



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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Weed of the Month

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

The month of June is always a total whirlwind, albeit in a good way (mostly). The days are long, in every way possible—abundant daylight and lots of projects and activities both at home and at work. It will be July when this hits the mailboxes. Most of July feels similar to June, just warmer water to swim in! I have had a ton of projects along with administrative tasks and customer service related correspondence/visits converging at the same time. It is budget season, so all of the Bonner County departments and elected offices have been building and tweaking budgets for FY26 (fiscal year 2026) for presentation to the Board of County Commissioners in a series of budget workshops. An adjustment for my department this year has been to outsource the majority of the roadside herbicide applications to a private service provider. This frees up more of my field time to redirect focus in areas where the county can ultimately be money ahead, and that's by addressing EDRR (early detection, rapid response) noxious weeds. I have spotlighted many of these in previous articles, a few of which I have been diligently mitigating in recent weeks before they go to seed; including Scotch Broom, Tansy Ragwort (not Common Tansy) and Yellow Flag Iris. I included an invasion curve in an article earlier this year, which demonstrates that the more area an invasive species occupies, and the longer it's allowed to persist in the given area, the greater the control cost. With EDRR designated noxious weeds in Bonner County infesting a limited amount of land, the management objectives revolve around eradication. More specifically, destroying all detectable infestations within the same growing season.

Another noxious weed that's categorized as an EDRR in Bonner County is Scotch Thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*). It's a biennial, with the second year plants developing into indisputably large organisms. If you ever have the unfortunate displeasure of seeing it, you will never un-see it. And if you get close enough, you might hear "feed me Seymour!" (If you're not aware of the movie reference, the satire will fall flat, so you should research that quote for fun). The leaves are spiny (as all thistles are) and covered with fine, cottony hairs, which gives it an almost silvery appearance. An attribute unique to Scotch Thistle is the winged stems, as displayed in one of the accompanying photos. The first year rosettes can often be overlooked at a glance, but the rosette that forms in the second year can reach diameters of 2-3 feet, making it stand out from its surroundings. Once it has bolted and reached the flowering phase by about mid-summer, it's almost impossible not to notice. Generally it bolts to heights of 5-6 feet, but can reach heights of 8-10 feet.

Scotch Thistle is highly invasive, and given the opportunity, can create barriers that inhibit or even prevent movement of wildlife, pets, livestock and certainly humans. Given this nature, and the fact that the leaves are spiny, it was planted in hedge rows in Europe centuries ago to serve as security fencing. At some point it was unintentionally introduced to North America.



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Currently, we have only inventoried Scotch Thistle on a small handful sites—primarily in the Priest River, Oldtown and Vay areas, where we are working with the affected landowners on eradication. Last year, a small population was randomly discovered near Samuels and was promptly destroyed. It was likely introduced to that site via contaminated topsoil. The seeds contain a water soluble germination inhibitor, causing a high percentage of viable seeds to remain dormant in the soil until conditions release them. This makes it of paramount importance to prevent seed dispersal, which requires prompt detection. It can still be eradicated if allowed to go to seed, but it requires a long-term commitment of aggressive control measures. We mobilize forces for our Scotch Thistle projects each year on the sites where they previously were allowed to seed out.

I rely on my citizen eyes-on-the-ground to assist with identifying our EDRR noxious weeds, since there are many areas in the county that I would likely never stumble upon. Please notify me should you encounter Scotch Thistle!