

VOICE OF THE MISSOURI

Mission Statement

Guided by scientific data, our mission is to conserve, enhance and advocate for the unique ecological resources of this valuable watershed.



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Greeting from UMOWA by Sherry Meador, UMOWA Board Chair

After a long dry winter, we're hoping for some summer showers. We've updated our River Health dashboard with the 2025 data and are using the information gathered in our education, advocacy, and on-the-ground projects. Josh and Dave had the opportunity to talk about the river health dashboard on the April 1st Wet Fly Swing podcast. Hope you take the opportunity to listen to it.

This year we are very excited to introduce Rock (Paul) Ringling to our board. He has a long connection with the conservation community through the Montana Land Reliance and the Land Trust Alliance. An avid outdoorsman, he brings thoughtful leadership and a genuine love of the land to UMOWA's board.

We are also pleased to have been awarded a Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant and are working with local landowners, FWP, and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad to treat the corridor's weed infestations through integrated weed management practices. We will continue to use revegetation as an integral part of our weed management and bank stabilization projects.

Come join us for the June 6th UMOWA Rendezvous at the Craig Taphouse for our annual celebration with the river community with free food, music, and a silent auction. And as always, don't forget to buy your raffle ticket for a custom RO Drift Boat --only 250 sold. You can purchase online or at any of our events. The winner will be announced at the Craig Caddis Fest, August 22nd.

Please stay up to date on our projects by checking out our website, signing up for emails, and following UMOWA on Facebook and Instagram. Also, feel free to email me, smeador@umowa.org, if you would like to become involved with UMOWA or have any questions about our projects. We appreciate your support. ■

Aquatic Invasive Species and the Upper Missouri



A Friendly Inspector at the Clearwater Junction Watercraft Inspection Station.

We hear a lot of gloom and doom about heat, drought and other threats to the rivers and lakes in Montana. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) are another one of those threats, but there is some good news: Many of the AIS that impact lakes and rivers across the country aren't found in Montana. At least not yet. And the introduction of AIS is absolutely preventable. Aquatic snails, mussels and weeds don't carry themselves from one waterbody to another. That responsibility lands on boaters and anglers.

When AIS are introduced to a lake or river, that waterbody is changed forever. Fisheries decline and species structure changes. Costs to maintain hydroelectric facilities and irrigation systems increase dramatically. Our expectations for that waterbody change because it is no longer the same. In spite of all our challenges on the Upper Mo, we are holding the line pretty well on the invasive species front.

The level of productivity and high use in the Upper Mo puts this area at high risk for AIS introduction, but at this time very few AIS are found in the area. AIS like New Zealand mudsnails and curlyleaf pondweed are in the system, but their impacts at this time seem to be relatively minor. We would not expect minor impacts if AIS like zebra mussels or hydrilla were introduced to the system. The only way those AIS would get here would be hitchhiking on boats.

To address this issue, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks operates a fairly comprehensive program state-wide to address the threats of AIS. All watercraft entering Montana are required to be inspected before launching to ensure boats are not transporting AIS. Watercraft inspection stations are established on highways entering the state to help facilitate required inspections. FWP also conducts AIS early detection surveys of all fishable waters

in the state to detect any AIS that are introduced. The state is doing a lot of work to keep AIS out, but we need everyone's help to protect our waters.

Follow these simple steps to prevent the movement of AIS:

- Clean your boat every time you exit the water removing mud, plants and debris. Don't forget to clean your anchor and rinse out the bottom of the boat.
- Drain all standing water.
- Dry all compartments.
- If a boat is coming in from out of state, ensure it gets inspected. Spread the word. Clean. Drain. Dry. every time.

