



WEEDS ON THE MOVE: WAYS TO STOP THE SPREAD

By Ken Henke

Does it seem invasive weed seeds rain down from the skies?

In some cases, that may not be far-fetched. Canada and musk thistle seeds ride the winds on parachute-like attachments traveling several hundred feet. Even more impressive is saltcedar, which can produce thousands of pollen-sized seed that become windborne and travel many miles – particularly during storms.

Water and wildlife also transport invasive weed seeds and plant parts, which can propagate, great distances from the parent plant. With the ability of dispersing far and wide and a knack for quickly establishing infestations, it's no surprise managing weeds is so difficult.

Controlling all weed movement by water, wind, and wildlife is virtually impossible, but there are many other routes of weed dispersal that are controllable. Knowing these routes of weed movement and how to stop them could save the considerable cost and effort of treatment if weeds become established on private or public lands.

Prevention

The more effort initially spent to prevent the spread of weeds, the less cost and effort for treatment. The added benefit of preventative measures is the satisfaction of reducing weed spread to weed-free neighbors and natural areas.

Although invasive weeds primarily establish new plants through seed germination, given the right conditions, many invasive weeds can propagate through pieces of stem or root; therefore, consider any plant part as having the ability to establish new infestations.

Routes of Spread and What Can Be Done

Recreational Vehicles

Vehicles are the perfect transport mechanism for weed seeds and parts. Seeds and plant parts can become embedded in tire treads, in the crevices on the underside of vehicles, or behind license plates. Weed seeds and plant parts may travel hundreds of miles before becoming dislodged. Recreational vehicles such as ATVs or



Aptly named houndstongue catches a ride to infest other areas. The weed is toxic to livestock.

motorcycles are of particular concern since they can travel in areas not accessible by passenger vehicles.

Avoiding weed infestations is the most effective measure that can be taken to minimize weed transport. Thoroughly powerwashing a vehicle at a commercial facility is next best. All traces of mud (which can conceal seeds or other plant parts) and plant materials must be removed. Commercial vehicle washes typically have drains that collect debris, which is then disposed of in a manner that prevents the spread of weeds. Washing at home will spread any plant parts or seeds to your property.

Equipment

Earthmoving equipment and dump trucks often carry weed seeds and plant parts since they are used at construction sites. Homeowners who rent equipment such as lawnmowers, rototillers, lawn aerators, and tractors should be especially concerned about introducing weeds. Lawn maintenance companies can also spread weeds over many areas when weed seed gets trapped in the undercarriage of power mowers. Be sure any company you hire is taking steps to avoid spreading weeds. Overall, the most effective preventative measure to minimize the spread of weeds by equipment is to thoroughly powerwash prior to moving from one location to another.

Landscaping materials

Homeowners purchase compost, gravel, mulch, sand, soil, and decorative rock for a variety of projects. If purchased in bulk from a local gravel pit or landscape supply company, an inspection of the facility and surrounding area may determine the potential risk of transporting weeds. Contact your county weed and pest control

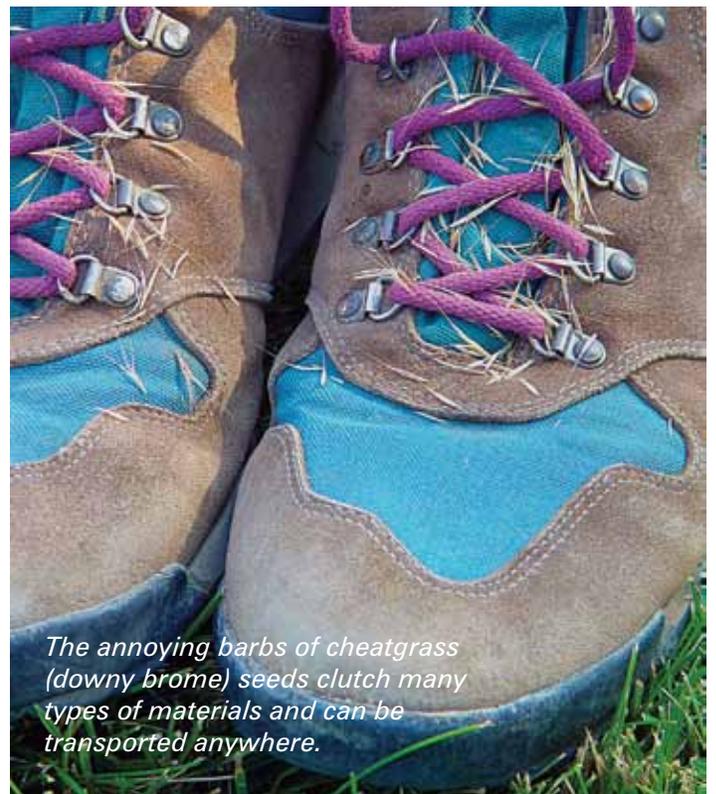
district office (www.wyoweed.org/addresses.html) to find sand and gravel pits certified weed-free.

