

The Noxious Weed Laws of Washington State

Although you have the right to use your land for your own purposes, noxious weeds can interfere with your land use goals. And because noxious weeds do not abide by property or boundary lines, they can also interfere with land uses of your neighbors - be they homeowners, farmers, timber producers, fishermen, horse and livestock owners, or park or natural area managers. Noxious weeds impact us all here in Washington, either directly or indirectly, and it takes the cooperative effort of all landowners to help control them.



This is one of the noxious weeds that started it all, Canada thistle. Washington farmers realized early on that infestations of this weed on their neighbors' land could spread onto their own land and affect their crops. Thus, in 1881 - before Washington was recognized as a state - an act was passed that required both landowners and district road supervisors to control Canada thistle on their property.

Our state's main noxious weed law is Chapter 17.10 RCW. Its purpose is to limit the economic loss and other negative impacts that noxious weeds cause to our agriculture, natural resources, and human health. This law mandates the control of noxious weeds by landowners - both private and public.

Noxious weed laws are administered through the State Noxious Weed Control Board, county weed boards and weed districts, and the WA Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

While every county noxious weed control board and weed district is different, they all strive to provide many valuable resources to their communities, such as education, weed identification, technical advice on weed control, and when necessary, enforcement of the noxious weed laws.

The Washington State Noxious Weed List

To help protect our economy and natural resources, the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board adopts an annual noxious weed list - WAC 16-750. This list determines which plants meet the criteria of a noxious weed, and where in Washington control will be required. It divides noxious weeds into three classes: A, B, and C, primarily on how widespread each species is in Washington, and therefore how feasible eradication or control is. This approach allows control efforts to be prioritized in the most reasonable and cost-effective manner.

Class A noxious weeds are species whose distribution in Washington is still limited enough to keep them from gaining a strong foothold here. By law, all Class A noxious weeds **must** be eradicated (eliminated). Garlic mustard (right) is a highly invasive annual in many parts of the country, where it completely dominates forest floors. Fortunately, its distribution is still limited in Washington, and it is aggressively being targeted for eradication so it does not become widespread in our forests.



Class B noxious weeds are non-native species that are limited to parts of Washington. They are **designated** for control in areas where they have not yet invaded, or where distribution is still limited. The goals are to **contain** and **prevent the spread** into new regions. Yellow starthistle (left) is abundant in parts of southeastern Washington but limited or absent elsewhere.



Class C noxious weeds are typically so widespread that there is no realistic hope of eradicating them. County noxious weed control boards can choose to require control of these species, especially if they pose a threat to local agriculture or natural resources, or they may opt to educate about and encourage voluntary control of these species, such as Himalayan blackberry.



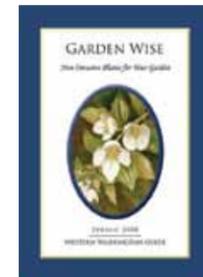
Simple Steps You Can Take To Help Control Noxious Weeds

Know your noxious weeds and learn how to control them on your property

- Contact your county noxious weed control board, WSU county extension office, or conservation district for assistance in plant identification and best control practices. Many county weed boards also loan tools to help with weed control such as Weed Wrenches and some offer cost-share programs.



Let no weed go to seed - Just a few plants this year could be dozens next year. Even if you are not required to control some of the more widespread noxious weeds on your property, preventing seed dispersal is appreciated by surrounding neighbors who choose to control these species.



Choose non-invasive plants for your garden Nearly half of our listed noxious weeds are garden escapees, but fortunately, the majority of ornamental plants are not invasive. Consult your local nurseries, Master Gardener program, or publications such as our GardenWise for help choosing the best plants for your area.

Dispose of garden clippings and weeds appropriately - Lots of new noxious weed infestations arise from seemingly harmless clippings and seeds that were placed in compost piles or dumped in natural areas. It is best to place propagating noxious weeds in the trash.

Never release aquarium and water garden plants into the wild - Many of these species can thrive in the wild, where they are very difficult to control. Dispose of these plants in the trash or compost away from water.

Share your knowledge of noxious weeds with neighbors - Many people aren't aware that they have noxious weeds on their property. Noxious weeds are everyone's problem, and we can all be part of the solution.

Walk on established trails when hiking - And check your shoes, socks, clothing and camping/hiking gear for plant material before and after hiking.

Check your watercraft and trailer for plant fragments and remove them - Many aquatic noxious weeds are introduced to new areas through watercraft movement, since plant fragments can grow into new plants.

