

ECOLOGY NEWS

Spring 2025
Vol. 1, Issue 2

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Important Academic Dates:

Finals Week — May 5-8
Commencement — May 9

Department Event Dates:

May 7—Year-end Celebration
Oct.23—Grad Scholarship Banquet

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Dr. Diane Debinski

Letter from the Department Head

We're quickly approaching the end of the spring semester, and it has been an exciting time. MSU Ecology continues to be one of the largest and most popular departments in the College of Letters and Science, with just under 600 undergraduates and 50 graduate students. For Spring 2025 graduation, a record 102 Ecology students will receive a B.S. degree!

In January, we welcomed new Assistant Professor of Applied Quantitative Ecology, Dr. Sarah Bassing, to our faculty (see her profile below). And as a result of recent job searches, in August we look forward to welcoming new Assistant Professor of Landscape Ecology, Dr. Travis Belote, and new BIOB 170 Principles of Biological Diversity Lab Coordinator, Dr. Anthony Slominski. Dr. Belote has most recently served as the Deputy Vice President and Senior Science Director for The Wilderness Society in Bozeman. Dr. Slominski has worked for MSU as a non-tenure track faculty member since 2019, and is highly accomplished in his teaching role. He will also continue to teach BIOE 408 Rocky Mountain Vegetation. We are also glad that former long-time BIOB 170 Lab Coordinator, Dr. Dave Willey, will continue to teach important lecture courses for the Ecology Department.

The Vertebrate Museum in Lewis Hall has a new set of cabinets for alcohol-based specimens used in teaching Ichthyology (the study of fishes). The associated "Fish Pod", a separate hazardous materials storage container to house the remaining alcohol-based research specimens, is scheduled to be constructed this summer.

For the upcoming summer semester, we will offer a broad variety of courses for our undergraduates, including field courses in Yellowstone Wildlife Ecology, Field Ornithology, Alpine Ecology, and Human Impacts on Soil, Plants, and Water in the Western US, and an online version of General Ecology. Meanwhile, our faculty and graduate students will conduct research related to projects in a wide array of locations from Africa, Antarctica, Iceland, the U.K., and the Pacific Islands to places closer to home such as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Glacier National Park, and the prairies of eastern Montana.

Please keep reading for additional details on other accomplishments and updates. I am honored to be a part of this amazing community.

Welcome New Faculty Member: Sarah Bassing

Dr. Sarah Bassing joined the Ecology Department in January, and comes to us from the University of Idaho where she was a research scientist with the Idaho Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit.

Sarah is a quantitative ecologist who uses statistical methods to understand animal behavior and population dynamics. She earned her BSc and MSc in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana and her PhD in Environmental and Forest Sciences from the University of Washington. Her research interests stem from a background in carnivore ecology and wildlife management, and she strives to co-produce conservation-oriented research with diverse research partners. She combines fieldwork, ecological theory, and statistics to address questions about interspecific interactions, human influences on wildlife, and the best methodological tools for monitoring and studying these relationships. She has worked across the western US and beyond, studying a diversity of species, from wolves to red-footed boobies.

Dr. Bassing is thrilled to have joined the Department of Ecology's faculty and is looking forward to growing her research program at Montana State University. She is also eager to develop courses on structured decision making and quantitative methods in wildlife ecology. Outside of the University, Dr. Bassing enjoys traveling, baking, hiking and cross-country skiing with her husband and dog. She also recently rekindled her love of ceramics and enjoys making nature-themed pottery.



Welcome to Our Incoming Spring 2025 Grad Students:

<u>STUDENT</u>	<u>DEGREE PROGRAM</u>	<u>ADVISOR</u>
Omotayo Ajao	M.S., Biological Sciences	Israel Borokini
Cara Brewer	Ph.D., Fish & Wildlife Biology	Andrea Litt
Gabby Eaton	M.S., Fish & Wildlife Management	Andrea Litt

Ecology Spring Seminar Series

10-15-minute Scientific Whiteboard Presentations
Thursdays at 3:30 PM, 346 Leon Johnson Hall

April 24

Benjamin Weber: *Translocations: a possible new conservation tool to preserve bull trout populations*

Samuel Larkin: *Bioenergetic plasticity in a geothermally-warmed stream system*

Gabriella Eaton: *Bats, boxes, and buildings: comparing temperatures in innovative bat box designs*

May 1

Benny Bevil: *Gross primary production and cutthroat trout in the changing climate*

Jason Gregg: *Såli survivors: using genomics to understand an endangered Pacific bird species*

Jayden Skelly: *Sagebrush and simulations, methods to unravel prong-horn movement*

Spring 2025 Graduate Student Degree Completion:

Coltan Pipinich M.S., Fish & Wildlife Mgmt. Spring 2025

Congratulations, Coltan!

