Montana Pulse Crop Committee to meet

The Montana Pulse Crop Committee will meet beginning at 9:00 AM MST on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 at the Northern Agricultural Research Center in Havre, Montana.

Committee members will review proposals to fund market development and educational projects designed to advance Montana’s pulse industry. For more information, contact Dani Jones at the Montana Department of Agriculture.

The Montana Pulse Crop Committee’s mission is to invest in and deliver support for marketing, research, education, and policy development programming that improves return on investment for the pulse producers of Montana.

Private applicator training

MSU Cascade County Extension will be offering an initial private applicator training in Great Falls, Montana on Tuesday, April 26, 2022. The training will be at Great Falls College MSU’s Heritage Hall and begin at 8:30 a.m. with introduction. The training will end at 5:30 p.m.

Individuals and their employees must be licensed as a private applicator prior to purchasing and using restricted use pesticides on land they own, rent, or lease. For applicators to acquire their private applicator license, they must either attend an initial private applicator training or pass the registration. The training will end at 5:30 p.m.

By far the most popular booth at the Montana Agricultural Trade Exposition in Billings, Montana on February 17-19 was the “tool” booth. Every tool imaginable was on display and for sale. Staff photo.

Cast your vote for new Montana Wheat and Barley variety names

The Montana Wheat and Barley Committee (MWBC) and the Montana State University (MSU) Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology Department are inviting the public to help name four new wheat and barley varieties released to the public this year.

The Montana Wheat and Barley Committee funds local research to develop superior plant varieties that earn premium prices and are recognized throughout the world for their superior quality. In partnership with the Montana State University Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology Department, new public crop varieties are released nearly every year to continue improving upon a long legacy of research and crop development in the state. Funding for research to improve quality, production, and best farm practices is supported through producer checkoff dollars.

To add a bit more excitement to the 2022 release of four new wheat and barley varieties, MWBC and MSU have teamed up to ask the public to cast their votes for new names. A list of names has been compiled—some clever, others honoring industry legends or locations across the state—and voting is now open online via this link. Voting will remain open until March 31, 2022, after which MWBC will announce the results.

To learn more about these varieties, go to montanawbc.com and click on the “Cast Your Vote Now” image. To vote, scan the QR code.

ABC workshop

By Sarah A. Sivits, Dawson/Buffalo/Hall County Extension

Nebraska Extension is hosting a series of workshops across the state in March focusing on a new online Agricultural Budget Calculator (ABC) tool. The Ag Budget Calculator is a free tool that focuses on budgeting and decision making to assist producers to determine cost of production, projected

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Last August while driving near the Yellowstone River, I noticed a young osprey atop its nest. I have studied ospreys for over 20 years in Montana and knew the bird should have flown and departed the nest weeks earlier as it prepared for autumn migration. I was suspicious that it was entangled in baling twine and trapped on the nest, so I quickly made a phone call to the local power company. A line crew was able to meet me at the site later that morning and raised me to the nest in a bucket truck. There, the lineman and I found an osprey struggling to free a leg entangled in baling twine. The same length of twine, invisible to passersby on the highway, was wrapped around the leg where the osprey’s bill clutched it. The nestling had an open, yet thankfully, superficial wound where the osprey had clawed at it. The bird flew off after we cut it free and would be fine. Unfortunately, others I have encountered over the years have not been so lucky—they were either dead by the time I arrived or had debilitating wounds from which they did not recover.

Many birds collect and incorporate artificial materials into the construction of their nests. Use of plastic trash, twine, net wrap, and rope is thought to be increasing over time as landfills, non-biodegradable litter becomes more abundant in the environment. Why do some birds add these unnatural objects may signal potential competitors that the territory is occupied by an individual of high social status, much the way large antlers on a mature elk communicate to younger elk the owner’s fighting ability and dominance. Whether the display of baling twine in nests functions similarly for ospreys remains unknown. Perhaps they use twine simply as a soft lining for the nest, the same way they use shredded bark or seaweed in other parts of their range. Regardless of the purpose, baling twine presents a deadly entanglement hazard to both nestling and adult ospreys.

For the past 10 years, I have been studying ospreys along the Yellowstone River in collaboration with the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society. Today we monitor about 100 nests annually, and a troubling 50–60% of those nests contain baling twine or net wrap. What is even more distressing is that each summer 4% of the young raised in those nests became entangled. Without timely human intervention, these nestlings would die a slow, painful death. Young ospreys face plenty of natural risks during their first year of life without having to encounter preventable hazards that cause them harm.

Where are ospreys getting twine? We find that the amount of twine along roads reflects the percentage of nearby nests containing twine. It is unknown if ospreys are picking up baling twine along roads or in pastures and feedlots, but we do know a lot of it ends up in nests if it exists in the nearby environment. One nest contained an astounding 675 feet of twine, which is over twice the length of two football fields.

Baling twine is an entanglement hazard to not only ospreys. A simple internet search using the terms “baling twine deer entanglement” will return numerous images of antlered deer and other big game wrapped with twine. Twine also poses health risks to cattle when ingested, and if twine becomes embedded in sheep wool it’s rendered useless. Twine also fouls state and county highway mowers, which means time and energy wasted maintaining equipment.

Most operators cut and coil baling twine after unloading round or square bales and then toss these coils onto a flatbed or pile them in an outdoor collection area, usually to be hauled to a landfill, buried on site, or burned later in the season, none of which are good long-term options for disposal. The amount of twine seen along roads indicates that at least some simply blows off ranch vehicles at highway speeds. Twine left piled in pastures and feedlots or draped over fences is also available to ospreys, other wildlife, and livestock and should be stored differently. Simple and sensible management of used twine storage in buckets or boxes with lids and covering with tarps. For twine that already litters roadways, Adopt-A-Highway programs can be effective. Ospreys return to Montana from their wintering area in April, so now is the time to clean up and store twine.

A nestling osprey entangled in baling twine and trapped on its nest. (photo M. Restani)

Plastics must be clean to be recycled, and baling twine is no different. The Twine Collection and Recycling Site in Laurel, Montana (photo D. Regele) requires that twine be at least 90% free of dirt and other debris at drop-off. The amount of twine seen along roads indicates that at least some simply blows off ranch vehicles at highway speeds. Twine left piled in pastures and feedlots or draped over fences is also available to ospreys, other wildlife, and livestock and should be stored differently. Simple and sensible management of used twine storage in buckets or boxes with lids and covering with tarps. For twine that already litters roadways, Adopt-A-Highway programs can be effective. Ospreys return to Montana from their wintering area in April, so now is the time to clean up and store twine.

Baling twine is a deadly combination but now a practical solution

Marco Restani, PhD, Department of Biological Sciences, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301

**Baling twine: A deadly combination but now a practical solution**

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