



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*

Fire hazard is a topic that has become as centrally focused as ever. It's difficult to ignore, being that we're in and out of smoke nearly all summer in north Idaho (among much of the west). With a steady stream of citizens fleeing concrete jungles to rural settings where their property is "in the direct line of fire", literally—asset protection from the devastation of wildland fires ends up taking a front seat. There are local programs through Idaho Firewise that can help residents with reducing fuel loads and creating defensible spaces on their properties, and it typically involves removing dead, dying and overcrowded trees along with excess ground litter and brush. Noxious and invasive weeds are also a component that contribute to fire hazard. For example, two noxious weeds that exist in our area—Common Tansy (to a great extent) and Scotch Broom (to a minimal extent, luckily)—contain resins that catch fire easily and burn fast. These are also noxious weeds that grow tall and thick, creating a lot of biomass (fire fuel). Another example is an Idaho noxious weed that barely has its foot in the door in Bonner County—Common Reed. It's a heavy duty perennial grass that also contains flammable resins in addition to developing an enormous fuel load, as this particular specimen grows to heights of over 10 feet! I once spoke to a wildland firefighter who had been on the front lines of a fire where infestations of Common Reed was present, and he described it as basically a bunch of mini explosions. An abundance of invasive annual grasses can also imperil your property when it comes to fire. Cheatgrass, for instance, is a winter annual that dries out in June and serves as a tinder box all summer.

I have featured all of the above mentioned weeds in past articles, but an invasive annual grass that I have yet to delve into, is **Ventenata (Ventenata dubia)**. It's a rarity when the generally referred to common name is the same as the scientific name, and this is one of a small handful. Asparagus, of all plants, is another example. An occasionally used common name for Ventenata is African Wiregrass. When it first emerges, it indeed looks like little green wires poking up out of the ground. Upon full development, the seed heads somewhat resemble a small oat. Grasses often come down to the minutia of details to distinguish one from another, but a key feature of Ventenata is crooked awns, demonstrated in one of the accompanying photos (look closely, it's subtle). Awn is a botanical term; it's a slender appendage comparable to a stem. Once the plants have dried, a stand of it will give an appearance of flowing blonde hair (no blonde jokes!), standing out against the surrounding vegetation. It's relatively short in stature, growing 6"- 27" tall. It's also shallowly rooted.



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Fire danger aside, *Ventenata* also inhibits healthy growth of desirable perennial grasses, making it an enemy in ranges and pasture. It's only palatable for a short duration, but even when it is palatable it's not good to let livestock forage it for any significant amount of time, as it contains high amounts of silica that causes premature tooth wear.

The North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA) fielded a petition from the state of Montana to add *Ventenata* to the national weed free hay standards list of prohibited weeds. It is expected that the majority of NAISMA's voting members will support this addition. The move would help prevent introduction of *Ventenata* in the National Forest backcountry, where use of certified weed free feed is required for horsemen.

Control measures for annuals are usually timing sensitive, and I'm still experimenting with treatment timing on *Ventenata* to find out where the optimal windows are for our locale. That said, early spring and mid-late fall are the general windows for herbicide applications. Rejuvra® (indaziflam), Plateau® (imazapic) and Outrider® (sulfosulfuron) are some options for annual grasses. Labels need to be followed closely for dosage and timing to ensure desirable perennial grass safety. Additionally, since the strategy is in pre-emergence, timing is important to achieve maximum control. An option to help with suppression is Milestone® (aminopyralid). This is convenient being that aminopyralid products are widely used for selective noxious & invasive weed control and can be safely applied throughout the entire growing season. Even though this chemistry is broadleaf specific and is not designed for control of annual grasses, it has demonstrated an ability to reduce *Ventenata* seed banks over time. For mechanical control, hand pulling is effective, and the plants come up easily being so shallowly rooted. An infestation of a few square yards or less would be feasible for hand removal. Prescribed burning is also an effective mechanical method provided it's conducted when the seeds are still on the plants.

Hold the pumpkin spice for now, but best wishes for smooth sailing into and throughout the fall.