



YOU CAN HELP KEEP

Gulf oil spill and invasive weeds in the West have this in

By Brian Mealor

The recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico may be one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history. The impacts of such an economic and ecological tragedy will be seen far into the future.

Those of us in the Rocky Mountain West had few options to directly influence the outcome. We are able, however, to take a more active role in reducing the effects of another slowly spreading environmental disaster capable of reducing wildlife habitat, negatively affecting local economies, and altering the way ecosystems function: invasive weeds.

Oil Spill, Invasive Weeds Both Cost Billions

Before dismissing this, give me the opportunity to clarify similarities between weed invasions and the Gulf Coast oil spill.

The oil spill affected a large area of marine and coastal ecosystems of the Gulf Coast. Invasive weeds negatively affect millions of acres of western North American rangelands and other types of ecosystems.

Estimates of the ecological and economic impacts of both the oil spill and invasive species are difficult to obtain because of many interacting factors. The costs of the recovery and cleanup of the oil spill will tally in the billions of dollars with unpredictable indirect future costs in lost fishing revenues, reduced tourism, and other losses.

Economic losses attributed to introduced invasive animals and plants have been estimated at more than \$120 billion per year; invasive plants account for approximately \$34 billion – a substantial loss to the nation's economy.

There is one distinct difference between the oil spill and weed invasions: once the oil well was sealed, there has been no additional oil released into the Gulf; invasive weeds continue to spread and reproduce once the initial source of invasion has been eliminated.

Identifying, Reporting helps Weed Control

We can help reduce weed invasions by finding and reporting new weed populations before they reach problematic sizes and densities.

Wyoming has a program for voluntary participation in

locating and reporting new populations of problematic invasive weeds (see accompanying story for a description of some of the weeds).

The Wyoming Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey / Pest Detection Program (Wyoming CAPS) is the cooperative program of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, and the University of Wyoming established to collect and share information on new weed and pest populations in Wyoming.

Its mission includes collecting data about pests of concern in Wyoming, providing and sharing data and management tools (including distribution maps), and coordinating pest management and survey efforts among federal, state, and county agencies.

Wyoming CAPS maintains an ongoing volunteer weed and pest survey database where interested citizens can report infestations of problematic weeds and insect pests through the Report-a-Pest program.

Wyoming CAPS a Gathering Ground of Information

Anyone spotting an existing or suspected problem-causing weed or insect in Wyoming can report it with basic information such as location, date of collection, and population characteristics through the Report-a-Pest link on the Wyoming CAPS Web site: www.uwyo.edu/capsweb.

This information gives weed and pest control districts or other entities opportunities to implement controls before the populations become too large to efficiently control and to reduce potential impacts of new species introductions.

During your time outdoors or travelling the state, you can actively protect Wyoming from the economic and ecological damage from weed invasions. Watch for plants that seem out of place and contact your local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office or weed and pest control district for assistance in weed identification and reporting.

Contact information for local weed and pest control districts is at www.wyoweed.org/addresses.html. Contact information for local UW CES offices is at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp>.

INVASIVE WEEDS AT BAY

common – both are wreaking havoc on habitats and costing billions

NOTORIOUS NOTABLES

Several new populations of weeds not previously recorded, or recorded only in very small numbers, have been documented in Wyoming over the past several years.

Management actions have contained the known populations for several of the weeds where first documented, but additional populations have been found in other areas. These weed species are high priority for documentation and control efforts.

These species include:



Rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*): This deep-rooted perennial from the sunflower family was documented in Sublette County in 2007, and another small population was found in northern Lincoln County in 2010. Rush skeletonweed has invaded millions of acres in states west of Wyoming and decreases forage quality and quantity for wildlife and livestock.



Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*): This spiny relative of the knapweeds is widespread in California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Its spines can cause injury to livestock, and the plant is toxic to horses. It is easily identified by spines surrounding the yellow flowers at the ends of individual stems. There are a few older records of this species near Thermopolis and Wheatland, but the most recent documentation is near Jackson in Teton County.



Viper's bugloss (*Echium vulgare*): Also called blueweed, Viper's bugloss produces multiple showy flowers in late summer. The stems are covered with many small hairs capable of irritating the skin if pulled or touched without gloves. It is increasing, especially along rights-of-way and disturbed areas in southeastern Wyoming.



Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*): This native to eastern Asia is a widespread invader along river corridors and wet areas in eastern parts of the U.S. but displays a potential for invasiveness in the Intermountain West. Large, heart-shaped leaves and multiple small, white flowers arranged along a central stem are reliable indicators. Current documented individuals are in the towns of Laramie and Lander, but it has not been documented spreading widely ... yet.



Austrian fieldcress (*Rorippa austriaca*): This perennial herbaceous plant spreads from rhizomes, or reproductive roots, into moist areas along ditches and potentially into irrigated hay fields. The bright yellow flowers look like many of the yellow-flowered annual mustards in our state, but this is easily distinguished by its robust perennial root system. The only known population in Wyoming is in Sublette County near Cora.

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