



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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Weed of the Month

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

My last feature generated quite a stir. I received dozens of calls on suspected Scotch Thistle infestations over the remainder of summer. That's a good thing—it shows me that people are paying attention. Closely surveilling for EDRR noxious weeds is crucial—however, I neglected to address look-alikes in that article. All but one report ended up being either Canada Thistle or Bull Thistle, both of which are widespread across the northwest.

You get a Thistle double-header—this month is Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*). It's a biennial, with second year plants bolting 2 – 5 feet in height, producing several branches. The shape of the leaves stands in stark contrast with those of Scotch Thistle. While Scotch Thistle has very large, wide leaves coming off the winged stems, Bull Thistle has smaller, more rigid leaves tapering down into spears where the spines protrude. Spear Thistle is actually another common name, albeit less common, but it's a better fit in my opinion. Bull Thistle is also busier looking, with errantly directed stems from top to bottom. The flower heads develop into spined bulbs, roughly the size of golf balls, with gumdrop looking flowers on top. Unlike either of these Thistles, Canada Thistle (which was featured in one of my 2018 installments) is wimpy looking by comparison. But looks can be deceiving—unlike its larger cousins, Canada Thistle has a mean rhizomatous root system that expands underground each year an infestation is allowed to persist.

With Bull Thistle being a biennial, the only propagation is by seed. The fleshy taproot is shallow, and extracts without much fuss (as long as you're wearing heavy leather gloves). I was part of a noxious & invasive weed hand pulling volunteer effort earlier this summer, and many of the specimens that the managing entity wished to remove was Bull Thistle. I must admit that there is a satisfying element to making weeds disappear via manual extraction, where practical. In terms of herbicide management, any chemistry in the growth regulator family will work—2,4-D, triclopyr, fluroxypyr, aminopyralid, dicamba, as well as others and combinations thereof. The key to selecting an herbicide is to match the labeled use site—whether range/pasture, turf, forestry, utility areas, natural areas, etc. Managing Bull Thistle is a personal preference being that it is not one of the 70 listed noxious weeds in Idaho, therefore not subject to the statutory management obligations. It's certainly a nuisance, and a target on my property, however it does not rise to the threat level on our lands that Canada Thistle and certainly Scotch Thistle do.

As I'm writing this, the 98th annual Bonner County Fair just wrapped up, although this was not my 98th year attending. :-) The fair serves as a great showcase of the county's agricultural community, not to mention the fruits of nearly a full year of labor from the 4-H youth. I have always enjoyed the ambience of fairs, and the sense of being one of summer's final hurrahs. Being a vendor for the last handful of



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years has allowed me to immerse myself in the whole fair environment for the entire duration, while serving the outreach/awareness & public education aspect of my job. Win-win!

Soon (too soon) we will be seeing Halloween décor on store shelves and pumpkin spice memes in our social media feeds. Changing of the seasons usually corresponds with shifting gears on the property, but don't put away the sprayer just yet. Fall opens another window for weed control efforts. Perennials start nutrient loading their root systems in preparation for winter dormancy, and will carry systemic herbicides efficiently into the roots with the expanded flow of nutrients. Additionally, pre-emergent herbicide applications targeting some annuals, particularly winter annual grasses, need to be carried out in the fall. If you have a specific scenario where you need guidance or a refresher, get a hold of me and I'll provide any advice that I can.