

## Utah's Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious and Invasive Weeds

We've all sung the little jingle "April showers bring May flowers". This year, with all the moisture we received in May, weeds are "growing like weeds". Wet soil from persistent storms has made it difficult to keep ahead of relentless weeds and warmer weather will only enhance their growth. The worst thing we can do is neglect them because hefty weeds are more difficult to control than small weeds. The battle with weeds never ends.

Weeds are everyone's problem. They're not just an agricultural issue. Individual property owners have the first and major responsibility for controlling weeds on their lands. As our society becomes more mobile it is easier to disperse seeds or plant parts from one location to another. Recent USU studies show that one ATV, when traveling off-road, can pick up on average 4,200 seeds per mile. Seeds stuck on vehicles are then spread to other areas. Hikers can do the same thing when weed seeds get stuck to shoes, shoe laces or other parts of clothing. No one is proposing a ban on off-road recreation, but we can all do our part to prevent the spread and establishment of new and invasive weeds. In some cases, noxious weeds have been introduced by nurseries as beautiful ornamentals.

In 1971, the State Legislature passed the Utah Noxious Weed Act. After enactment of the law, the Department of Agriculture adopted rules to guide implementation of this act. A few years ago weeds were listed as Class A, Class B or Class C, depending on their seriousness and difficulty to control. More recently the Utah Weed Control Association, in cooperation with state and federal agencies and private land managers, has proposed a statewide strategic plan for managing noxious and invasive weeds. The enforcement of the law is basically the responsibility of the individual counties, county weed boards, and county weed supervisors. That proposal prioritizes weeds into the following categories.

Class 1 weeds have a relatively low population within the State and are of highest priority for control or eradication. Such weeds are referred to as an early detection rapid response (EDRR) weed. Some examples of Class one weeds are Common crupina, Spring millet, Plumeless thistle, Oxeye daisy, and Japanese knotweed. Many local citizens are not familiar with these weeds because they are relatively new to Utah. Every effort is being made to identify the location of these weeds and control or eradicate them before they can get a foothold in our State. Our ability to detect and document early invasions is getting better as we improve the way we collect and disseminate information about invading plants. The use of GPS and GIS technology is helping weed departments, and even individual citizens, efficiently track weed populations for more efficient control.

Class 2 weeds have a moderate population throughout the State and are thought to be controllable in most areas. Examples of Class two weeds are Yellow Starthistle, Diffuse Knapweed, Leafy spurge, Medusahead, Rush skeletonweed and Dyers Woad. Dyers Woad looks daunting in northern Utah, but other parts of the State have none at all. In our neighboring state of Idaho, Yellow Starthistle covered only a few acres years ago. Today it covers nearly 500,000 acres. We certainly don't want this weed to get established in Utah.

Class 3 weeds are found extensively in the State and are thought to be beyond control, but can potentially be contained. Statewide efforts are generally towards containment of smaller infestations.

Field Bindweed (morning glory), Quackgrass, Canada Thistle, Poison Hemlock, Phragmites and Hounds tongue are examples of Class C weeds.

Class 4 weeds, in addition to those listed above, are to be prohibited for sale at landscaping nurseries. Myrtle spurge, Scotch broom, Dame's Rocket, Cogongrass (Japanese blood grass) and Russian olive are examples.

Each County may have different priorities regarding specific state designated noxious weeds. The county weed board is responsible for the formulation and implementation of a county-wide coordinated noxious weed control program designed to prevent and control noxious weeds within its county. The responsibilities of the county weed board are outlined in state statute.

Among other things, the Weed Board directs the work of the County Weed Supervisor who may be asked to serve notice to landowners failing to control noxious weeds on their property. If deemed advisable, the County Council may send the County Weed Department onto neglected property to control noxious weeds. Any expense incurred by the county is assessed to the property owner. If payment is not made to the County Treasurer within 90 days, the cost is added to the individual's property tax.

Clark Israelsen  
USU Extension Ag Agent  
Cache County