In line with the important discussion above, we have great news that a new Watercraft Inspection Station is operational thanks to the High Plains Conservation District. The Highway 12 Watercraft Inspection Station is located just outside of Helena, a couple of miles past Broadwater Hot Springs. The station is open daylight hours, 7 days a week until mid-October. Highway 12 is an important watercraft inspection station because it is the last place many boats can receive an inspection prior to crossing the continental divide on Macdonald Pass. This protects the Flathead Basin from harmful aquatic invasive species hitchhiking a ride from the East side of the continental divide. The Highway 12 station staff are made up of retired people who care for Montana's waters as well as young professionals exploring a career in conservation.

If you would like more information about the Highway 12 Inspection Station please stop by and they will be more than happy to inspect your watercraft to and from launching on the Upper Missouri. ■



For more information go to fwp.mt.gov/AIS and www.highplainscd.org/.

Collaborative Public Service Announcement:

- Thomas Woolf, *Aquatic Invasive Species Bureau Chief, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*
- Jake Atkinson, *Resource Technician, High Plains Conservation District*
- Mike Day, *UMOWA Board Member*

How Eagle Island Became a Fishing Access Site

By Joe Kerkvliet, UMOWA Board Member



Missouri River's Eagle Island. The ponderosa pine in the foreground was probably a sapling when the Corps of Discovery passed by in 1805 and 1806.

Resilient communities work together to promote community values. This is what happened 34 years ago when Eagle Island came up for sale. Eagle Island is the 23 acre island located a mile below the mouth of the Dearborn, six miles downstream from Craig. Each year, hundreds of anglers fish its willow-lined banks on the north side and grassy banks on the south. Mule and whitetail deer use its cottonwood gallery and chokecherry bottoms. Over many years of walking, fishing, and hunting Eagle Island, I have seen eagles, osprey, beaver, otter, badger, mountain lions, bear, and even moose.

Eagle Island is now a MFWP Fishing Access Site with a small undeveloped camp site, but it wasn't always this way. In early 1992, to the surprise of many Missouri River users, FOR SALE signs appeared on Eagle Island. The advertised price was \$165,000 (\$380,000 in today's \$) and the property was being touted as an excellent location for a residence, guide service, or retreat. To develop the island, a bridge or heliport would have to be built. Most islands on the Missouri are federally or state owned. But Eagle Island had somehow come into private ownership and its Oregon-based owner wanted to sell.

This news disturbed many who enjoyed and/or lived on the river and people began to take action. In March 1992, Jim Posevitz, of the Ecological Service Unit of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP), wrote a memo describing how State Senators Steve Doherty and Hal Harper were contacted by John Wilson of the Montana Land Reliance (MLR) to express concern about the island's potential development. Senator Doherty then asked Jim Posevitz what needed to be done to "protect this island from development". Steve Leath, fisheries manager of MFWP's Region 4, responded to the Posevitz memo saying that his division "would participate in some sort of conservation partnership" and could possibly commit \$25,000 to such an enterprise.

By August 1992 John Wilson had worked with the landowner, who had agreed to take Eagle Island off the market, was "receptive to a plan that would conserve the island's natural values", and "would consider a trade for a property of equal value." Several properties owned by MFWP had been reviewed as potential property exchanges, but this option was ultimately dropped. Then Senator Doherty called a meeting to review the potential to protect the island. Doherty reported that the Missouri River Flyfishers had a "keen interest in" protecting Eagle Island. The Fisheries Division offer of \$25,000 was still on the table.

For the remainder of the year and well into 1993, John Wilson and others worked tirelessly to raise the funds needed to purchase the property. John Wilson had persuaded the landowner to sell the island for \$75,000, applied for funds from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and tapped contributions from other conservation groups. Joe Kerkvliet had raised funds from his family and nearby river neighbors.

On October 6, 1993 the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded MFWP \$25,000 toward the purchase of Eagle Island, \$10,000 in NFWF funds and \$15,000 in funds from private sources. The NFWF award was contingent upon MFWP committing \$50,000 for the purchase.

