

2024

Huerfano County Noxious Weed Department Monthly Report

March-April 2024 WORK ACTIVITY TOPICS

1. R&B GIS Asset Management Program
2. Preemergent Herbicide Applications
3. State Land Board Assistance
4. Broadleaf Herbicide Treatments
5. Species To Be Aware Of
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1. R&B GIS Asset Management Program

Upon approval for the R&B GIS Asset Management Program by the Huerfano BOCC in early March, staff began consolidating mapping data that was previously collected by R&B Superintendent Bill Burnelli and uploaded it to the Diamond Maps mapping platform. These data points were mainly for culvert and cattleguard locations throughout the county. As usual, March was a fairly windy month with periods of snow, providing the perfect opportunity to perform condition assessments among the already logged culverts and cattleguards while Noxious Weed Department field-work was impractical.

A) Areas of Focus

Given the fact that Eastern Huerfano County does not contain near as many noxious plant species among roadsides\right of ways as the western portion of the county does and that our attention will be focused among other high priority sites during the spray season, staff completed condition assessments for all cattleguards and culverts east of Interstate 25. It is anticipated that Noxious Weed Department staff will perform condition assessments during the course of routine work throughout the season. Color coded condition values (poor, fair, good) were applied to each feature after their assessment. Many of these features were constructed of non-standard materials or were vestiges of the old State Highway system, especially in areas parallel to I-25. Given the relatively high volume of summer traffic on C.R. 520, this roadway was also assessed during this slower portion of the season. This area has many aged concrete culverts with stone masonry wings, appearing to be WPA work from the 1930's. Along C.R. 520 and areas of Eastern Huerfano, there were a considerable amount of culverts that were located that had not been logged during Mr. Burnelli's assessment. These were generally in very poor condition and were in areas that may have not been in the most ideal locations to begin with.

B) Overall Culvert and Cattleguard Conditions Documented Thus Far

The tables below provide a snapshot of the overall condition of the assets inspected so far.

Culvert Conditions

Total Culverts	Good	Fair	Poor	Needs Repair\Attention	Total Inspected	Countywide % Inspected
956	69	50	53	11	172	18%

