



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl, *Bonner County Noxious Weeds*

Why is that big, white truck spraying along the county roads, and what is in the tank? Undoubtedly, these are questions that come to mind when residents on one of our nearly 700 miles of roads (especially those who are new to the area) sees one of our applicator rigs rumbling through their neighborhood with a spray boom in operation. Idaho Statute §22-2405 is the County Duties pertaining to noxious weeds, and one duty listed in this chapter is to detect and treat noxious weeds. This includes private property (following a process), but property under the county's ownership and management absolutely needs to comply with responsibilities assigned in the noxious weeds chapter of statute (as well as rules promulgated by the state related to noxious weeds, which is where the Idaho Noxious Weed List is housed). Bonner County road rights-of-way make up the bulk of county property, equaling approximately 800-900 acres of land. Transportation corridors are the primary vectors for spread of noxious weeds, being that vehicles cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time and can originate from, or be en route to, virtually anywhere. Seeds tumble off of tires and fender wells and rest in that operational zone beginning at the edge of the road surface and extending down into the bar ditches. Likewise, noxious weeds that go to seed on the edges of roads are picked up on tires and tracked elsewhere. The majority of the Idaho noxious weeds that we detect in our surveys of county roads can generally be treated with a "catch-all" chemistry combination of broadleaf specific herbicides that are labeled for use in rights-of-way. Milestone® (aminopyraid) + Escort® (metsulfuron) + Freelexx (2,4-D choline) + Syl-TacEA (spreader/sticker) + Crosshair® (a drift control agent) generally constitute our roadside mix. In areas where Toadflaxes are noted, we substitute Telar® (chlorsulfuron) for the Escort® component. Additionally, we are in the process of transitioning to a new product called HighNoon® (aminopyralid + florypyrauxifen). This replaces Milestone® and eliminates the need for 2,4-D—as the florypyrauxifen component is a new molecule in the plant growth regulator family. Growth regulator herbicides are synthetic auxins (imitation plant hormones), which results in the plants essentially growing themselves to death—that's why you see twisting and contorting of treated weeds.

This is my 45th article for this publication, and by now I have pretty much run through all of the Idaho noxious weeds that are widespread or semi-widespread in our area, as well as the Bonner County listed invasive weeds of concern; the main targets on our roadsides. Among the last of



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its kind (for now) to be featured is Rush Skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*). We have it classified in the Control category, which are the noxious weeds of mid-level infestation in the county. Rush Skeletonweed is certainly not found everywhere in Bonner County, but it has surpassed the Early Detection, Rapid Response threshold for eradication. It's a branched perennial with wiry stems, exhibiting few leaves, giving the stems a leafless appearance. The toothed basal leaves form a cluster, resembling that of a hairy Dandelion. Flowers are scattered across the branch tips, and produce 7-15 small yellow petals that give way to windborne seeds in the fall. Spotted Cat's Ear can be a look-alike, but the main differentiation between the two is the flower size and structure. Another Rush Skeletonweed confirmation is a milky fluid excreted from cut leaves, stems and roots.

Rush Skeletonweed tolerates a wide variety of environmental conditions, but it thrives in areas with cold winters and hot, dry summers—like many Idahoans. :-) Sites that it likes to invade include roadsides, CRP grounds, farmlands/rangelands and pastures. It can become quite aggressive, especially in well drained soils, and extremely damaging to agriculture and natural resources. In the context of agriculture, it doesn't take long to crowd out the desired crop, and the stems have a propensity to clog harvesting machinery. Outside of Ag land, it diminishes native plant and wildlife habitat. Rush Skeletonweed is documented as a leading invasive species of impact to one of Idaho's threatened plants; Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*).

Between the lightweight seeds that disburse in the wind, and taproot fragments that can send up new shoots from depths of 3 feet in the soil, Rush Skeletonweed is one that's built to spread and persist. With that, it is incumbent upon landowners to act swiftly if discovered on their land. The longer it's left unattended to, the more difficult it is to kill, as the taproots become stronger and more nutrient-rich. Additionally, as infestations increase their footprint, the seed bank will blow further away each year, affecting neighbors. Being that Rush Skeletonweed is in the Control category in Bonner County, it is a zero tolerance specimen in our rights-of-way. It's still well within the reach of keeping it from becoming a widespread issue.

Spread the word, not the problem.