

Ponderosa Snow Warriors

Neighbors Helping Neighbors to Maximize Restoration Efforts within the Southwestern Crown of the Continent

In 1993, three volunteers with the Ponderosa Snow Warriors (PSW) began spraying weeds on segments of the 500 miles of snowmobile trails located throughout the upper Blackfoot Valley and Lincoln Ranger District of the Helena National Forest. After nearly 20 years, the PSW club has had over 40 volunteers who donate nearly 5,000 hours of their time to treat noxious weeds throughout the entire Blackfoot Valley. Since noxious weeds do not recognize land management boundaries, the PSW work across those boundaries to comprehensively treat noxious weeds and help restore ecosystems on forest, state and private lands.



Up until 2010, all of the weed treatments the PSW club implemented were done through volunteer efforts and funded with grants they received. The weed target for the Lincoln Ranger District portion of Helena National Forest was largely obtained through their volunteer efforts. However, a good percentage of their weed treatments were also applied to state and private lands.

Three years ago the Helena National Forest signed a partnership agreement with the PSW to obligate funds from the Collaborative Forest Land Restoration (CFLR) Project for weed treatments and monitoring.

With these funds, and the other grant funds secured, the PSW were able to purchase a second weed truck, upgrade worn-out equipment, purchase additional personal protective gear, and supplement with additional treatment supplies. All of this has helped the club to double their efforts in treating noxious weeds on National Forest lands; as well as leverage their non-federal funds for treating more acres of noxious weeds on state and private land. The combination of new and improved club equipment that is used to successfully treat more acres of noxious weeds, has allowed the PSW to secure additional funding through non-federal grant sources because of their ability to contribute a higher partner-match ratio to each project.

Last summer, the club refurbished a Forest Service owned hydro-mulcher, which was broken and went unused for more than 10 years due to the lack of funding for repairs. With the refurbished equipment, the club used the hydro-mulcher to treat roadside cut banks that were once heavily populated by noxious weeds and slow to rehabilitate naturally with native grasses and forbs.

The Helena National Forest has continued to enhancing its successful partnership with the PSW by incorporating CFLR funding and projects into the long-standing agreement with the club. Each year the PSW and Forest Service meet to coordinate a program of work together and identify the priority locations that need to be treated. Once areas are treated, members of the PSW club share data from each treatment with Forest employees to use in their upward reporting requirements and target accomplishment reports.

Along with their data collection efforts, members of the PSW have also developed a monitoring plan for both of their treatment units on National Forest lands. To help enhance monitoring of their treatments, the PSW are involved in a larger monitoring project with the University of Montana that is designed to increase the club members' knowledge of the long-term ecological implications of various weed treatments.



The footprint of the Ponderosa Snow Warriors can be tracked across the Blackfoot Valley, beyond land management boundaries, leading us toward a healthier and more sustainable landscape for generations to come. "We are fortunate to have such a strong partnership with the PSW. They are the biggest factor in why the Upper Blackfoot Valley has been able to maintain noxious weed populations at a low level and keep new invaders from establishing," said Lincoln District Ranger Amber Kamps.

“We have a long history of partnering with the Forest Service to collectively make a positive difference on the ground, and now in partnership with the Southwestern Crown Collaborative we can increase our restoration efforts by additional CFLR funding and project opportunities. Our goal is to restore ecosystem function across lands that we care so much about, and we are always pleased to work with all who share that mission,” states Jim Paris, current board member of the PSW.

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Photos: Top: PSW club members spraying noxious weeds along a roadway on the Lincoln Ranger District. Bottom: Forest employees and PSW members work together to identify priority weed treatment areas, data collection and monitoring requirements for upcoming projects.