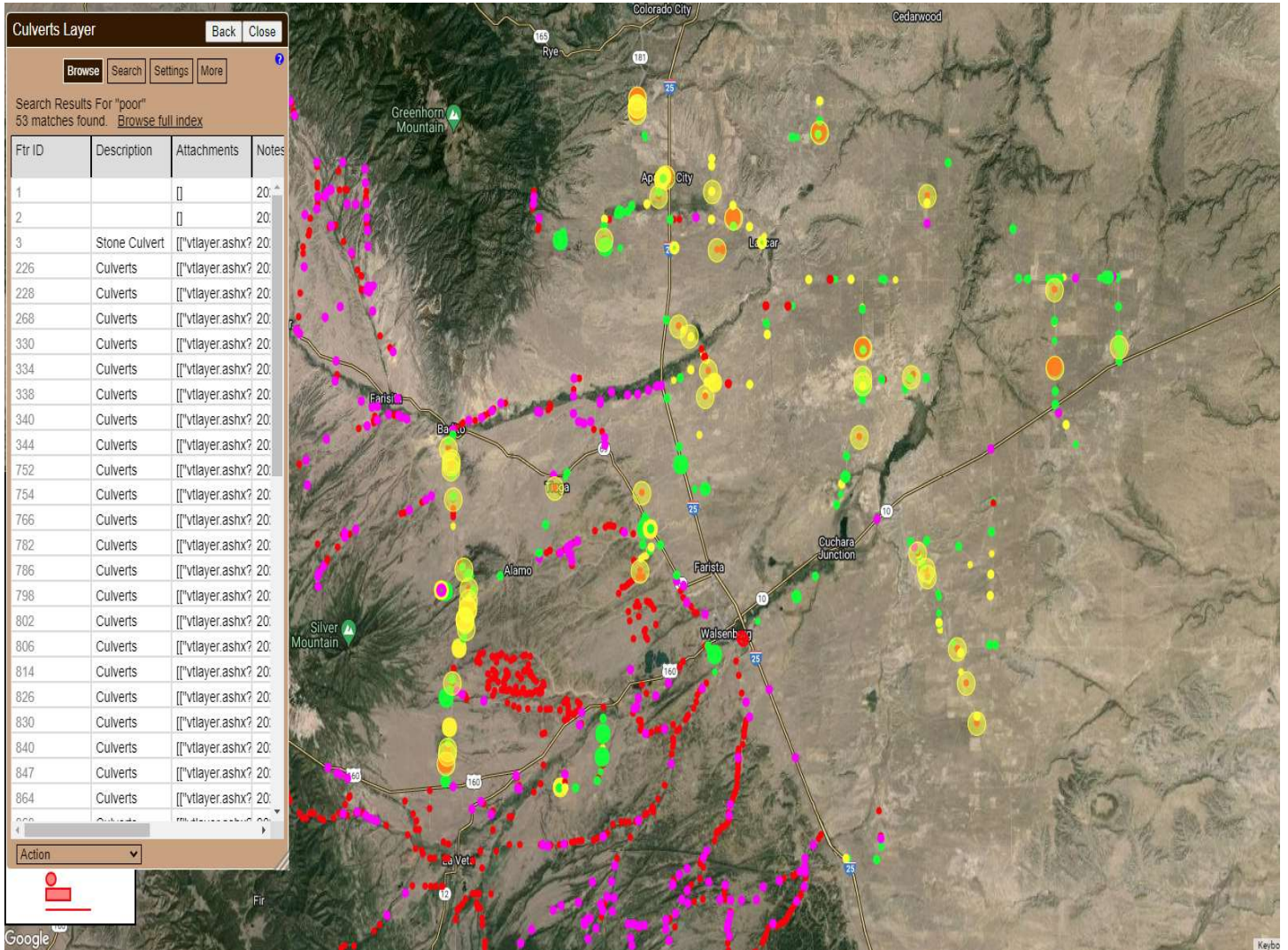
Cattleguard Conditions

Total Cattleguards	Good	Fair	Poor	Needs Repair\Attention	Total Inspected	Countywide % Inspected
434	46	62	96	6	204	47%

