



ISSUE BRIEF

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Noxious Weeds

What is a noxious weed?

"Noxious" refers to weeds that are extremely competitive, aggressive and hard to control. They have taken over our rangelands, forests, croplands and natural areas causing ecological, social and economic damages. The terms "noxious weeds" and "invasive weeds" are used interchangeably; they refer to the same thing.

How are noxious weeds different from regular weeds?

Federal and/or State law designates plants as "noxious" if they are overly aggressive, difficult to manage, parasitic, poisonous, carriers or hosts of serious insects or diseases. Noxious plants may also be non-native, new to, or not common to the United States. In most cases, noxious weeds have a direct impact on croplands.

Where did these plants come from?

Most of these weeds came from (and still come from) Europe and Asia, being transported to the United States accidentally and intentionally. Accidental transport occurred and continues to occur in the ballast of ships, in the fleece and hair of livestock, in clothing, and as contaminants in seed lots. Other weeds enter the United States as medicine, dyes, and ornamental plants or to control erosion.

In 1787 English Botanist Sir Joseph Banks launched the "antipodean exchange" and shipped plants upon request to suit anyone's fancy. This brought the U.S. many plants we now enjoy - wheat, barley, and okra, to name a few. We also ended up, through these shipments, with cheatgrass, knapweed, toadflax and countless other "imported" plants that are invasive to our landscape today.

In addition to "importation", how are these weeds spread?

Weeds are spread in any number of different ways: by human activity, birds, animals, wind, water, vehicles, and seed and plant parts, to name just a few.

Are there health hazards associated with noxious weeds?

Yes. Health hazards to the public include the following examples:

- ✓ Leafy spurge can cause blindness and skin irritation or blisters;
- ✓ Poison hemlock is extremely poisonous if eaten and may cause death in a short period of time;

- ✓ Water hemlock, especially the root, is extremely poisonous if eaten, causing death in a short period of time;
- ✓ Jimsonweed and black henbane have hallucinogenic properties and can cause death;
- ✓ Many weeds cause allergic reactions in susceptible humans;
- ✓ In addition, weeds can present other public health hazards. For example, dense weed growth along public rights-of-way can obstruct vision leading to vehicle collisions.

How many noxious weeds exist in Oregon?

The Oregon Department of Agriculture designates two lists of noxious weeds. "A" designated weeds are weeds of known economic importance which occur in the state in small enough infestations to make eradication/containment possible or which are not known to occur, but their presence in neighboring states makes future occurrence in Oregon seem imminent. The "A" list includes thirty-one (31) different plant species. "B" designated weeds are weeds of economic importance which are regionally abundant, but which may have limited distribution in some counties. There are fifty-nine (59) different plant species in this list.

What is Oregon doing about controlling noxious weeds?

Within our state, the Oregon Department of Agriculture is responsible for coordinating an integrated approach to control and eradicate noxious weeds. The ODA's Plant Division Weed Control Program mission is "to protect Oregon's natural resources from the invasion and proliferation of exotic noxious weeds". The Oregon Noxious Weed Strategic Plan, published in January 2001, is the state's comprehensive guide for the protection of Oregon's resources in regard to noxious weeds. Additionally, the ODA works with local weed control boards, other Pacific Northwest states, and the federal government in control and eradication efforts.