On October 15, 1993 the MFWP Commission approved \$50,000 in department funds for Eagle Island's purchase, contingent upon a \$75,000 selling price and provision of \$25,000 by MLR. MLR funds came from the following: NFWF \$10,000, Burlington Northern Foundation, \$7,500, Missouri River Trout Unlimited, \$1,000, Missouri River Flyfishers, \$1,000, Private Individuals \$5,500. Commissioner Decker asked about long-run development plans for the island and was informed that there were none and the island would be left as it is. The purchase was completed on October 19, 1993 and Eagle Island was added to the long list of Fishing Access Sites on the Upper Missouri.

Although Eagle Island is now protected from development, challenges remain. During the 1990's and 2000's, much of Eagle Island became infested with leafy spurge and other invasive weeds. Since 2022, UMOWA, funded by the Montana Weed Trust and private landowners, has worked to reduce weed infestations on Eagle Island and all the other islands between Holter Dam and Cascade. UMOWA volunteers have seeded native grasses and forbs on the island. We are seeing progress but the process of restoring native species will be a long one and require constant vigilance. Meantime, river recreationists can be assured that Eagle Island will remain accessible, thanks to the efforts of many community members who love the upper Missouri. ■

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UMOWA's New Executive Director, Josh Seckinger

By Jay Erikson, UMOWA Board Member



UMOWA welcomed Josh Seckinger as its first executive director in October 2025. In his new role, Josh has been focused on developing and promoting UMOWA's goal to collect scientific data to be used to influence the factors that improve river health. The River Health Dashboard houses this data on the UMOWA website and

includes yearly sampling of aquatic insects including mayflies, stoneflies, midges and tricos, as well as river flow and fish counts. UMOWA also monitors and records data on the dashboard for water temperature and water quality for nutrient levels. The Missouri River fishery is impacted by levels of nitrates from agricultural operations and residential development near the river as well as our climbing temperatures and drought.

In addition, Josh is working to promote UMOWA's integrated weed management program. This is a popular program with the community, and includes herbicide treatments and biocontrol releases on properties such as islands owned by the state of Montana, BNSF railroad rights-of-way and individual private land owners. UMOWA partners with state and county governments to costshare and provide this important service.

UMOWA also partners with landowners to rehabilitate impaired river banks. Josh oversees the cataloging of stream bank health along the blue ribbon fishery stretch of the Missouri between Wolf Creek and Cascade. After identifying stream banks in need of restoration, Josh will work with landowners to establish agreements, obtain permits for stream bank work and secure grant funding.

Josh came to Montana from Wisconsin in 2009. He's a fishing guide and a member of Montana's House of Representatives for HD 62. He loves the outdoors and is a connector, bringing folks together to solve complex issues.

UMOWA had been planning to grow its staff to include an executive director for a while. Until last fall, UMOWA didn't have staff for field work, outreach and fund raising. We made the move to grow after receiving a generous gift from Bob Brent, a long time Missouri fishing guide, who passed away last year. We are grateful for Bob's generosity and are compelled to use his gift wisely.

A warm welcome to Josh Seckinger as UMOWA's executive director and a big Thank You to Bob Brent for his vision and generosity. ■

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Impact of Flushing Flows ‘or Lack Thereof’ on Macroinvertebrate Populations in the Upper Missouri River

By Dave Stagliano, MT Biological Survey, Scientific Technical Advisor to UMOWA



UMOWA Craig site side-channel May 2026 with no-flushing flows again this year.

After two consecutive years of unimpressive spring flushing flows on the Missouri River (averaging 6,300 cfs), we have documented a steady shift in the benthic macroinvertebrates (BMI) in the riffle habitats within 10 miles of Holter Dam. Between 2024 and 2025, the BMI community is beginning to shift back to a dominance of non-insects (aq. worms, snails, scuds and isopods) and midges. Even the introduced New Zealand Mudsnaills (NZMS) are building up their densities in these habitats, averaging ~150 per square meter. As non-insects dominate space in the riffle cobbles, there is less habitat available for the mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies (%EPT); insect hatches that most fisherman prefer. In terms of either total %EPT or mayflies, typically *Baetis tricaudatus* (Blue-Winged Olives, BWO's), *Tricorythodes* (Tricos) or *Ephemerella* (PMD's), we can see that there are fewer in the upper 3 UMOWA monitoring sites in 2025 (avg. 22%) compared to 2023 (avg. 48%) (Figure 1).