2025

*Graduate
Student Scholarship
Awards Banquet*



Save the Date:

*Thursday
October 23rd
6:00 PM*

2025 Ecology Year-End Celebration Open House

When: Wednesday, May 7th
Time: 11:30-1:30
Where: 306 Lewis Hall
What: Heavy Appetizers
Who: Faculty, Staff, Grad Students, and graduating undergrads and their families

Spring Happenings:

February “Snowmageddon”



Department Head, Diane Debinski, doing double-duty to ensure students can safely access Lewis Hall.

Congratulations to Zane Haroldson who was honored with a Founders Day Award for Student Excellence along with his chosen mentor, Dr. Dave Willey

Honored students are nominated by faculty in their colleges or departments. Qualified nominees must have at least a 3.0 GPA and demonstrated campus leadership and community service. Students each select a mentor who will be recognized with them at the event, which is hosted by the MSU Alumni Foundation.



Zane is a senior from Manhattan, Montana and is studying conservation biology and ecology. Congratulations Zane and Dave!

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

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society (TWS) held their 63rd annual conference in Billings during the week of March 5, 2025, with a theme of “Conservation Policy: Getting Involved, Staying Engaged, and How TWS Can Help.”

The MSU Ecology Department was very well represented at the conference, with 4 faculty members, 12 graduate students, and 17 undergraduate students in attendance, presenting 4 talks and 3 posters. Many alumni of MSU Ecology also participated, now in their capacity as wildlife professionals working for agencies and NGOs throughout Montana.

Participants from MSU Ecology also received numerous honors at the conference. Elise Loggers received the award for the Best Poster by a graduate student. Itai Namir received the Small Grants Award to support her PhD project on prairie dog behavior and ecosystem effects in northeastern Montana. Noah Sechrist was honored with the 2025 Wynn Freeman Award, for his outstanding contributions to the MSU TWS student chapter. Shane Petch, who received his BS and MS degrees from MSU Ecology, was honored with the Rising Professional Award, to recognize his early-career contributions as an area biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Carly Segal created the conference art. Undergraduate students from the department volunteered to help with many aspects of the conference operations.



Congratulations to our Recently Announced 2025 Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients

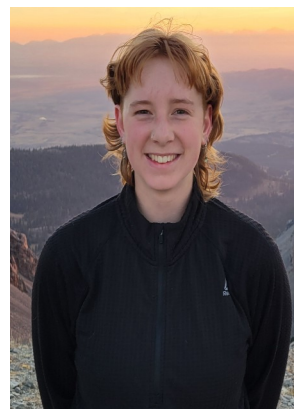
Ecology Department Scholarship



Skyler Ochs was selected as the 2025 recipient of the Ecology Department Scholarship. Skyler is from Manhattan, Montana, and is majoring in Conservation Biology and Ecology with a minor in Soil Science. Skyler will graduate in Fall of 2025 and plans to continue her education in grad school. Her research interests are in ornithology.

Yarnall Family Scholarship

Coral Mercer received the Yarnall Family Scholarship. Coral grew up exploring the outdoors in Eagle River, Alaska, where she has seen how human activity is affecting ecosystem functions and the importance of conserving these wild places. She is currently a junior in Conservation Biology & Ecology with a minor in Soil Science. She hopes to be a restoration ecologist, working to restore degraded ecosystems due to mining or other disturbances.



MT Trout Unlimited Fisheries Scholarship



Photo Credit: Lukas Draugelis

Jonathan Onken is currently a sophomore at MSU seeking a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management as well as a B.A. in Film. Hailing from Tijeras, New Mexico, his passions are native trout and the art of storytelling through film. He hopes to make conservation films that give a voice to species and habitats that don't have one.

Ecology Memorial Scholarship



Riley Parker was awarded the Ecology Memorial Scholarship. Riley is from Rockport, Texas and is in her second year of the Fish & Wildlife Ecology and Management program. She is currently doing independent research characterizing environmental effects on grizzly bear foraging sites in the GYE. Her goal is to become a research biologist, and she would love to incorporate art more into science communication.

Sara Amasa Madsen Conservation Biology Memorial Scholarship

Rowen "Axl" Wolfcale is a Montana State University freshman, double majoring in Ecology (Conservation Biology and Ecology Option) and English (Writing Option), with a minor in Global Studies. He is from Missoula, Montana, where he was involved with research on fire-adapted forests, including physiological responses of trees to drought, and in Montana's first FireWise Demonstration Garden, which educated homeowners in the wildland-urban interface about strategic landscaping to reduce wildfire risk to property. Axl is interested in international conservation biology research and hopes to contribute to conservation and wilderness protection in diverse parts of the globe.



**Congratulations to our record
102 Ecology undergraduate
students who will graduate in May!**