

Eastern Garfield County Weed Prevention Area

Revised 11/2007

Thousands of acres of rangeland are lost each year in Montana due to rapidly spreading invasive weeds. These aggressive plants are a threat to rangeland stability and future cattle production. Invasive weeds seriously impact producers through lost revenue and costly management, posing unmanageable economic burdens on ranchers whose operating capital is already limited. Spotted knapweed infests over 4 million acres, with noticeable movement towards eastern Montana. This weed alone (there are 27 others) has the potential to seriously impact producer profits, local communities, and rural economies of eastern Montana, all of which depend on strong agricultural production. These industries rely on healthy, productive plant communities, which are threatened by rapid and chronic weed spread.

The development of cooperative Weed Prevention Areas (WPA) will help protect Garfield County and surrounding areas from extensive, unmanaged noxious weed encroachment. WPA's maximize participant's efforts and resources by rapidly responding to new weed invasions as a coordinated stakeholder group. The unified group shares common goals to protect native plant resources, healthy rangeland ecosystems and agricultural livelihoods from invasive weeds. WPA's follow a basic cooperative, local-level strategy, where landowners within an area work collectively to manage common weed problems. WPA's promote a proactive, cost-effective, approach to weeds control. Weed-free rangelands are aggressively protected from weed spread and complex and costly weed problems are avoided. The following measures are regarded as necessary management tools and policies for continued profitable ranching and "zero tolerance" for invasive species.

The goal of the Garfield County WPA is to:

Protect and maintain rangeland and farmland's productive capacity from invasive weeds to safeguard sustainable agricultural production of cattle, forage and small grains in Garfield County.

- 1) **Prevention strategies** are designed to reduce continuous weed pressure into the WPA by identifying, monitoring and interrupting human-influenced weed pathways:
 - A. **Materials:** Beware of any material such as hay, other feed stuffs and building materials. They may carry weed seeds. Know where the materials were used and monitor those sites for new patches of weeds.
 - B. **Hunter activity:** Hunter activity in the area will increase weed invasion and "walk-in only" areas decrease the spread of weeds. If the ranch practices "walk-in hunting", monitor all parking areas for new weeds. If driving is permitted on the property, encourage hunters to stay on roads and monitor roads for weed invasions. Encourage hunters to notify landowners if they find any noxious weeds while hunting and record the locations with a GPS if possible.
 - C. **Machinery, Combines and Heavy Equipment:** All types of equipment entering the WPA have the potential to bring weed seeds with them. Operators should clean equipment if it has come from an area with known noxious weeds. Equipment from western Montana may be high-risk and should not enter the WPA without thorough cleaning and inspection. Monitor all sites where equipment has been used for new patches of weeds.
 - D. **Livestock:** Livestock that are coming from high risk areas may bring weeds with them. Livestock should be placed in a dry lot for 3 days prior to rangeland turnout. If this option is not feasible, the first pasture grazed should be monitored for new invasions of weeds.

2) **Early detection/rapid response strategies** are aimed at detecting new infestations early and quickly responding while management is still cheap and easy. A "zero tolerance" policy has been established. When new infestations have been located, they are immediately managed by spraying, hand-pulling or digging. All identified patches will be mapped and managed with follow-up monitoring. Contact the Garfield County Weed District at 557-2770 for assistance.

A. **High probability sites** within the WPA should be frequently surveyed. These areas include sites disturbed by heavy equipment, rest and viewing areas, as well as pathways such as road ways, waterways, and irrigation canals. Parking areas and hunter-traveled roads are also high probability sites.

Identified Sites in GCWPA:

1. Highway 200 West and East
2. Highway 59 North
3. U-Haul Road
4. West Little Dry Road
5. Long Branch Road
6. Two Furrow Road
7. Steve's Fork Road
8. Road 17211
9. State Highway Gravel Pit/Storage
10. County Stockyards
11. Little Dry Creek
12. Big Dry Creek
13. Sand Creek

B. **Low to moderate probability sites** within the WPA will periodically be surveyed when fencing, moving livestock or other daily activities. All people working on the farm or ranch will be trained in noxious weed identification.

C. **Monitoring** should be conducted on all potential introduction sites the year following the potential introduction. Any known treated weed site will be monitored annually for additional seedlings.

D. **Sustainable management practices** will be utilized to maximize the persistence of native rangeland communities to discourage weed invasion. The use of proven sustainable grazing management practices, such as pasture rotation, altering season of use, promotion of litter accumulation, moderate grazing levels and multi-species grazing, all work to encourage a healthy native plant community.

Use of grant funds as identified by landowners in the WPA:

1. -GPS units for all farms and ranches in the area.
2. -Weed identification booklets for landowners, employees and sportsmen using the area.
3. -Spraying new small patches of weeds that are targeted for eradication.
4. -Brochures of the WPA.
5. -Signs showing the WPA at strategic locations