcmt.org) or Bruce Rieman (677-3813; brieman@blackfoot.net) for more information.

So, as our world is being painted white by the snow, this is an excellent time to start planning to remove excess fire fuels from our property and help protect our homes from wildland fire. Our community continues to receive grants to assist with fire fuel mitigation. Contact CRC or your local fire department for more information. This is also a good time to plan treatment of noxious weeds. The Missoula County Weed District’s deadline for grants is early February. Look for the 2013 grant application form on their website (www.missoulaeduplace.org) after Christmas.

Have a happy Thanksgiving and be safe while out hunting.