

The Release of Three Native Plants Announced by Leslie Marty

from Kelseya, Spring 2003

Old Works Germplasm fuzzytongue penstemon (*Penstemon eriantherus*), Washoe Germplasm basin wildrye (*Elymus cinereus*), and Prospectors Germplasm common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) were recently released by the Development of Acid/Heavy Metal-tolerant Cultivars (DATC) Project. The DATC Project is sponsored by the Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District in cooperation with the NRCS Bridger Plant Materials Center. The project was founded in 1996 to select plants inherently adapted to the low pH and heavy metal laden soils common at mine-impacted sites in western Montana. The program is structured around the collection of seed from plants growing in contaminated mine soils in western Montana. These (Go) seed accessions are subsequently tested against other accessions of the same species at a common garden at the Anaconda Smelter Superfund Site. Superior performing accessions are then planted at the Plant Materials Center in Bridger, Montana, to produce G1 seed and investigate cultural requirements. If an accession tests well and can be effectively farmed, it is petitioned for release through the Montana Foundation Seed Program. Upon approval, a release becomes commercially available to seed producers. Seed producers generally plant G1 seed and produce G2 seed, which is sold directly or indirectly to the general public, most commonly via seed company catalogs.

Old Works Germplasm fuzzytongue penstemon is a blue-flowering perennial forb adapted to loamy and sandy soils. It is commonly found in dry, open terrain from the prairies into the mountains of Montana, southern British Columbia and Alberta. This selection was collected near the historic Old Works smelter in Deer Lodge County, Montana. It has excellent potential for the restoration of dry, open lands and for xeriscape and rock garden applications.

Washoe Germplasm basin wildrye is a tall, coarse, robust, perennial bunchgrass native to the intermountain region of the western United States. The species' tall stature and extensive fibrous root system make it an excellent soil stabilizer and wind barrier. Washoe Germplasm basin wildrye was originally collected in Deer Lodge County, Montana, 1.25 miles southwest of the Washoe smelter stack on gravelly, sandy-loam textured soil. Soil pH at the collection site ranged from 4.6 to 5.6 and heavy metal concentrations ranged from moderate to above established phytotoxicity levels. Washoe Germplasm had better overall height, vigor, and survival compared to 'Trailhead' and 'Magnar' when tested in contaminated soil. Basin wildrye provides excellent forage and cover for many wildlife species. It is readily grazed in most seasons but is critical winter forage for elk and deer. It provides cover and thermal protection for many birds and small mammals.

Prospectors Germplasm common snowberry is an erect, densely branched deciduous shrub found at various elevations and climatic zones. It is a cool season plant with rhizomatous roots and often forms dense thickets. It is an important food, nesting, and cover species for many game and songbirds in the western U. S. Bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, and deer browse the foliage and twigs. This selection was collected adjacent to the defunct Washoe smelter in Deer Lodge County in a loamy textured soil. Soil pH at the collection site ranged from 4.1 to 6.0. Arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, and zinc concentrations ranged from benign to above established phytotoxicity levels. This species is an excellent soil stabilizer with a branched and rhizomatous root system that often forms dense plant colonies.