



# BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681 ext.6  
<https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

## Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl, *Bonner County Weeds Manager*

A challenge that I often encounter is hammering home what distinguishes a noxious weed from an invasive-nuisance weed. It can be difficult for someone to wrap their head around the fact that a particular invasive weed, let's say Red Sorrel for example, is not on the Idaho noxious weed list, despite the fact that it takes over their pasture if left unchecked. Like most everything else in government, there's a process involved—which starts with a stakeholder (it can be a private Idaho resident) submitting a petition to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to make a specific addition to the noxious weed list. The ISDA compiles submissions once the petitioning period has closed for the current year and performs an initial screening. Petitions that are incomplete or filled out incorrectly are typically discarded, but the ones that make it through the administrative screening process lead to a Notice of Negotiated Rulemaking. A series of public meetings are then scheduled, and the ISDA solicits recommendations from the State Noxious Weed Advisory Committee, the Idaho Association of Noxious Weed Control Superintendents (the association of all my counterparts throughout Idaho) and any other group or association appropriate to consult with for the petition(s) at hand—nursery grower associations, etc. At the conclusion of rulemaking meetings and upon gathering public comment, whether submitted in writing or provided orally at meetings, the ISDA decides whether or not to proceed. In strong cases, a draft rule advances to the legislature, where, if approved by both chambers, becomes final upon *sine die* (legislature adjournment). At that point, the petitioned weed has been formally added to the noxious weed list and holds the force and effect of Idaho law. In other cases, the petition dies during negotiated rulemaking and never advances to the legislature for consideration.

A relatively recent example of a “weed” that was petitioned to be added to the Idaho noxious weed list but was rejected during the rulemaking process, is **Japanese Yew** (*Taxus cuspidata*). It's an ornamental, evergreen shrub bearing red fruit that resembles berries. There are local stories associated with Japanese Yew. As recently as last March, the death of a young moose near the Idaho Club was investigated by Idaho Fish & Game and was determined by the conservation officer to have succumb to poisoning from Japanese Yew.



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As opposed to the majority of what I present, Japanese Yew poses the biggest problem during the winter and early spring. When ungulates (deer/elk/moose) run short on available browse due to heavy snow cover, they seek out alternative browse, often in suburban areas. Exotic Yews have been distributed in the ornamental industry for years, and are popular in landscaping due to the year round color, ease of shaping and being unfussy about site conditions (shade/sun, soil types, etc.). In addition to being poisonous to wildlife, it's also toxic to pets and humans. Dogs and puppies that like to chew on sticks are vulnerable to poisoning, as are curious children who could be attracted to the berries. The mentioned reasons were laid out as support in the petitions, but it ultimately wasn't enough. There was concern among opposing stakeholders that listing a non-invasive/non-competitive, poisonous ornamental plant would open the door for other such plants to be listed—such as Daffodils and Rhododendrons (I could contend that Yews are unique being that they're a palatable, true evergreen with poisonous qualities). It was argued that additions of this nature would dilute resources needed to fight currently listed noxious weeds, with the feeling that the legislature would probably not increase Ag appropriations to fund battling noxious weeds in the category of "poisonous ornamentals". Potential listing of Japanese Yew certainly could fit within the context of how a noxious weed is defined in Idaho code; "Any plant having the potential to cause injury to public health, crops, livestock, land or other property and which is designated as noxious by the director [of the Department of Agriculture]". The results of these rulemaking negotiations could have gone the other way, it all depends on who shows up and the level of support versus the level of opposition.

As is the case with a number of invasive and/or poisonous plants that are not on the Idaho noxious weed list—Japanese Yew deserves attention, it's just not required by Idaho law. Consequentially, there is no government funding to assist with abatement. I provide technical assistance via control recommendations all the time for weeds that are not on the Idaho noxious weed list, I just can't offer any cost share assistance. The fundamental definition of a weed is any plant that interferes with a given set of management objectives. The definition of a noxious weed is quoted in the paragraph above.

Idaho Fish & Game promotes education and awareness efforts regarding Japanese Yew and encourages voluntary removal. IDFG has my support in these efforts. With far more elusive issues such as Chronic Wasting Disease and Bluetongue posing a serious threat to our ungulates, additional threats that are more within our grasp should be addressed. If you have Japanese Yew in your landscape, the ethical thing to do is to get rid of it.