

ECOLOGY NEWS

Spring 2026
Vol. 2, Issue 2

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Important Academic Dates:

Finals Week — May 4-7
Commencement — May 8

Department Event Dates:

April 22,—Earth Day Celebration
April 30—Retirement/Thank-You
Celebration
May 6—Year-end Celebration
Nov. 6—Scholarship Event

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Dr. Diane Debinski

Letter from the Department Head

Happy Spring to all. This is a time of growth, transitions, and exciting new plans. I invite you to review our remarkable accomplishments in this newsletter, including student scholarships, faculty, staff, and student awards, stories of research contributions, and recent press coverage.

I have served as the MSU Ecology department head for almost 9 years. It has been an honor to do so. As a department, we have accomplished some amazing things together during this time. We hired seven excellent faculty and four outstanding staff members, created new courses to provide our students with experiential learning opportunities and specialized skills, redesigned our undergraduate curriculum to provide more flexibility and opportunities, moved alcohol-based museum specimens to a safer Vertebrate Museum Annex, and obtained funding for the upcoming installation of an elevator and ADA improvements for Lewis Hall. Meanwhile, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates built on our excellent reputation for research in Montana and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, while also conducting stellar research across five continents.

I decided last spring that it would be a good time to be proactive and start thinking about leadership succession planning. MSU's Ecology Department is in a great position, and I wanted to turn over the reins while there was time to plan for transfer of "institutional memory." I also wanted to return to being a faculty member and have a chance to do some more teaching and research. Hint: you may be more likely to see me wielding a butterfly net in nearby montane meadows after June 30th. I am thrilled that Dr. Chris Guy has been chosen to be the next MSU Ecology Department Head, and I look forward to the next chapter of our common endeavors. My goal is to make this transition process as smooth as possible to ensure the continued success of the MSU Ecology Department.

Incoming Department Head: Dr. Chris Guy

Dr. Chris Guy joined the Department of Ecology and the Montana Cooperative Fishery Research Unit in 2002 as an affiliate professor in fisheries science. His research focuses in the area of fish ecology and management. A major, consistent research theme of his has been on native fish assemblage restoration, a prominent ecological and societal issue in Rocky Mountain and Great Plains ecosystems. Much of Dr. Guy's research is focused on the needs of state and federal natural resources agencies. He is probably best known for his research on the critically endangered pallid sturgeon and Yellowstone cutthroat trout recovery in Yellowstone Lake. His research team cultivates strong relationships with natural resources agencies, which support the mission of the Montana Cooperative Fishery Research Unit, Ecology Department, and MSU. He has advised 53 graduate students, most of whom go on to work for natural resource agencies managing the public trust.

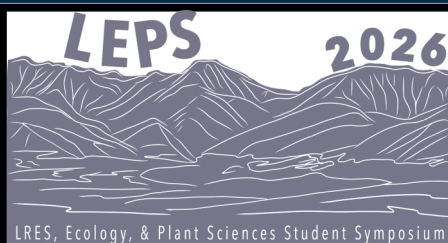


Dr. Chris Guy

Dr. Guy is honored to be the next Department Head of the Department of Ecology. He is excited to lead one of the most popular programs in the College of Letters and Science at Montana State University. In his free time, Dr. Guy enjoys floating the rivers and gardening. He officially starts his Department Head tenure on July 1st.

Welcome to Our Spring Incoming 2025 Grad Students:

<u>STUDENT</u>	<u>DEGREE PROGRAM</u>	<u>ADVISOR</u>
Lydia Diehl	Ph.D., Biological Sciences	Andrea Litt
Nate Jourdonnais	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Jay Rotella
Caroline Kane	Ph.D., Ecology & Environ. Sci.	Travis Belote
Owen Kanter	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Justine Becker & Ethan Linck
Maxwell Randels	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Chris Guy

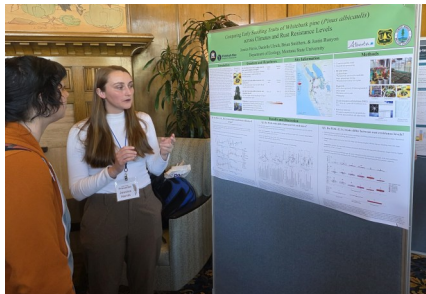


Graduate Students Host Research Symposium

Graduate student organizations in LRES, ECOL, and PSPP hosted the 16th annual scientific research symposium (LEPS) to celebrate that science at any stage matters, from undergraduates presenting for the first time to graduate students nearing their PhD defense. The theme of this year's event, "We Grow As We Go," highlights that there is a place for all levels of scientific discovery.

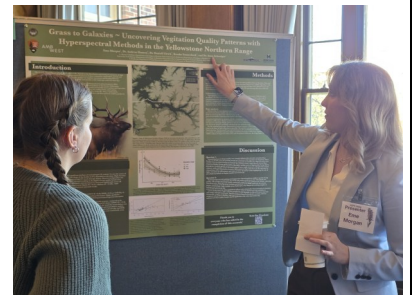


Nate Heili explains his research on climate change and food webs



Jessica Harris presents a poster on her Whitebark Pine research

This was the first year that the Ecology students took an active role in planning this event, which included poster sessions and scientific talks. Judges were recruited from faculty and staff. The event, which ran from 10:30-5:30 in the Leigh Lounge and Procrastinator Theater in the SUB, had a number of participants, although a wish was expressed for more attendees—something to work on for next year!