In contrast, substantial flushing flows in June of 2023 (~15,000 cfs) removed accumulated sediment and silt from the riverbed cobbles and provided more favorable conditions for the colonization and increased abundance of mayflies and caddisflies (Figure 1). Anglers experienced this in 2024 with more abundant PMD and Trico hatches. According to the Fall 2025 BMI data from the upper 3 sites, the outlook for Mayfly hatches for 2026 is not promising, Tricos, BWO's and PMDs are very sparse in samples. There is potential for some notable hatches of BWOs, Tricos and PMDs from upstream of the Dearborn River downstream to Prewitt FAS. Tan Caddisfly hatches may be abundant in some of the lower reaches from Pelican Point to Cascade. With the current snowpack levels, it is unlikely that there'll be a significant flushing flow in 2026, so this cycle continues. ■



Typical dish of bugs from UMOWA Craig site.

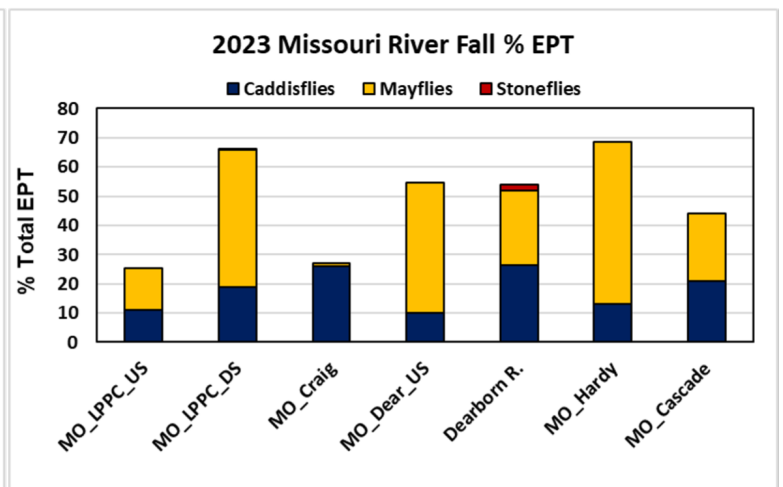
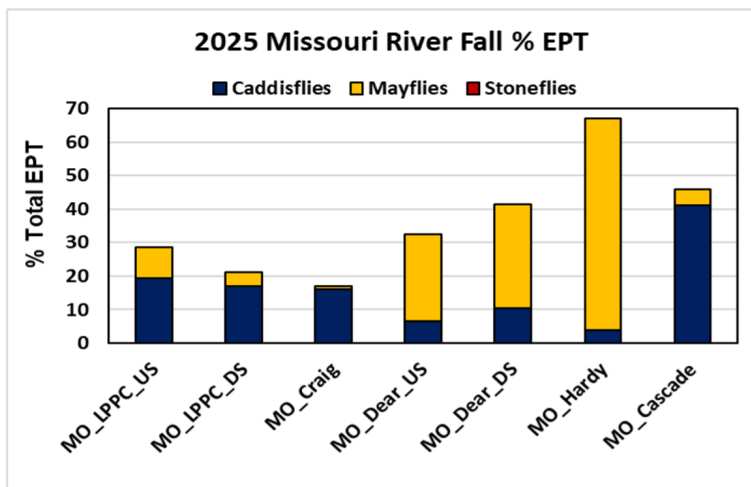


Figure 1. Total %EPT of the BMI community in 2025 (left) and in 2023 (right). LPPC=Little Prickly Pear Creek, Dear=Dearborn River. Sites arranged US=upstream to DS=downstream.