

ECOLOGY NEWS

Fall 2025
Vol. 2, Issue 1

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Important Academic Dates:

Oct. 1—Spring 2026 Graduation Applications Due
Oct. 21—Spring Priority Registration Begins
Nov. 12—Last day to drop w/ "W"
Dec. 1—Last day for MS & PhD defenses for fall graduation
Dec. 8-11—Finals Week
Dec. 12—Commencement

Department Event Dates:

Oct. 4—Annual Ducky Race
Oct. 23—Graduate Student Scholarship Banquet
Dec. TBD—End-of-term "Soup & Bread" Celebration

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Letter from the Department Head



Dr. Diane Debinski

Happy Fall! What a beautiful time in Bozeman. I hope that you are all getting out to enjoy the landscape and ecological wonders. MSU Ecology continues to be one of the largest and most popular departments in the College of Letters and Science. This semester our students are getting outside in a variety of their classes, including Rocky Mountain Vegetation and Research in Freshwater Ecology, among others.

This fall we have a new Assistant Professor of Landscape Ecology, Dr. Travis Belote (profile in this newsletter), and a new Principles of Biological Diversity Lab Coordinator, Dr. Anthony Slominski. We also have two new instructors, Dr. Christine Bonadonna co-teaching Principles of Biological Diversity and General Ecology, and Claire Bresnan teaching Conservation Biology.

The construction of the Vertebrate Museum Annex, affectionately known as the "Fish Pod" was completed during the summer and hundreds of jars of museum specimens preserved in alcohol (mostly fish, but some reptiles and amphibians) recently were moved there, making Lewis Hall a safer space for students, faculty, and staff.

And, as most of you are aware, Lewis Hall is in need of an elevator. MSU has now secured state funding totaling \$7,000,000 for an elevator project. A request to allow MSU to proceed with construction was made to the Board of Regents at the September 2025 meeting, and that was approved, so we are moving forward on that front. ADA accessible bathrooms will be built in association with the new elevator tower.

The MSU Ecology Department recently received a \$200,000 donation, with \$40,000 pledged over each of 5 years, entitled the Jungbluth Ecology Research Support funding. The Jungbluths are passionate about conservation, and the science that informs it. We are grateful for their support and excited to put these funds to good use.

Welcome New Faculty Member: Dr. Travis Belote

Dr. Travis Belote joined the Ecology Department in August after spending 16 years with the conservation NGO, The Wilderness Society. He completed his BA and MS at the University of Tennessee, PhD at Virginia Tech, and postdoctoral research at USGS before joining TWS in 2009.

Travis is a landscape and community ecologist and has used field experiments and spatial models to understand how nature works across spatial scales. His field studies have focused on Appalachian hardwood forests, Colorado Plateau rangelands, and Northern Rockies conifer forests. His spatial modeling work includes global assessments of species intactness, continental connectivity assessments, and national prioritization of terrestrial vertebrate biodiversity. He enjoys working at the nexus of basic and applied ecology and tries to ask research questions arising from management and conservation challenges while testing or applying ecological theories.

Travis is very excited to be transitioning to an academic role and is eager to build his research program at MSU. He is also excited to be teaching Landscape Ecology and Management this fall. His wife, Melissa, teaches at Sacajawea Middle School. They have two sons attending Bozeman High School. Travis enjoys hiking, skiing, floating rivers (and playing music, mostly by himself). Stop by and see him in AJMJ 119.



