

WHY CONTROL NOXIOUS WEEDS IN YOUR COUNTY?

Why control noxious weeds?

In the U.S., introduced weeds are spreading and invading approximately 1.7 million acres of wildlife habitat per year. These species have been implicated in many of the natural resource problems the world faces today. It is noted that *Noxious weeds result in U.S. crop losses estimated at \$26 billion a year.* In addition, introduced species are the second leading cause of reductions in biological diversity.

- **Noxious weeds affect the economy.** Noxious weed infestations can have serious economic consequences. For example, Scotch broom interferes with the regeneration of Douglas-fir plantations. A recent study estimated that Scotch broom reduces Oregon's total personal income by about \$47 million. This is equivalent to 1,908 annual jobs lost to Oregon's economy from the production foregone by the presence of this noxious weed.
- **Noxious weeds threaten public health and safety.** Several noxious weeds, such as giant hogweed, or poison hemlock, can cause severe skin burns, sickness, and even death.
- **Noxious weeds destroy plant and animal habitat.** Noxious weeds can form dense stands, which choke out desirable vegetation. For example, spotted knapweed infestations may reduce available winter forage for elk by as much as 50 to 90 percent. When knapweed replaces dense, native vegetation in riparian areas, it can increase soil erosion, which may ruin spawning habitat for salmon.
- **Noxious weeds threaten recreational areas.** Noxious weeds directly impact lakes, rivers, tidelands, and parks. Species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil, can choke out fishing areas and make swimming and boating unsafe.
- **Noxious weeds impact water quality.** Infestations of plants, such as parrotfeather, can alter aquatic ecosystems by shading out the algae in the water column that serve as the basis of the aquatic food web. In addition, these plants can lower productivity and pH, as well as cause severe dissolved oxygen problems. Wetland weeds, like purple loosestrife, can also clog waterways, increasing siltation and decreasing water storage capacity.
- **Noxious weeds impact land use.** Infestations of some species can affect the use of property. For example, *Spartina* can ruin beachfront property by altering the fundamental hydrogeology of the intertidal zone. Gently sloping beaches are transformed into high *Spartina* meadows that drop off into deep water. These changes may eliminate activities, such as shellfish production.

Why Act now?

Washington's weed program is based on prevention and early detection of noxious weed problems. Species with limited distributions are our highest priority because we can hope to effectively control or eradicate them before they spread. A recent study evaluated the benefit of controlling new invaders and found a 34:1 benefit cost ratio. To the non-weed specialist, there is a tendency to avoid taking control actions until weed infestations become so pronounced that they present a clear economic and/or environmental problem. In postponing the control decision, the real cost of control increases over time. The longer an entity waits to implement a control program, the more damage the species causes and the more expensive control actions become.