



## BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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### Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl—*Director, Bonner County Noxious Weeds*

Pollinator awareness is a topic that has generated some attention in recent years, and for good reason. About a third of our foods require animal pollination. Pollinators include organisms such as ants, beetles, bats, birds, moths, butterflies and of course, bees. While it can seem a bit paradoxical, agriculture relies on pollinators, as well as tools and practices that can be unfriendly to pollinators. There are resources to help with the balancing act—one being the Idaho Pollinator Protection Plan. The plan was drafted by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to provide general guidelines for supporting pollinators with tips and suggestions on how the apiary community and agricultural community can work together. Without taking a ton of article space to summarize the whole document, it lays out Best Management Practices (BMP's) for both communities, provides key concepts that each community should be aware of, and above all, it encourages open communication. This is not a codified document, it is simply a stewardship resource. Undeniably, pesticide use (mostly misuse) can affect pollinators. This is where solid education and awareness comes into play, as well as adhering closely to label requirements. As a basic reminder, 'Pesticide' is an umbrella term, and encompasses all chemical compounds designed to control a target organism. Insecticides are the main pesticides of interference with pollinators, especially bees—however, it's good to be mindful of herbicide use related to bees. The University of California's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources has a webpage with bee precaution ratings for commonly used pesticides, as well as a list of BMP's to help protect bees from pesticides. Most of the rated herbicides either have no effect on bees, or effects that are indirect (eliminating or reducing potential nectar and pollen sources). Their ratings are simply a guideline, and do not override the product labels. A good way to overcome the indirect effects of herbicides on bees is to dedicate portions of your property to non-invasive pollinator gardens. As an educational resource, I have developed a pamphlet of non-invasive alternatives to noxious weeds in our area. For example, Spotted Knapweed is a state listed noxious weed, and landowners have a statutory obligation to control it, regardless of the fact that it's desirable for some beekeepers due to the long flowering season and maintenance free nature. One of my researched alternatives is Russian Sage—it's long blooming, drought tolerant and grows fine in poor soils. Bees love it!

Weed of the Month is a bit of a pivot from the norm being that it's one that generally should be left alone, and actually encouraged; Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*). It's a native perennial that grows 2 – 5 feet tall with oval-shaped, prominently veined leaves reaching lengths of 4 – 7 inches each, and develop off of fleshy stems containing a milky sap. Purplish-pink flowers are arranged in round clusters at the top, and exude a sweet scented aroma. Milkweed species are attractive to butterflies, bees and other insects.



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The Monarch Butterfly has an exclusive relationship with Showy Milkweed, specifically—it's the only plant on which the eggs are laid and the larvae will feed upon. As such, Showy Milkweed is critical for the survival and perpetuation of the Monarch Butterfly, of which populations have been declining for several years. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service intends on proposing protections for the Monarch Butterfly under the Endangered Species Act in 2025, and public comment on the proposal will be accepted until March 12. Based on my interpretation of their press release, what they are seeking is a listing as a Threatened Species, which allows for more flexibility than a listing as an Endangered Species. The short story (very short) if listing as a Threatened Species is successful would result in prohibitions on killing or transporting the Monarch Butterfly, but farming and ranching practices could continue as-is without interruption. There might be stipulations put in place under Section 4(d) of the Act that would encourage conservation practices, such as tax incentives for large agricultural landowners who convert a portion of their land to Monarch Butterfly habitat (a.k.a., Showy Milkweed gardens).

Concurrently, the EPA is drafting regulatory updates with regards to pesticides and the Endangered Species Act. At this time, it's unclear how the potential updates will shake out, but it's speculated that the changes will center on pesticide labeling. There will be a presentation on this very topic at the Idaho Noxious Weeds Conference this winter. It's an issue that I will be following and monitoring closely, and will certainly pass along updates as I learn about them.

Hope all had a nice holiday season. I'm glad it's behind us, because I can't wait for spring (well, actually summer), like usual. Hopefully it can't wait for me, either! :-)