

EXOTIC PLANTS, WILDLIFE, AND ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT^{TWS}

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Public awareness of exotic, invasive plant problems is increasing and even though momentum has been increasing, there are still people who do not understand or are unaware of the impact on the environment. What is your understanding of the issue? Can you take newcomers through the issue step-by-step so they learn and grasp the significance? If not, please take the time to listen. Nearly every plant

referred to as a weed is not indigenous to this continent. Many have an unfair advantage in the environment because the biological controls on them were removed when the plant migrated here. No insects, fungus, or disease to keep them in check. There are over 2000 non-indigenous plant species in the United States but only about 200 that are invasive. However, there is new bio matter (seeds, stems or tubers) hitting our shores each year and many that are already here are evolving into the next potential spotted knapweed or leafy spurge. Presently weeds cover over 5% of the US, an area larger than the state of California. The Bureau of Land Management has estimated that weeds are increasing at a rate of 4,600 acres per day or 3 million acres per year. Weeds are spread by animals, people, equipment, wind, water, fire and hay. Activities that disturb the soil or plant community or reduce ground cover increase the likelihood of a weed-invasion. Some weed species are so invasive that they are taking over otherwise healthy ecosystems. Impacts of weeds on the environment include replacement of native vegetation, loss of wildlife habitat, loss of wildlife species diversity (60 - 80%) and monocultures on whole landscapes. Montana has over 8 million acres of spotted knapweed alone. Weeds like yellow starthistle will cause loss of recreational opportunities, livestock forage production is reduced (\$4.5 million in Montana). Areas infested with spotted knapweed are shown to experience 56 to 192% higher runoff and erosion. What can be done? Pass the word. Until people are concerned they are not going to be interested in solutions.