

Clallam County Integrated Roadside Weed Management Plan

Commonly Asked Questions

Q: *What are noxious weeds?*

A: Noxious weeds are aggressive, non-native plants that are difficult to control once established. These exotic invaders generally get listed by the State because they cause serious economic or environmental damage.

Q: *What's wrong with noxious weeds?*

A: Noxious weeds can have severe consequences for our environment as well as impose significant costs to our economy. Noxious weeds negatively impact natural resource productivity, watershed function, wildlife habitat, human and animal health, and recreational activities.

Noxious weeds compete for pollinators, displace rare native plant species, and serve as reservoirs of plant diseases. They replace diverse and complex native plant communities with simple, non-native ones.

Noxious weeds negatively impact agricultural and forestry production, as well as property values. It is estimated that invasive plants cause about \$123 billion in damage and losses to the U.S. economy annually (HarperLore, Johnson, and Skinner, 2007). Non native weeds cause an estimated \$34 billion in losses to crops and pastures alone.

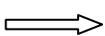
Left unchecked, the problems created by noxious weeds increase over time.

Q: *What's being done about noxious weeds?*

A: Washington State law requires the control of certain weed species by all landowners, public and private. The purpose of the law is to limit economic loss and adverse effects to Washington's agricultural, natural, and human resources due to the presence and spread of noxious weeds in all terrestrial and aquatic areas in the state. Local Noxious Weed Control Boards are tasked with ensuring compliance with state weed laws. Federal agencies take noxious weed problems seriously, too. Most have detailed weed control plans in place for federally managed lands. Our local Tribes are also concerned about the spread of noxious weed and impacts to natural resources. Weed boards, state, federal and tribal entities as well as many environmental groups and private landowners are working together to control invasive weed populations across jurisdictional boundaries.

Q: *Does the County have noxious weeds on its lands, and what's being done to control them?*

A: The County is a large landowner. The County's road system alone encompasses over 500 miles, which equals over 1000 acres of green space! Although some progress has been made, the number of County-owned noxious weeds sites has steadily increased over time. The County Road Department is responsible for operating and maintaining a safe and efficient transportation system, which includes ensuring that vegetation does not impede drainage, line of sight, and cause damage to road surfaces in addition to other safety considerations. The County relies heavily on mowing and tree and brush cutting to carry out these important vegetation management responsibilities. However, there is currently no specific plan for dealing with and controlling noxious weeds.

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Q: Isn't the problem so big, it's hopeless?

A: Noxious weeds have real and significant costs and impacts. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away. Consistency is key to success; we've had many opportunities to prove it can be done.

Q: Why can't we just mow more?

A: Unfortunately mowing does not remove roots and most weeds just grow back. A heavy reliance on a single tool such as mowing has inadvertently resulted in spreading many of our noxious weeds.

Q: Why don't you use other methods? Herbicides need to be last resort.

A: We do use other methods and will continue to do so. Clallam County has not updated its strategy for 25 years; it's reached the limits of what the current control options can accomplish. We need to add more tools such as targeted, selective herbicide use, but also prevention and cultural ones. A mix of methods (Integrated Weed Management) will be most successful.

Q: Won't you harm people, pets, and wildlife, pollute water resources, and kill butterflies and bees if you use herbicides?

A: After considering all these important issues and assessing potential risks, products and application methods were specifically chosen for low toxicity, maximum applicator safety, and to minimize drift and exposure.

Q: Others don't spray, why should we?

A: Clallam County is one of only two counties in Washington that doesn't have at least a limited herbicide allowance for noxious weed control. Most people would be surprised to learn that neighboring Jefferson County does allow limited herbicide treatments for noxious weed control. Most entities in our county already use targeted herbicide applications as part of their strategy to control their noxious weeds.

Q: How is the IRWM plan different from what we have now?

A: This plan views the roadside as potential ecological asset. It is detailed, strategic, weed and site specific; all things we don't have in place now. In developing a plan for noxious weed control that makes sense for a roadside setting, we've incorporated new ideas about environmental issues, investigated the most up to date information and research, as well as drawn on the expertise and know-how of much better funded organizations across the county. We've carefully chosen options and control methods that will minimize or limit potential negative impacts. By including a provision called EDRR (early detection, rapid response) that prioritizes and targets new invaders, and prioritizes small, early infestations, we keep all options open and reduce the potential need for later, more drastic herbicide interventions. Most importantly, this plan is designed to move toward less costly control measures in the future, such as prevention, and emphasizes less intrusive tools, like native plantings that can help us realize the long term goal of transitioning toward sustainable, healthy plant communities. This plan allows us to achieve higher environmental services potential from this long underutilized asset.