BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl, *Bonner County Weeds Manager*

Moving towards the spring equinox, I tend to glance at a sunrise/sunset calendar on a frequent basis. When conditions are cold and gray for so long, seeing the rapid increase in daylight seems to help—not only in actuality, but also on a calendar for the days and weeks ahead. It's a habit that I would recommend. Spring (and summer) never gets here fast enough—but it does get here, and seeing tangible reminders helps the process along. The land will come out of the dormant state of hibernation and the urge to scratch the itch of getting our hands and equipment dirty will be satisfied…soon enough.

Whether you're farming, gardening, landscaping or trying to maintain a clean gravel parking pad, you've likely had encounters with this Weed of the Month: **Quackgrass** (Elytrigia repens). It's a rhizomatous perennial grass that's widespread across the northern tier of the United States, and can be found to some degree on nearly every plot of land in Bonner County. It's not a noxious weed in Idaho, as it would be unrealistic to require landowners to control something that we would not even be able to meet containment goals on. It is, however, on the NAISMA (North American Invasive Species Management Association) list of prohibited weeds for the Weed Free Forage & Straw program. This is probably due to the fact that Quackgrass is listed as a noxious weed in some of the hotter, drier states, where population levels are low to moderate, and NAISMA is the national certification standard. If you're growing a crop with the intent to receive a national weed free certification, it has to be free of Quackgrass, as well as 20 other weeds on the NAISMA list [in addition to the 53 terrestrial noxious weeds in Idaho]. Quackgrass can be a host for diseases in cereal crops; leaf rusts, smuts, etc. So it can certainly have economic impacts in areas where these particular crops are grown for large scale production. Paradoxically, it is actually desirable forage for pasture animals, which is a good thing because trying to kill a perennial grass out of a stand of other perennial grasses is a headache. Whether or not Quackgrass can be tolerated on a site is going to depend on what the management objectives are. A parking lot or driveway turnaround, for example, is going to be managed differently than a pasture or a grass hay field.

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Identifying grasses is tricky, it can come down to the minutest of details. Quackgrass does have a couple of distinct features that can assure you of its identity. The leaf blades have a crimp near the tips; a characteristic unique to Quackgrass. That's a clue that can be detected at any phase during its lifecycle. Another useful identification characteristic is the inflorescence at maturity; the seed heads have a "compact" appearance (tight against the stem) and a silvery-green color that stands out against other grasses in our area. See accompanying photos.

For control in gardening and landscaping situations, the best bet is to use a mulch. The practice of mulching for weed control is to create a sunlight barrier to prevent weed seeds and root fragments from germinating. There are both artificial and natural options for this. Heavy plastic and landscape cloth are the commonly used artificial mulches. Straw and bark are effective natural options, but they need to be evenly piled and maintained at a minimum of 3 to 4 inches deep to achieve the sufficient sunlight barrier.

Mechanical control of Quackgrass is challenging due to the nutrient retaining rhizomes. Hand pulling is not effective—you can be assured of not extracting all the rhizomes. Mowing is also ineffective due to Quackgrass primarily reproducing and spreading via rhizomes. Tillage is usually not enough to exhaust the rhizomatic reserves, especially if the infestation is heavy. One mechanical method that can at least slow it down (if it fits with the use site) is to plow the area under and come through afterwards with a disk and harrow. Plowing brings the entire rhizome system to the surface, the disk levels out the mess and the harrow helps bring the root pieces to the surface where they can desiccate.

Herbicide control needs to be performed with non-selective chemistries. An affordable option is glyphosate (generic Roundup®). At least it used to be affordable—supply chain issues and inflation is affecting herbicide prices just like everything else, and I have heard from wholesalers that glyphosate products made a significant jump in price. Glyphosate is great if you're looking to replant sooner than later. If you're willing to wait longer for replanting (or if replanting is not necessary for your situation), imazapyr (Polaris® or Habitat®) products provide more sustained control. Since imazapyr is a slow acting chemistry, diquat (Reward®) can be tank mixed with imazapyr if a faster burndown is desired. Sulfosulfuron (Outrider®) is a somewhat selective option (mixed selectivity); it seems to be fairly safe on some of our perennial grasses but can control Quackgrass when applied in an early vegetative phase.

Give me a call, shoot me an email or check out our website for this year's noxious weeds programs and resources in Bonner County. Field season is around the corner.