Feed horses weed-free forage and/or processed food pellets before and during backcountry trips - Using weed-free product such as our NAWMA-recognized WA Wilderness Hay and Mulch (WWHAM) help prevent the dispersal of noxious weed seed through forage and manure. Also, check horses' coats, tack, and gear for clinging seeds.

Report noxious weed sites - You can contact your local noxious weed control board, or contact us at noxiousweeds@agr.wa.gov. Please keep your eyes open for new invasive plants in Washington. Early detection and rapid response are critical in preventing new problems.

Volunteer to control weeds - There are many organizations that work on weed removal in natural areas as well as local, state, and national parks, such as this thistle-pulling event at Mount Rainier. These are great opportunities to get some fresh air and enjoy and help protect Washington's precious natural areas.



Julie Hover, Mt. Rainier NPS

Support your local noxious weed control board and other programs - They are here to help and support you as a good steward of Washington's land.

Please help us protect Washington's economic and natural resources from noxious weeds



Native wild hyacinth growing in Lyons Ferry. It is threatened by encroaching yellow starthistle.

Photo courtesy Robin Kusske, Franklin County Noxious Weed Control Board.

For more information, please contact us at:

WA State Noxious Weed Control Board
360- 725-5764
noxiousweeds@agr.wa.gov
www.nwcb.wa.gov

or contact your county noxious weed control board or weed district.

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Noxious Weeds in Washington State: everybody's problem, everybody's solution



Yellow starthistle is a noxious weed that rapidly colonizes semi-arid rangeland where it outcompetes native plants and desirable forage species that wildlife and livestock depend on. It also causes chewing disease in horses, which can be fatal.

Photo courtesy Marty Hudson, Klickitat County Noxious Weed Control Board.



What are Noxious Weeds?

“Noxious weed” is the traditional legal term for invasive plants that are difficult to control and are destructive to Washington’s agriculture and natural resources. Noxious weeds include non-native invasive herbaceous plants, trees and shrubs, and aquatic plants. Once established, these invasive plants can colonize our cropland, rangeland, forests, parks, wetlands, estuaries, and waterways, causing economic and ecological damage that affects us all in Washington. That’s why everyone - home gardeners, farmers, public land managers, foresters, and ranchers - have a role to play in this effort to prevent and control the spread of noxious weeds, such as rush skeletonweed (above).



The various impacts of noxious weeds are almost as numerous as the weeds themselves. Although the effects of noxious weeds are often separated into economic, environmental, and health categories, the three are interrelated. And while some noxious weed impacts can be measured with a dollar sign, many are too complex to fully calculate, particularly those affecting natural areas.



The floating aquatic noxious weed water primrose (above) clogs waterways and ditches and is costly to control.

Noxious Weeds Really Hurt Us Where It Counts: Our Wallets

Noxious weeds are a problem for all of us, from farmers to urbanites and their impacts cost us, both directly and indirectly. According to a study by the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture, noxious weeds reduced that state’s personal income by an estimated \$83 million in 2000, and the loss in production caused by these weeds could eliminate an estimated 3,000 jobs per year.

Many noxious weeds can significantly reduce property values. A classic example in the Pacific Northwest is a ranch that sold in auction in 1988 for only about 10% of its original worth after becoming overrun with the noxious leafy spurge (below). Noxious weeds are also costly in suburban and urban areas. For example, invasive knotweeds can grow through pavement, pipes, and septic tanks, causing damage to infrastructure. And we all pay for weed control along roadways and utility right-of-ways, where they reduce visibility and access.



Utah State University Archive. Utah State University. Bugwood.org

Noxious weeds also cost farmers, ranchers, and orchardists millions of dollars in control efforts and lost crop production, which can contribute to higher prices of food for all of us. Invasive knapweeds and yellow starthistle outcompete forage species, reducing grazing quality of rangeland and pastures. Infestations of these species result in an estimated loss of \$950,000 in forage production in eastern Washington. The cost to provide hay to replace the lost forage is an additional estimated \$2 million.

The majority of forested land in Washington is commercial timberland, and some noxious weeds interfere with the reforestation process. For example, it was estimated in 2000 that Scotch broom alone cost Oregon \$47 million in reduced timber production every year.

Noxious Weeds Threaten Our Native Plants and Ecosystems

With over 4 million acres of Wilderness Area and 120,000 acres of natural areas, Washington has been able to preserve many of its diverse ecosystems. While many pieces of land have been set aside and protected from development and disturbance, noxious weeds are still a constant threat. Many of these invasive plants adapt to many different environments, and they readily invade our natural areas where they outcompete our native vegetation for space, available sunlight, water, and nutrients. Many noxious weeds form dense monocultures, dramatically reducing biodiversity and often changing the way healthy ecosystems had functioned.

