

LEWIS AND CLARK'S QUANDRY AT DECISION POINT

June 3, 1805
Confluence of the Marias and
Missouri rivers

"An interesting question was now to be determined; which of these rivers was the Missouri...to mistake the stream at this period of the season...and to ascend such stream to the rocky Mountain...and then be obliged to return and take the other stream would not only loose us the whole of this season but would probably so dishearten the party that it might defeat the expedition altogether."

MERIWETHER LEWIS

June 3, 1805—Taking five days to reach a decision, Lewis explored the Marias and Clark proceeded up the Missouri to determine which river was the mainstem. Lewis and Clark agreed that the best course to the Columbia River lay up the Missouri, however, the rest of the men believed they should follow the marias, which was larger due to snowmelt. Irregardless, Lewis wrote that the men said "very cheerfully that they were ready to follow us any where we thought proper to direct".

Native Plant Species

Cottonwood	Globemallow	Saltbush
height: up to 65 feet habitat: river plains	height: 4 to 9 inches habitat: shrubland and dry grassland	height: 4 to 20 inches habitat: plains, valleys, and badlands
A new species discovered by the expedition, Lewis described, "the narrow leafed cottonwood differs only from the other in shape of its leaf and greater thickness of its bark."	Scarlet globe-mallow is a low spreading plant with orange to brick-red, cup-shaped flowers. Leaves are yellowish-green above and grey-hairy below.	Gardner's saltbush grows in the alkaline clay and gravel soils of the Missouri Breaks. This small shrub has grainy feeling oblong grey-green leaves, and cream-colored winged fruit at the branch tips.



*Populus
angustifolia*



*Sphaeralcea
coccinea*



*Atriplex
gardneri*



Montana artist Don Greytak realistically captured the quandry that Lewis and Clark faced as they pondered which direction would be the "true course" at the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers.

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Statewide Noxious Weed Awareness and Education Campaign
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The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail weed education project was initiated and developed in 1997 by Montana's Statewide Noxious Weed Awareness and Education Campaign Task Force. The project grew to eleven locations by 2003 with the addition of Tower Creek Pyramids site cooperating with Idaho's Weed Awareness Campaign. By 2008 collaboration increased to the diverse entities shown on the reverse side of this sheet.

Today — As you explore the country around the Marias River you will observe non-native plant species like Russian and spotted knapweed that were not present when Lewis and Clark explored the river. Invasive plant species we find today in the area surrounding Decision Point were brought by unsuspecting travelers along waterways, roads, and trails. Humans transport plant parts and seeds on their clothing, shoe treads, vehicles, and boats. Wildlife, livestock, and pets transport seeds on their coats.

Once introduced, invading species thrive in Montana's climate. Russian knapweed and leafy spurge form dense colonies, crowding out native plants and reducing forage for wildlife. Spotted knapweed has the potential to increase soil erosion when it reduces native plant cover. One spotted knapweed plant will produce 3,000 to 4,000 seeds. You can help protect pristine areas from invading species by not walking or driving through infestations and by washing your clothing, gear, pets, and vehicles between site visits.

You may see these three invading plant species when you visit Decision Point and surrounding area.

Invasive Plant Species

Knapweed	Knapweed	Leafy spurge
height: 1.5 to 3 feet habitat: moist sites	height: 1 to 3 feet habitat: wide range	height: 1 to 3 feet habitat: variety
Russian knapweed can form an almost continuous cover. Openly branched plants have light blue-green foliage. Flowers are pink to lavender with whitish, papery bracts.	Spotted knapweed, unlike Russian knapweed, has a long taproot and the leaves are generally more deeply lobed. The flowers are pink to purple with dark spots on the bracts.	If you break off a stem or leaf from the leafy spurge plant it will drip a white, milky substance that has a bitter taste. Heart-shaped bracts house tiny flowers.



*Centaurea repens or
Acroptilon repens*



*Centaurea
maculosa*



Euphorbia esula