Dr. Travis Belote

Welcome to Our Incoming Fall 2025 Graduate Students:

<u>STUDENT</u>	<u>DEGREE PROGRAM</u>	<u>ADVISOR</u>
Lydia Bushey	M.S., Biological Sciences	Lindsey Albertson
Chase Dart	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Sarah Bassing
Henry Hardin	M.S., Biological Sciences	Israel Borokini
Ashlyn Hemmah	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Sarah Bassing
Marissa Ng	M.S., Biological Sciences	Brian Smithers
Ainsley Nystrom	Ph.D., Ecology & Environmental Science	Danielle Ulrich
Andriana Puchany	Ph.D., Fish & Wildlife Biology	Chris Guy

Annual Graduate Student Ducky Race Saturday, October 4th, 3pm at Bogert Park



Ducky Race
&
Duck Ball



Food
&
Fun

2025 Graduate Student Scholarship Awards Banquet



Thursday
October 23rd
5:30 PM

RSVP by October 8th

Graduate Students Intending to Graduate Fall 2025

Drew MacDonald	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management
Malia Naumchik	M.S., Biological Sciences
Hannah Stapleton	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management

Wishing you the best as you complete the last of your degree requirements for graduation!

Summer is for Field Work ... & Fun!



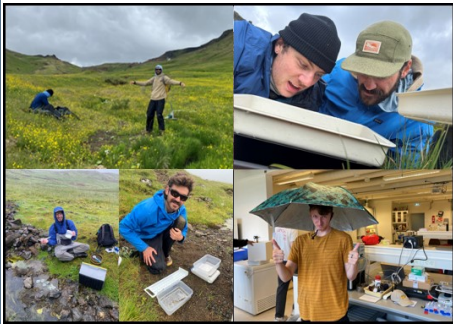
Black-tailed prairie dog field study in north-central Montana. —*Itai Namir*



The view on sabbatical—Scott Creel doing a flyover of the Lost River Range, ID.



Paddlefish study on the Missouri River near Fort Peck. —*Kelson Hickman*



Cross lab doing macroinvertebrate field research in Iceland. —*Sam Larkin*



Bassing lab on gray wolf field studies in Idaho and Yellowstone National Park. —*Sarah Bassing*



What does an ecologist do on vacation? Dr. Andrea Litt looks for bears in Ecuador and explores the Galapagos.



Nolan Helmstetter deployed marten monitoring stations in the Great Bear Wilderness.



Dr. Justine Becker and MS student, Arcata Leavitt, presented at the "Saving Yellowstone Summit" in Bondurant, Wyoming



Albertson Lab — Salmon fly & crayfish studies on the Madison River—and, below, students take part in a Fun Run at Society for Freshwater Science in P.R.



Diane Debinski demonstrates butterfly catch-and-release techniques to colleague Bill Clark.



Yellowstone ecosystem study —*Eme Morgan*



Cutthroat Trout study on Yellowstone Lake —*Cody Vender*

Vertebrate Museum Adds a “Fish Pod” Annex

The “Fish Pod” idea first came about in 2018 when department head Diane Debinski was speaking to a colleague from another university about the hazards of alcohol-based museum specimens stored in Lewis Hall. He suggested a separate fire-safe chemical storage container to store them. A long process of securing financial support, project approval, design, and construction began. Finally, during the summer of 2025, the Vertebrate Museum Annex, aka “Fish Pod”, became a reality.

Aside from minimizing fire risks, the fish pod will keep the museum specimens in a temperature-controlled space, increasing their longevity for future use. With some specimens dating back to around 1900, the collection is invaluable for research purposes. This collection is now digitally documented and is available online (<https://zenodo.org/records/5847350>).

With the fish specimens housed elsewhere, part-time curator and teaching and research professor Brian Smithers was asked about the changes the fish annex will bring to the museum space. “With more available space in Lewis Hall, we now have the flexibility to put more of our collection on display while also making our ornithology, mammalogy, and ichthyology teaching collections far more organized and accessible for those classes. It really is a game changer and it will allow us to seek even better long-term archival storage in the future!”



The “Fish Pod” arrives on campus in temporary storage until installation.



A giant crane lifts the “Fish Pod” over Chem Stores



The “Fish Pod” is carefully lowered on to its foundation.



Shelves are installed inside in preparation for receiving the fish specimens.



A professional team of HazMat movers transfers the fish specimens from the 4th floor of Lewis Hall to the new “Fish Pod” annex.



Meanwhile, fire-safe storage closets are constructed in the Vertebrate Museum to safely house the frequently used ichthyology teaching specimens.