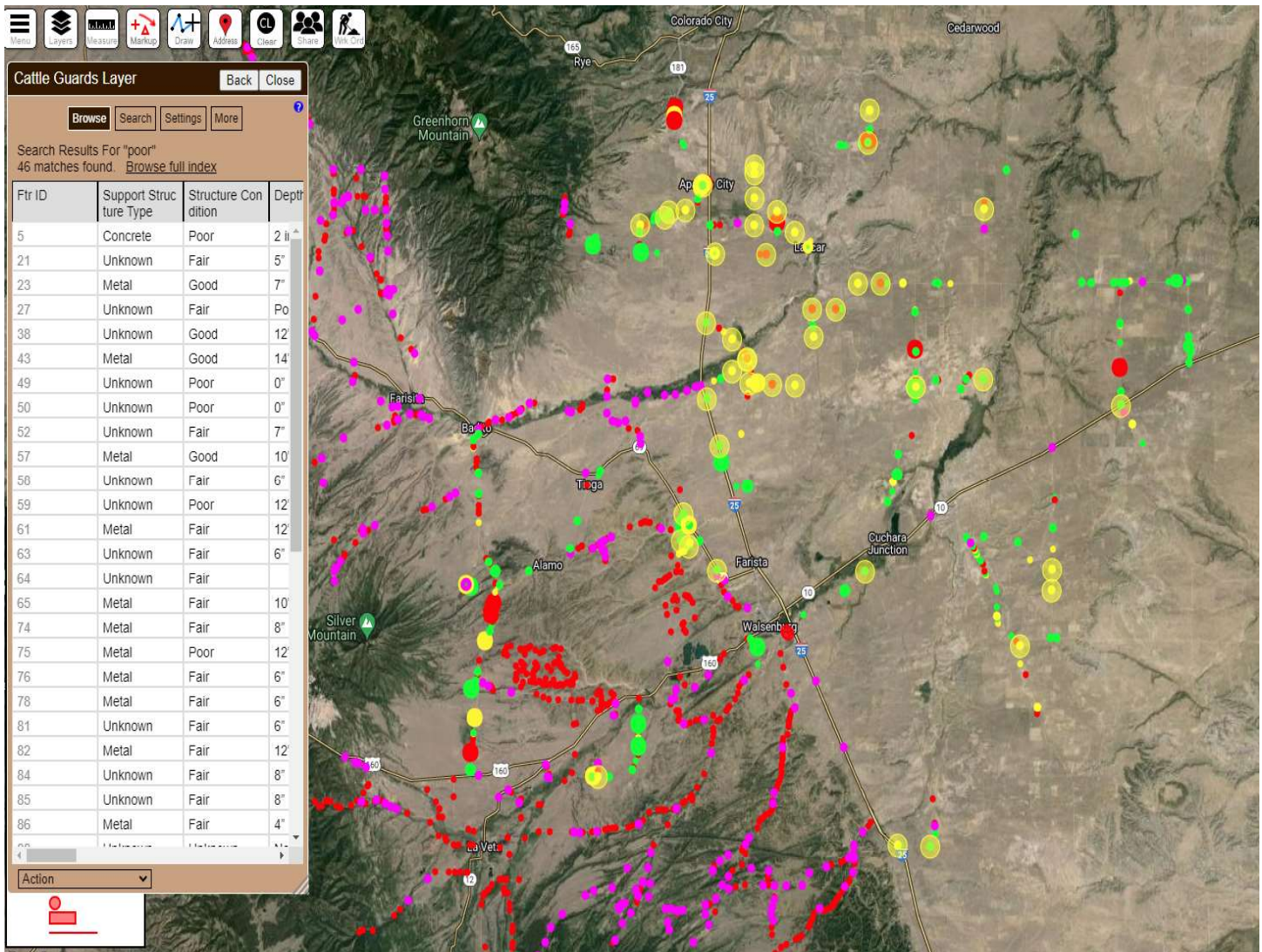
C) Color Coded Map Overview

The map image below indicates the locations of assets defined as “poor” (highlighted in yellow) being that these may be of interest to the BOCC and Administration.

Poor Condition Culverts



Poor Condition Cattleguards



D) Other Asset Features

Department staff will be expanding the types of assets being inspected and logged into the system. These additional features will eventually include: bridges, signs, guardrails, etc. Staff will coordinate with R&B Supervisor Hribar to determine which features\areas are of the greatest priority to be logged.

2. Preemergent Herbicide Applications

Within the months of March and April department staff completed preemergent herbicide applications among our industrial sites that we are responsible for upkeep, with the exception of the airport and Walsenburg R&B equipment yard which still need attention. The treated sites are as follows:

- 1) Capitol Hill Tower Site
- 2) Walsenburg R&B Fuel Tank & Outlying Areas
- 3) Walsenburg Community Center\Fiesta Park
- 4) Huerfano County Government Offices Parking\Alleyways (Old Courthouse, Sherriff's Dept., Social Services)
- 5) Fox Theater
- 6) Gardner Fairgrounds
- 7) Gardner R&B Yard
- 8) La Veta Fairgrounds
- 9) La Veta R&B Yard
- 10) West end of Jogging Trail (Walsenburg)
- 11) Badito Cone Tower Site
- 12) Sheep Mountain Tower Site
- 13) New Dispatch Center Alley & Parking Lot

3. State Land Board Assistance

As in previous years, the Colorado State Board has requested assistance towards the containment and suppression of State List noxious plant species among some of the properties that they own. This will serve as a welcome, unexpected revenue source for Huerfano County as we will be netting around \$4,900 for approximately three days of work (using only one spray unit). Jesse Price with the SLB asked for us to submit a quote for this work which is located among the old Gerald Pavlick\Martinez place on Bear Creek. This project will be completed by the end of May. Mr. Price expressed a desire to engage in a more formal, annual agreement for the upcoming years. We will be sure to coordinate with the Huerfano BOCC and Administration should a more formal agreement be presented in the coming months.

4. Broadleaf Species Treatments

Upon the completion of work among the preemergent sites previously discussed in this report, department staff began our routine seasonal work of controlling State List plant species among county right-of-ways and assisting landowners through our current CDA funding source that was secured last year (CDA\USFS Post Disaster Grant). Hoary cress (whitetop) has been doing exceptionally well so far this season in many varied sites throughout the county. One of our greatest success stories so far related to longstanding problem areas has been the coordination of treatments around the Corsentino Farm. This former organic farming operation had become overgrown with hoary cress along Hwy 10 and had become a serious source of concern and complaints from neighboring property owners. With the suspension of the organic “no spray” restrictions, we have been able to begin work in the immediate area, much to the satisfaction of neighboring property owners, particularly Mr. Dave Stroh.