Gardening

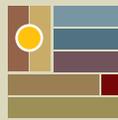
What we consider an attractive flower in our yard may prove a menace in the wild! Screening new plants for invasive properties before purchasing is important. Additionally, pay attention to any unidentifiable plants growing with a potted plant. Not all potting soil is certified weed-free, creating yet another route for weeds to invade your garden or adjacent natural habitats. Avoid buying and planting mixtures of seeds, especially ones labeled "wildflowers," as they may contain invasive species, which are often difficult to identify. Never dispose of unwanted plants or lawn or garden clippings in parks or natural areas. This may spread invasive species. Compost yard waste or dispose according to local requirements; readers should contact their city or county government for more information on proper disposal.

Recreation

The potential for transporting plant parts or seeds is high anytime people or their animals are in areas infested by weeds. Oftentimes, invasive weeds transported to backcountry areas are not identified until they become well-established and are then difficult to eradicate. Careful consideration of the ways recreational activities can transport weeds is the most effective prevention practice to reduce weed introduction into natural habitats.



The annoying barbs of cheatgrass (downy brome) seeds clutch many types of materials and can be transported anywhere.



The most important way to limit the spread of weeds from recreational activities is the most obvious – avoid camping in weed-infested areas. Many weed seeds have hooks and barbs that easily attach to clothing and camping gear. If weeds are present in your campsite, shake out and inspect tents and sleeping bags before moving to a new site or stowing gear.

Clean all gear before leaving home. A stiff-bristled brush or high-pressure water spray is the best tool. Inspect gear before packed. Visible traces of sand, mud, gravel, and plant fragments are signs of improperly cleaned gear. Properly dispose of any materials washed off or there is the risk of infesting your property.

Loose soil and vegetation should be removed from mountain bikes prior to leaving backcountry trails. Upon returning home, a thorough powerwashing may also be necessary. If dogs, horses, or pack animals are part of recreational activities, be sure to inspect, brush, and clean them thoroughly – paying special attention to hooves, paws, and legs before entering and leaving infested areas. In addition, inspect and clean tack and equipment. Take only certified weed-free hay or pelleted food if going into the backcountry. Contact your county weed and pest control district for a list of certified weed-free hay retailers and/or contact the Wyoming Hay-Pasture-Seed List at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/haylist>.

Worth the Effort

The more folks aware of the dangers of transporting weed seeds and parts, the fewer infestations we'll have to tackle. Please help spread the word. Consider the seed production of Dalmatian toadflax – a single mature plant can produce more than 500,000 seeds per year! Not only does the Dalmatian toadflax produce a lot of seed, the seed is viable for 10 years! Characteristics like these highlight the importance of preventing the dispersion of even a few weed seeds.

For more information, see

- www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/weeds_pests.html
- www.weedcenter.org/
- www.fs.fed.us/r2/invasive_species/

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Noted producer part of special sustainable agriculture conference at Torrington

Joel Salatin of Polyface Inc. farms in Virginia will be the keynote speaker at "Living and working on the land: The building blocks of success" Tuesday through Thursday, August 24-26, at the Rendezvous Center in Torrington.

Workshops topics include:

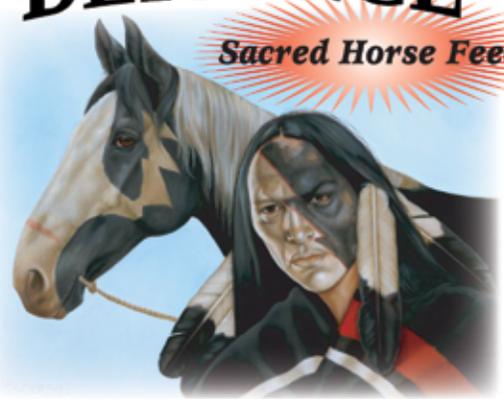
- Purchasing Food from Producers: What are we looking for from our suppliers?
- CSA, Farmers Markets, Direct-to-Consumer Marketing
- Direct Marketing Meat
- Marketing with Social Media
- Chicken Tractors
- Fruit Production in Wyoming
- Getting Started with Herb Production
- Business Strategies for Success
- Project Feasibility
- Farming with a Sharp Pencil
- Using Marketing Claims to Add Value
- Getting Started – New Production

For more information about this conference, visit:

<http://blocksofsuccess.org>

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