

CRC makes gains in the fight against weeds

By Megan Birzell

This summer, CRC mapped weeds on over 500 miles of roads in the Clearwater Valley as part of an ongoing effort to identify weed infestations and prioritize weed treatments across ownership boundaries in the valley. The Task Force is currently overseeing chemical treatments on 275 acres of public land in the valley. The Clearwater Valley Weed Mitigation and Control Program is the hallmark of CRC's Weed Mitigation Task Force that began in 2009.

The Task Force, composed of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies as well as conservation groups, homeowners' associations, and private landowners, came together to make weed management more effective across the valley. Together, they developed the Clearwater Valley Coordinate Invasive Weed Strategy to guide management actions across the valley.

The first step in implementing the strategy is to do a complete inventory of weeds on the valley's road and trail network. This includes both open and closed roads on public and cost-share roads. The strategy also calls for mapping random ¼-mile transects throughout the valley to determine whether – and how far – weeds may be spreading beyond known travel corridors. CRC began mapping in 2009 and covered 150 miles of roads and 50 random transects in the northern part of the valley. This year, with funding from the National Forest Foundation, Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund, Missoula County Weed District, and Seeley Lake Community Foundation, CRC was able to significantly increase its capacity and mapped over 500 miles of roads and close to 100 random transects, moving south down the valley. CRC is sharing all data with the Missoula County Weed District and Seeley Lake Ranger District.

As CRC has gained a better understanding of weed locations through the mapping portion of the program, we have begun to prioritize areas for weed treatments. Currently, CRC contractors are spraying weeds on 275 acres of Forest Service land in the northern portion of the watershed based on priorities identified through the 2009 mapping program. Next year, we plan to treat over 300 acres of weeds based on new data collected this year.

Overall, the mapping program has shown that common invaders such as spotted knapweed and Canada thistle are widespread, as expected. We have also seen some instances of new invaders, such as hawkweed and St. Johnswort. However, the new invaders are not spreading rapidly, and even the common invaders are mostly relegated to roads and trails and have typically not spread beyond these travel corridors.

As you survey your property for weeds, it is important to remember that weeds do not know property boundaries. Talk to your neighbors and come up with a joint plan to treat weeds in your area in order to maximize effectiveness. Also, it is important to recognize that, because weeds are prolific, one treatment will not solve the problem. Be prepared to treat weeds over several years in order to realize maximum benefits.

If you'd like to learn more about weed identification and management, visit CRC's website at www.crcmt.org.

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