Other high value areas treated include large monocultures along the Huerfano River around East Lascar. Similar to prior years, much of our work will be focused on the La Veta and Gardner\Chama\Redwing areas as these have the greatest densities and varieties of high priority species.

We are also happy to report that many of our 2023 treatment sites appear to be in very good condition going into the new season. There has been a drastic reduction in infested areas among many of our project sites, especially among the Oak Creek and Middle Creek corridors. Our work around the heavily infested Scotch thistle sites within La Veta (particularly areas around the railroad) has also seen a marked improvement over previous years.

5. Species to Be Aware Of

Our ample springtime moisture has allowed ideal conditions for the establishment of some of the more problematic perennial and biennial species in our area. After reviewing a number of sites throughout the county, whitetop, leafy spurge and Scotch thistle appear to be the most prolific so far. As mentioned previously in this report, the La Veta and Gardner areas carry the bulk of these infestations. Thankfully, our department has been able to forge many valuable relationships among affected landowners in these areas who are more than willing to address the noxious plant species on their properties. Of the species listed above, leafy spurge and whitetop will be among the first to complete their lifecycle, leaving a fairly slim treatment window that will close by mid-June. Scotch thistle and other perennial and biennial thistle species will have a slightly longer treatment window that is highly dependent upon temperature and moisture. The same can be said for the several species of knapweeds that we contend with as well.

6. Rod Smircich’s Departure from the Department

Just prior to the drafting of this report I was regretfully informed of the anticipated department transition for Mr. Rod Smircich who will be seeking a fulltime position within the R&B Department. The loss of this exceptional staff member will temporarily setback the operations of the Noxious Weed Department as it will be **VERY** difficult to find a replacement staff member of his work ethic, personal character and expertise. Unless otherwise directed, I would prefer to leave his position vacant for the time being given the fact that the training of a new technician this time of season will hamper the Department’s efforts and ability to complete pending projects. While disheartening to see the loss of such an exceptional worker, I can certainly understand his desire to secure a position with better wages and benefits. His presence within the R&B crew will prove to be just as valuable (perhaps more so) as his presence in the

Noxious Weed Department was. Being that his position is funded through the annual NWF Grant, I will be coordinating with the CDA\UAWMCA to transition that funding to other spending categories like herbicides and biological controls.

Moving Forward

By all indications it will be another busy season for the department. We will be focusing on the completion of pending projects, many of which are deliverables for our various grant opportunities that have been awarded. I feel confident that we can uphold our responsibilities to these commitments and will be able to advance our efforts, despite the staffing shortage\disruptions we are unfortunately facing. The condition of Huerfano County's landscapes are in a much improved place compared to when I started in the Department ten years ago this May. Much of this success was made possible by Mr. Smircich who has worked in the department for the last five years. The transition to a 4-10 workweek will aid the department in a few ways. Under the former schedule where the work day ended at 2:30pm, it was often impractical to get very much spraying work done later in the day, especially if herbicide tanks needed refilled after 1pm. The transit back to a fill truck\site, mixing of chemicals and transit back to treatment sites created a situation where it was not feasible or efficient to return to an area, only to work a few minutes before having to return back to Walsenburg so that we could clock out on time. On the inverse side, not working on Fridays will limit our flexibility to meet with landowners and may also be problematic should adverse weather conditions complicate treatments during the course of a 4-10 workweek. Under a traditional five day workweek, landowner visits would be scheduled on days of poorer weather. Under the new schedule, some fieldwork on ideal treatment days will have to be postponed so that site visits with landowners can take place.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the Huerfano BOCC, Administration and R&B leadership for their continued support, guidance and room for advancement that you all have provided over the years. When I first hired on as a seasonal worker in the Noxious Weed Department under Darryl Crawford in 2014, I could not have imagined the opportunities for personal growth and advancement that have been forthcoming and the positive trajectory that it has provided my family from literal poverty. I feel blessed to serve in such a role, especially compared to some of the bleaker and demeaning occupations that I have known. Special thanks to the current and past leaders within our organization who saw potential in me, potential that I may not have even realized myself. Here's to another ten years...