



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

- 521 S. Division Ave, Suite 216 • Sandpoint, ID 83864
- Phone: (208) 255-5681 ext.6 • Email: chase.youngdahl@bonnercountyid.gov
- Website: <https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl—*Bonner County Noxious Weeds*

Changing of the seasons; a perpetually reoccurring phenomenon that serves as a milestone of sorts. Spring giving way to summer is by far and away my favorite out of the four transitions. The temperatures will continue climbing, we have nearly all the good weather that our region has to offer yet ahead of us and we're in the midst of the longest days of the year. There's always a lot going on, as well—from gardening and farming to lake days and various events, and simply the ambience of the season's happenings—from farmer's markets and roadside farm stands to yard sales and the buzzing of outdoor recreation. Although, I'm not a fan of the overwhelming traffic that Bonner County's roads and highways have accumulated in recent years, which worsens in the summer months. I sometimes do miss the days when you could practically lay down in Selle Road and take a nap. But, if that's my only gripe, I'll take it. :-)

On the farming front, we're coming into first cuttings of hay, in most cases. A toxic, invasive grass that was brought to my attention a couple of years ago has taken a lot of our area's hay production ground by storm. Sweet Vernalgrass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) is the culprit. It is clump-forming and tops out early in the summer with cylindrical flower spikes. Grasses can be difficult to distinguish from one another, so I often lean on a single unique attribute for identification assistance. Sweet Vernalgrass has a sweet, vanilla-essence odor when crushed, and especially so when dried. It contains a compound called cumerin, which led to the development of the first human blood thinning medication, and later, the active ingredient in common rodent killers such as D-CON®. These were groundbreaking developments and remain important tools for their respective causes, however, you could see how a grass containing these properties in hay is problematic. Livestock consumption of hay containing large amounts of Sweet Vernalgrass can lead to slow blood clotting time. If the hay is moldy, the compounds become more concentrated, increasing the chances of the livestock consuming enough to achieve mortality from hemorrhaging. As if that wasn't enough, here's the even more unfortunate part; it's a perennial grass. Trying to selectively control a perennial grass in a stand of desirable perennial grasses poses the biggest challenge one can face in weed mitigation. There's not really a viable herbicide option, short of desiccating the entire field and starting over. In researching the issue last year, and consulting with an herbicide dealer rep, Clethodim was floated as a possibility for semi-selective control. Mind you, Clethodim would still cause some level of injury to pasture grasses, but there's a possibility that the injury threshold could be in the margins for tolerance if used at a low rate. I'm still on the hunt for a willing landowner to donate a small plot of ground (at least half an acre, but 1-2 acres would be ideal) with enough Sweet Vernalgrass to conduct experimental treatments and subsequent monitoring. It would require willingness to leave the area completely fallow for a minimum of two years. So, if you have what



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

- 521 S. Division Ave, Suite 216 • Sandpoint, ID 83864
- Phone: (208) 255-5681 ext.6 • Email: chase.youngdahl@bonnercountyid.gov
- Website: <https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

I'm looking for and you're interested and willing to contribute to science, let me know! I had a similar arrangement with a landowner for the Maretail trials. In terms of currently viable management of Sweet Vernalgrass, cultural control via lime treatments is likely the most effective. Sweet Vernalgrass thrives in acidic soils, and lime elevates the pH to a more neutral state.

Independence Day is right around the corner, and this year's is special being the 250th anniversary of this great American experiment. Dave Wenk, my long-time counterpart in Boundary County passed away suddenly and unexpectedly this last winter from a massive stroke. I not only lost a solid partner in the region (Bonner & Boundary County noxious weed programs have historically had a close working relationship in the Selkirk Cooperative Weed Management Area), but a good friend. Not to mention, Boundary County lost a pillar of their community. Dave loved Independence Day and put on one of the best private fireworks displays of professional quality and length that you could experience. He was looking forward to the 250 celebration being the biggest yet... Dave, I'll be toasting to you when I see the sky lit up the night of July 4.

This article is dedicated to Dave.