Eme Morgan shares her research on hyperspectral methods to analyze vegetation quality

All in all, the experience of putting on a research symposium provides invaluable experience for the graduate students while also providing a forum for undergraduates to get their first experience at presenting.

Graduate Student Oscar Dalling's research featured in Wyoming's "The Cowboy State Daily"



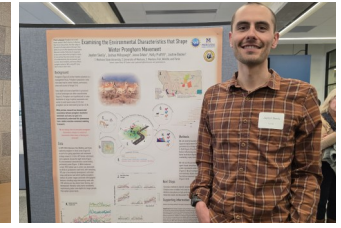
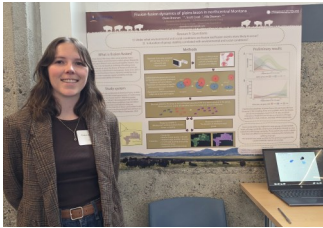
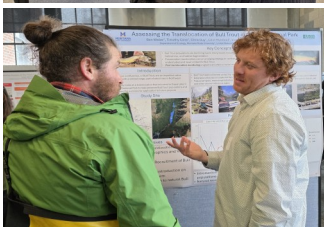
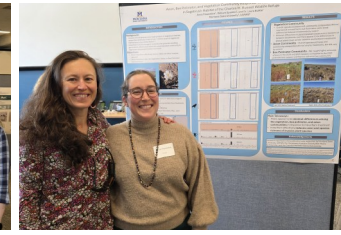
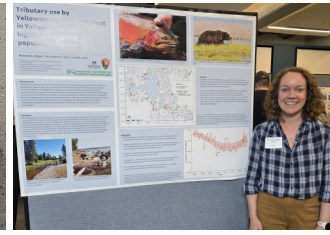
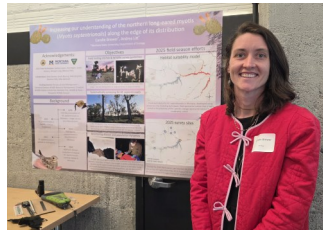
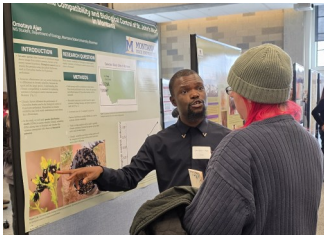
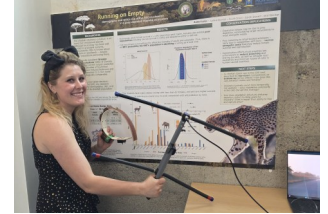
Ecology graduate student, Oscar Dalling, was featured in an article in "The Cowboy State Daily" newspaper for his research on grizzlies in Yellowstone National Park. The article, titled "From Bear Wrestling to Wildlife Monitoring, AI and Tech Evolution Fuels Research," written by Mark Heinz, appeared in the February 3rd issue. The story tracks how new technology alleviates much of the risk that researchers faced while studying grizzly bears, while at the same time reducing the stress on the bear population. AI was used to sort out 930 grizzly photos from the total 2.3 million photos captured over a two-month period. (Digital readers can read the full article here: [Read Article](#))

Inaugural Crawford Scholars Project Showcase

The Crawford Wildlife Habitat Graduate Fellowship financially supports graduate students interested in conducting research, education, outreach, and creative activities related to wildlife habitat areas. In the summer of 2025, 57 selected masters and doctoral students were awarded the inaugural scholarships, thanks to a \$30 million endowment from Tim and Kathy Crawford. Awardees were selected from nearly every college at MSU and from a wide variety of academic programs, including 12 from the Department of Ecology.



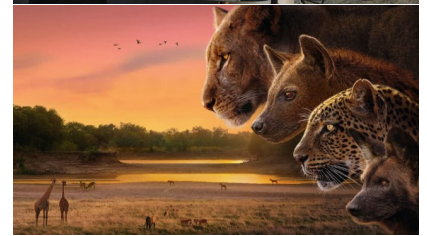
Dr. Kathy Crawford, in conjunction with The Graduate School, hosted the first Crawford Scholars Project Showcase to display the research that has been conducted by the student recipients. Graduate students presented posters of their work. The Showcase was well-attended and will likely become an annual event.



Professor Scott Creel's Research Contributed to the BBC Documentary Series "Kingdom"

Dr. Scott Creel, along with graduate students and colleagues in the Zambian Carnivore Programme, conducted years of research which was documented in the BBC docuseries "Kingdom," narrated by British biologist, Sir David Attenborough. The show is streaming now.

