

Weed and pest districts exist to assist landowners

A landowner is often the first defense when a new invasive species arrives.

They not only need to be aware of potential invasion from the 30 noxious weed species designated in Wyoming but also those found outside our state's boundaries.

Weed and pest districts exist to protect our state from noxious weeds; however, 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.

Wyoming's current weed and pest program is the result of more than a century of noxious weed laws. The state's weed and pest program has evolved to become as diverse as the different species threatening our state.

Legal mandate of weed and pest districts

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."

A noxious weed or pest may be a plant, animal, or insect that is destructive, injurious, poisonous, invasive, or detrimental to the general welfare of the state. A

species is termed noxious when designated as a problem and added to the state list. Each county is required by statute to have a weed and pest district to implement effective programs for state-designated weeds and pests.

A board of five or seven county landowners is appointed by the county commissioners to oversee a weed and pest district. 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. The extent of these cost-share programs depends on the priorities set by the board and budget constraints.

Since noxious weeds and pests do not recognize agency, county, or state boundaries, neither should county programs; 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 Invasive

Potent weeds call surrounding states home

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, and Palmer amaranth (*Amaranthus palmeri*) in Nebraska.

These weeds and many others are capable of establishing themselves in Wyoming and could potentially already be here.



Palmer amaranth has already arrived in Wyoming.

Shawn Askew

Agriculture, wildlife habitat, land values, even human health suffer from unmanaged noxious weeds and pests

- 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.



Tansy ragwort



Purple loosestrife



Silverleaf nightshade



Dalmatian toadflax

Nataika De, Victoria Tucholka, emilio100, Kostantinos Livadas, shutterstock

Species Management Association and the Western Society of Weed Science.

Designated weeds and pests

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 noxious within its respective county. Particularly troublesome species in a county can be added to the declared list, which enables districts to implement programs for those weeds and pests.

District budgets are funded through county mill levies but may also be supplemented by grants, contracts with government agencies or private individuals, and sales of services and products. Grant sources such as the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust have made significant contributions 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 agencies that contract with districts for noxious weed control work.

In addition to noxious weed control, the districts also implement programs on designated pests. The designated pest lists includes prairie dogs, 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 vector management programs.

Wyoming Weed Free Forage program

Weed-infested forage can spread invasive weed seed into isolated and pristine areas. Fields free of noxious weeds may be certified as “weed free” through the North American Invasive Species Management Association Weed Free Forage program by the local weed and

pest district. The harvested crop is marked with special twine or tags as certified hay, and typically sells at a higher price than noncertified. Some state and federal agencies, such as WYDOT and the U.S. Forest Service, have restrictions on the use of noncertified hay and straw on lands managed by their agencies.

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

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Russian knapweed

Norman E. Rees, USDA
 Agricultural Research Service -
 Retired, Bugwood.org

More information than you can shake a weed at is available under the Treasure Trove of Information at the Barnyards and Backyards website www.uwyo.edu/barnbackyard. Click on Weeds.

Informative articles, photographs, and links to University of Wyoming Extension publications and other resources are available to help identify and control weeds.

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