



A Look at Daniels County

The MSU Daniels County Cooperative Extension System is a non-formal educational program designed to help people use research-based knowledge to improve their lives. The service is provided by the state's designated land-grant university, Montana State University. In Daniels County the educational focus is in the areas of agriculture, natural resources, family and consumer science, community economic development, and youth development, including 4-H.

Since 1922, MSU Extension has successfully provided a service to the citizens of Daniels County in Northeast Montana, facilitating programming to bring important tools to aid in decision making for production agriculture, estate planning, youth development, community health and more. Daniels County MSU Extension has provided a location where research-based resources are immediately accessible.

The Daniels County Courthouse is located in Scobey, the county seat. The building was built in 1913, the same year Scobey was relocated to a site on the Great Northern Railway, and originally functioned as a hotel. The two-story building, which had a false front, was the largest in the city at the time. Over the next seven years, the hotel passed through several hands. At one time, it

became known as “One-eyed Molly’s House of Pleasure” after its most notorious proprietor, a glass-eyed woman known as One-Eyed Molly who supposedly ran a brothel from the hotel. When Daniels County was established in 1920, the newly-formed county purchased the hotel to use as its courthouse.

The courthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places on May 4, 1995.

There is one K-12 school serving all of Daniels County, Scobey Schools.

Daniels County current population is estimated to be 1755. Approximately 26% of the population is 65 years old or older, and 22% is under 18 years of age. Ninety-five percent of residents have a high school degree and 24% have a bachelor degree or higher.

As of 2000, Daniels County was considered the most rural county in the continental United States as measured by the Index of Relative Rurality. It borders the southern line of Saskatchewan on the Canada–U.S. border.

Photo by Trevor Manternach, Flickr



Plant and noxious weed education in Daniels County

Weeds and kids: both grow up too fast

When you ask kids if they have ever heard the phrase “You are growing like a weed,” 85 percent of the time you get a big smile and a resounding “YES!” Kids and weeds seem to grow up too fast, when given the right environment. In Daniels County, the kids learn early in life about weeds, especially noxious weeds, through coordinated efforts of MSU Extension, the Daniels County Weed District, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Scobey Schools.

In 2017, Scobey School kindergarten and first grade students participated in a field trip that had several important objectives. The first objective was presented before students left the school: each group was given instructions on how to safely board and exit the bus. Upon arrival at the field trip site, the students learned how to exit a bus in case of an emergency, which meant practice using the back door.

Then the real fun began with the introduction to the plant world around them. The field they visited is one many of the students pass every day, but generally do not pay attention to what is growing there, as it essentially is just another field.

With this field visit, youth are instructed to go and search for different plants to see how many they can find without getting the same one twice. Once field gathering is done, the youth proceeded to lay out the plants they found.

The next step is to identify the plants as native or introduced species. Once the native and introduced species are separated, the leaders point out the noxious weeds, the impact they have on our agriculture and natural resources, and how each of us can help in the eradication or management of invasive plant species.

To reinforce what was learned on the field trip, the following week the kindergarten and first grade students participated in a classroom activity about noxious weeds. Surprisingly, many remembered what they saw and experienced the week before. The students enjoyed sharing the fact that several of the identified noxious weeds are growing in their gardens and backyards. All 45 students were given the official titles of “Weed Warriors” and were given t-shirts provided by the Montana Weed Control Association and markers to list their top noxious weeds on the back of the t-shirt. Topping the list of noxious weeds in Daniels County were field bindweed, leafy spurge, knapweed and Canada Thistle.



Photos by Connie Wittak

Identifying plants in pastures can prevent loss of livestock

Not all plant questions have such a positive identification outcome. During the summer of 2017, Daniels County was in extreme drought. Ranchers were challenged with finding pastures that may not have been normally used during the grazing season. Many of those pastures had not been managed for desirable plant species in decades.

Water hemlock, a wetland plant, is commonly found in wet meadows and pastures and along the banks of streams. Water hemlock is a native species, but is highly toxic and can cause a quick death in animals, including humans.

With drought conditions, the wet meadows are seen more prominently across the landscape, therefore improving the ability to see water hemlock infestations. Under normal conditions, animals have probably never grazed in areas where water hemlock grows, but when green forage is not available, the urge to graze anything growing can be problematic and deadly.

To facilitate awareness of water hemlock, MSU Extension in Daniels County provided a news release with photos to the local newspaper, the

Daniels County Leader. In our world of social media, this is still a community paper that is read by a large percentage of residents.

Upon reading the article, a young producer called about the possibility that he had just turned cattle out into a pasture that might have water hemlock. In a matter of minutes after the conversation, the producer was already on his way to town with a sample to have identified.

The Extension agent was able to determine the plant found in the pasture was indeed water hemlock. The rancher immediately removed the livestock from the pasture. Also of concern was the possibility of the rancher's young children becoming exposed. The pasture was declared off-limits for both livestock and family members.

Without MSU Extension making the farming and ranching community cognizant that water hemlock was indeed growing in Daniels County, the outcome could have been a lot different.



Splitting the stem of water hemlocks for identification. Photos by Ronda Cromwell



Plant Detective

The growing season generally means activity in the fields, yards and gardens throughout Daniels County and especially in the MSU Extension office. Planting and maintaining healthy vegetation, whether it be in a 1000-acre field or 4' x 8' raised bed, requires knowledge and understanding by the grower. That is where MSU Extension has become the resource for answers. Fielding questions on numerous potential crop problems will start with the local Extension Office. However, MSU Extension is not just one office in one county.



Agents seek advice from neighboring county Extension offices or an MSU specialist or researcher who provide a network of quick responses and solutions to problems.

Unsightly, but not harmful, fasciation in asparagus. Photo by Bobbie Roos

When the office received a call from an avid gardener about her asparagus growing very strangely, an over-the-phone description called for a visit to the garden. Upon arrival, it was not hard to spot the deformed asparagus plant with a wide, flat stem. Cutting the asparagus plant down did not seem reasonable at the time, due to the oddity of the growth pattern, therefore photos were taken. The photos were sent to Toby Day, the MSU Extension Horticulture Specialist, and within a short time frame the answer was received. The asparagus plant had a condition called fasciation. This odd disorder can result in huge, grotesque stems, which was the case with this asparagus plant. The results were shared with the gardener and the good news was that perennials that exhibit fasciation may be perfectly normal the next year, so there is no need to destroy the plant.

Ironically, this same plant was entered in the Daniels County Fair, winning grand champion in the horticulture "Novelty" Class.

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