



# IS RUSSIAN OLIVE

## really a noxious weed in Wyoming

Yes, the rumors are true. After several years of consideration by the Wyoming Weed and Pest Council, Russian olive was recently placed on the state's designated noxious weed list.

What does this mean for Wyoming citizens? The legal ramifications are primarily twofold.

First, under Wyoming's nursery stock laws, sales of Russian olive seeds, rootstocks, cuttings for propagation, and live trees are now banned within the state. The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is responsible for enforcing this during its annual nursery stock dealer inspections.

Second, each county weed and pest control district is required by law to implement a Russian olive control program. Most districts have prioritized control efforts to focus on Russian olive that has escaped cultivation and invaded pasture and riparian areas. Whether any action would be taken to remove or control Russian olive trees that seem likely to spread is up to each county's weed and pest control

district. Its invasion and negative impacts are widely seen in many areas of Wyoming including, but not limited to, the Big Horn Basin, along the North Platte River, and many parts of the Powder River Basin.

Many folks are still wondering why the trees, which were promoted for windbreaks and wildlife habitat for so many years, are now on Wyoming's hit list. While Russian olive does provide a rapidly growing, drought-tolerant windbreak, it often refuses to leave well enough alone and stay where it is planted. Mature trees produce enormous numbers of fleshy fruits every summer that are consumed by many wildlife species, including deer, turkeys, raccoons, coyotes, and numerous birds. Seeds within the eaten fruits are then widely dispersed. Russian olive seeds are capable of establishing and growing across a broad range of conditions while native riparian trees, such as cottonwoods, have very specific requirements for establishment.



This, coupled with other factors such as drought, beaver preference for native trees, and intense competition for light, water, and nutrients, is resulting in Russian olives displacing cottonwood and willow stands.

Russian olive-dominated riparian areas are often much less diverse in terms of habitat structure and plant community composition. Despite the use of the fruits by many animals, this reduced habitat diversity can negatively impact other wildlife, such as cavity nesting and insect eating birds. Little is still known about the potential full impacts of Russian olive's domination of riparian areas.

Here are a few recommendations for controlling Russian olives. Cutting alone is not enough to control this tree. Russian olive is a vigorous resprouter from the root crown and will rapidly regrow following cutting or any type of top growth damage. To reduce resprouting, apply herbicide directly to the stump within 15 minutes after cutting (the sooner the better). Effective cut-stump herbicide treatments include triclopyr, imazapyr, and glyphosate.

Foliar herbicide applications are difficult to make on large trees, but small trees and resprouts may be controlled with 2,4-D. Late summer timings are very effective. For more detailed information, contact a county weed and pest control district. Wyoming weed and pest control district information is available at [www.wyoweed.org/wp\\_dist.html](http://www.wyoweed.org/wp_dist.html).

Small seedlings may also be hand pulled in the spring and early summer, but this is extremely difficult when stems are greater than one-half inch in diameter. Resprouts from older root crowns cannot be hand pulled at all. In addition to the sprouts, control efforts will need to continue until the seed source within the soil is exhausted, which may take several years.

Contact a local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service or weed and pest control district office for more information on control programs for Russian olive. County CES office information is available at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp>.

Russian olive is not the first popular horticultural species to be placed on Wyoming's noxious weed list. Yellow toadflax, common tansy, purple loosestrife, and saltcedar (*Tamarix*) have all escaped cultivation and have become a serious threat to Wyoming ecosystems. Unfortunately, desirable characteristics of some horticultural species can cause them to become invasive.

Only a few horticultural plants have escaped to become pests in natural ecosystems. Unfortunately, Russian olive is one that has.



*Russian olive produces numerous seeds, which are eaten by many wildlife species and are then widely dispersed.*

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