The Bozeman Daily Chronicle featured a nice article on their work in the January 9th, 2026 edition entitled "Long-term Montana State research brings rare African predator stories to life in BBC's 'Kingdom'," written by Lilly Keller. (Digital readers can read the article [here](#))



2026 Ecology Year-End Celebration Open House

When: Wednesday, May 6th
Time: 2:00-4:00 PM
Where: Leigh Lounge, SUB
What: Heavy Appetizers & Cake!
Who: Faculty, Staff, Grad Students, and graduating undergrads and their families





Ecology's
Bernadette Diaz
Business Operations Manager

Receives
"Everyday Hero Award in Research"
For her initiative in offering training sessions to faculty & graduate students on hiring, travel, and purchasing procedures to help them as they pursue their research

Congratulations, Bernadette!



*Congratulations to
Dr. Al Zale*

MT Cooperative Fishery Research Unit Leader and
Affiliate Ecology Professor

for receiving the

Montana Chapter--American Fisheries Society

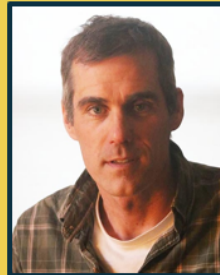
2026 Career Achievement Award



Congratulations
Department of Ecology 2026 CLS Award Winners:



Dr. Lindsey Albertson
Meritorious Research / Creativity Award



Dr. Steven Kalinowski
Excellence in Integration Award

Save the Date:

*2026 Ecology
Scholarship Awards Event
Friday, November 6*

MSU's Ecology Department was well represented at the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society conference in Missoula

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society held their 64th annual conference in Missoula during the week of February 23, 2026, with a theme of "Coordination and Collaboration in Conservation."

The MSU Ecology Department was very well represented at the conference, with 5 faculty members (Drs. Bassing, Becker, Litt, Willey, and Emeritus Professor Bob Garrott), 14 graduate students, and 19 undergraduate students in attendance. Undergraduate and graduate students from the department presented 4 talks and 7 posters; undergraduates also helped with many aspects of the conference operations. Many MSU alumni participated, now in their capacity as wildlife professionals working for agencies and NGOs throughout Montana.

MSU Ecology students received numerous honors at the conference. Undergraduate and MSU TWS student chapter president, Theo Koshar was recognized for winning the Dick Mackie Award to support his travel to the national TWS conference in Edmonton. Itai Namir received the award for the Best Poster by a graduate students. Owen Kanter received the Small Grants Award to support his MS project on swift fox. Nolan Helmstetter was honored with the 2026 Wynn Freeman Award for his outstanding contributions to the wildlife profession.



Congratulations to our Recently-Announced 2026 Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients

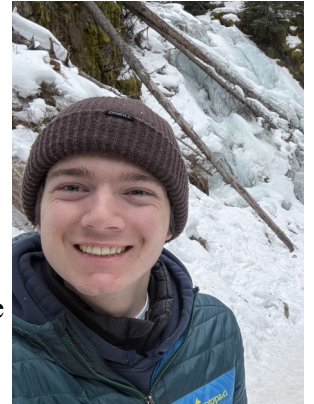
MT Trout Unlimited Fisheries Scholarship



Ian Swavely is a sophomore from Los Alamos, New Mexico, and is seeking a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management here at MSU. Ian is particularly interested in the management of recreational coldwater fisheries like those found here in Montana.

Yarnall Family Scholarship

Cody Hoover is currently a junior studying Fish and Wildlife Management. He grew up in Whitefish and has always been drawn to the aquatic side of ecology—especially marine systems. After graduating from MSU, he hopes to pursue grad school and eventually have a career in marine or freshwater ecology where he can work to preserve these systems.



Ecology Memorial Scholarship



Kylie Mills is a sophomore from Woodland, California. She is interested in working towards mitigating negative interactions between cinnamon black bears and recreationists in Montana and in the Greater Yellowstone Area. She will be conducting research for the next two years under the direction of Dr. Justine Becker. Kylie's goal is to become a ter-

restrial biologist or research ecologist for the National Park Service.

Sara Amasa Madsen Conservation Biology Memorial Scholarship

Madeleine Cooley is a sophomore from Littleton, Colorado, interested in alpine ecology and in the tangible application of conservation-focused research. Madeleine hopes to continue her education for a master's degree in ecology (or related field) and work in a hands-on application of research.



Ron & Jane Rada Scholarship in Aquatic Ecology

James Brown, a senior from Ligonier, Pennsylvania who is studying Fish and Wildlife Ecology and Management, and his mentor, **Dr. Wyatt Cross**, were selected as this year's recipients for the Ron & Jana Rada Scholarship in Aquatic Ecology. James is specifically interested in aquatic insect ecology and intends to further his education, and research the important role that macroinvertebrates play in aquatic ecosystems.

James' mentor and co-recipient, Dr. Wyatt Cross, explains that James will conduct a pilot project using drone imagery to track the distribution of water and productive habitat across the Gallatin River channel during snowmelt recessions at two sites with contrasting channel shapes. James will document wetted habitat characteristics—sediment, temperature, and inundation extent—and pair those data with fish gut content analysis to identify which invertebrates are more important for influencing trout growth across the riverscape.