Some noxious weeds, such as spotted knapweed, garlic mustard, and several of the invasive hawkweeds (right), can exude herbicide-like chemicals that prevent other plants from germinating. So, they not only make grasslands and rangelands less palatable for grazing animals by displacing forage species, but they then make reestablishment of native plants difficult while the invasive species are present.



Several knotweed species have been invading our riparian habitat, particularly in western Washington. These fast-growing invasive plants can transform



riverbanks by restricting access to water, increasing soil erosion, displacing native vegetation, reducing available sunlight, and altering the nutrient cycle. The degradation of habitat caused by noxious weeds pose

a serious threat to our native plants, as well as salmon and other wildlife. And many state endangered and threatened species such as golden paintbrush and showy stickseed are displaced by encroaching noxious weeds such as Scotch broom and Dalmatian toadflax.

Noxious Weeds Reduce Wildlife Habitat

Noxious weeds can take over native plant communities or establish themselves as dominant species where few plants had been able to grow before. They can change the habitat upon which our native Washington wildlife depends for food and shelter. Some species such as Scotch broom, gorse, knotweeds, Scotch thistle, and Himalayan blackberry form physical barriers that restrict wildlife movement.

Purple loosestrife is a well-studied noxious weed that illustrates how far-reaching the impacts of an invasive plant can be. This wetland invader forms dense stands and outcompetes native species, reducing necessary habitat for waterfowl, songbirds, small mammals, and amphibians. Recent studies are helping us to understand ways that this species upsets the food web. For example, it may directly harm tadpoles with tannins in its leaf litter. But decomposition of this plant releases different nutrient levels than some native wetland plants, which affects the types of algae species available for the tadpoles to feed on.



Many aquatic and wetland noxious weeds degrade aquatic habitat. For example, the noxious weed parrotfeather forms dense mats that can choke streams and ponds, reduce water flow and oxygen levels in the water, and displace native aquatic plant communities, which had provided valuable habitat for fish, amphibians, invertebrates, and other wildlife.

Noxious Weeds Affect Recreational Activities

Washington State’s abundance of pristine landscapes and diverse ecosystems attract many visitors who come to enjoy our beautiful natural areas and recreational activities. In fact, about 48 million people visited our state and national parks in 2006. Noxious weeds have a negative effect on many outdoor activities and on tourism, which impacts the livelihood of many Washingtonians.

Rangeland invaders outcompete the native plants that game animals depend on. For example, spotted knapweed (right) can reduce the forage quality of areas by up to 90% for elk and deer. The lack of forage forces them to search elsewhere for food and affects hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities. And noxious weeds such as knapweeds, knotweeds, and thistles block trails and restrict access to waterways.



Gary Kramer



L. Scott

Puncturevine is a noxious weed that is right at home on road shoulders and trails. Its sharp-spined seeds can rip right through tires, stick to shoes, and really hurt when touched, making it a real nuisance for bicyclists, hikers, and park visitors.

Aquatic noxious weeds can be problematic for water sports enthusiasts. They limit swimming areas, block waterways for boaters and paddlers, and clog boat propellers. Plants like Eurasian watermilfoil (right) can ruin anglers’ favorite fishing spots by degrading fish habitat.



Some Noxious Weeds are Toxic to People and Animals

Some noxious weeds are toxic, and in some cases, deadly. The fact that many of these plants rapidly colonize disturbed areas and spread into neighboring properties makes them even more troublesome. To learn more about toxic noxious weeds and how to identify them, please go to our website, or contact your county noxious weed control board or WSU extension office.

Poison hemlock is a fatally toxic plant to both people and animals. It contains the alkaloid coniine, which is a neurotoxin that affects the nervous system. In 2010, one person died and several people were hospitalized for mistakenly eating or being exposed to this noxious weed. Livestock are also vulnerable, and this cow was a victim of poison hemlock ingestion.



Giant hogweed had once been a favorite ornamental plant, due to its unusually large size. However, contact with the toxic sap can leave painful, third-degree burns on the skin that can often leave scars.



Tansy ragwort is poisonous to cattle, horses, and sheep. It contains alkaloids that accumulate in the liver, ultimately resulting in chronic liver failure. Unfortunately, many people do not remove it from their pastures, thinking that their animals will only graze around the noxious weed. What they don’t realize is that livestock cannot always avoid eating the low-growing and highly toxic rosette leaves, which can eventually lead to liver damage.

