



Weed and pest districts exist to assist landowners

By Slade Franklin

Unmanaged noxious weeds and pests can negatively affect agriculture, wildlife habitat, land values, and even human health.

For example:

- Annual forage loss from invasive weeds in pastures amounts to nearly \$1 billion in the United States.
- In 1937, a Mormon cricket outbreak in Wyoming caused \$383,000 in crop damage – approximately \$6 million in today's money.
- Plants such as tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), silverleaf nightshade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*), and Russian knapweed (*Centaurea repens*) are common in Wyoming and toxic to livestock.
- Plants such as purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria* L.), oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*), and Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria genistifolia* ssp. *dalmatica*) can destroy wildlife habitat by out-competing native plants.
- In the Western states, an estimated 17 million acres of federal land are infested with noxious weeds, and the number is increasing at a rate of 4,000 acres per day.

This is pretty scary news, and it's hard to imagine what a small-acreage owner can do to make a difference; however, a visit to a county weed and pest control district office is an excellent way to start.

Wyoming's current weed and pest program is the result of more than 100 years of noxious weed laws. The original weed control program was enacted and signed into law by Wyoming Governor William Richards in 1895 and made it "...the duty of every person, company, association of persons, railway company, corporation and municipal or public corporation in this state to destroy...the noxious weeds hereinafter mentioned, namely: the *Aesola kali tragus*, commonly known as the Russian thistle and the Canadian thistle." Since then, the state's weed and pest program has become as diverse as the different invasive species threatening the state.

Russian knapweed



Landowners can provide help to their local districts by reporting any plant or pest that looks out of place. It is much easier to eradicate 10 or 12 plants than it is to eradicate a 10- or 12-acre established infestation.

Legal mandate of weed and pest districts

Each county is required by statute to have a weed and pest control district to implement effective control programs for state “designated” weeds and pests. A “designated” weed or pest may be a plant, animal, or insect that is destructive, injurious, noxious (poisonous), invasive, or detrimental to the general welfare of the state.

To implement these programs, a board consisting of five or seven county landowners is appointed by the county commissioners. The board holds monthly public meetings at which district programs are devised and reviewed. In many cases, the board offers a cost-share program to landowners to assist in controlling specific weeds or pests. Landowners should contact their local district for

an application. The extent of these cost-share programs depends on the priorities set by the board and budget constraints.

Since invasive weeds and pests do not recognize agency, county, or state boundaries, neither should county programs; therefore, the 23 districts (www.wyoweed.org) are organized by statute into the Wyoming Weed and Pest Council. The council serves as a platform for individual districts to coordinate and cooperate with each other to implement an effective statewide program. The council also plays an important role in working with neighboring states on regional and national noxious weed and pest issues. The council membership is also active in national organizations such as the North American Weed Management Association and the Missouri River Watershed Coalition.



Mormon cricket

Designated weed and pest list

Part of the duties of the council is to update, by joint resolution with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, the Wyoming "designated" weed and pest list as needed. The list not only serves as the state's priority list of noxious weeds and pests but is also referred to by state and federal agencies in their land management programs.

In addition to designated weeds and pests, each district can "declare" specific weeds and pests as noxious within its respective county. Invasives particularly troublesome in a county can be added to the designated list so districts can legally use public funds to control declared weeds and pests.

District budgets are funded through county mill levies but may also be supplemented by grants and contracts with government agencies or private individuals as well as sales of services and products. Grant sources such as the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust have made a significant contribution to districts working to improve wildlife habitat. The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Bureau of Land Management are examples of the agencies that contract with districts for noxious weed control work.

Wyoming Weed Free Forage program

Fields free of noxious weeds may be certified as "weed free" through the Wyoming Weed Free Forage program by a weed and pest control district, and the harvested crop is



Photo by Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service

Garlic mustard

marked with either special twine or tags. Certified hay typically sells at a higher price than uncertified; therefore, the producer also receives an economic benefit.

Some state and federal agencies, such as the WYDOT and USFS, have restrictions on the use of uncertified hay and straw on lands managed by their agencies. Weed-infested forage can spread invasive weed seed into isolated and pristine areas. For more information, please see Ask Sam "What is certified hay?" published in the Fall 2007 *Barnyards&Backyards* magazine at www.barnyardsandbackyards.com/Articles/2007.htm.

In addition to noxious weed control, the districts also implement programs on "designated" pests. Prairie dogs are the most widely recognized and debated of those designated as a "pest." The designated list also

includes mountain pine beetle, beet leafhopper, ground squirrels, grasshoppers, and Mormon crickets. Many districts also declare mosquitoes as pests, which allows them to cooperate with cities and abatement districts in insect control and obtaining grant funding.

Weed control requires partnership

A landowner is often the first defense against the introduction of new invasive species. Landowners not only need to be aware of potential invasion from the 25 "designated" weeds but also the species found outside our state's boundaries. Some of the species creating significant problems in our neighboring states are yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis* L.) in Idaho, African rue (*Peganum harmala*) in Colorado, rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*) in Montana, spurge flax, (*Thymelaea passerina* (L.) Coss. & Germ.) in South Dakota, and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) in Nebraska. For photographs and other information, see <http://ces.edu/wyoweed/wyoweed.htm>. These weeds and many others are capable of establishing themselves in Wyoming and could potentially already be here.

Landowners can provide help to their local districts by reporting any plant or pest that looks out of place. It is much easier to eradicate 10 or 12 plants than it is to eradicate a 10- or 12-acre established infestation.

To find out more about your county weed and pest control district, the Wyoming Weed and Pest Council, or invasive weeds and pests, visit the council Web site at www.wyoweed.org or call (307) 777-6585.

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