

Noxious Weed Report for June 21

Today I would like to talk to you about Scotch Thistle and Musk Thistle, both of which are required control in Okanogan County. Musk Thistle will typically be found growing in the northeastern parts of the county while Scotch Thistle is usually found in the central valley part. Both types of thistle are found growing in disturbed areas, roadsides, rangeland, and abandoned cropland. They both can dominate sites and crowd out native species and forage plants. Both types only reproduce by seed.

Musk Thistle is an annual or biennial with prickly leaves and stems and can grow up to 6 ft tall. Pink to purple flowers are single and often seen nodding on long stalks, giving its' nick name "Nodding Thistle". Musk thistle can produce a vast amount of seed, anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000, depending on the size of the plant. The seeds can remain viable in the soil for about 10-15 years.

Scotch Thistle can grow 6-8 feet tall in dense stands creating a natural barrier. In Europe it was used as a natural fence or border. Scotch Thistle is a biennial with large spiny leaves that are covered with fine cottony hairs which give it a silver or grayish color. Seeds germinate in winter to early spring and exist as a rosette until flower stems occur in the spring of the following year. Scotch Thistle flower heads are large, either solitary or in clusters of 2-7 and the numerous flowers are pink to lavender colored. Scotch Thistle seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 39 years according to some sources.

Both Scotch and Musk Thistle seeds disperse primarily by wind, but water, rodents, livestock, vehicles or human activity can also contribute to spread.

Both types of thistles can be manually removed. To control by hand, roots must be cut 2-4 inches below ground level to prevent re-sprouting. Any buds, blooms, or seed heads must be removed from the plant and disposed of properly to reduce the spread of viable seed. Mowing in late bolting or bud stage can also reduce seed production, but regrowth can occur if we get some rain. There are also a range of herbicides that can assist in your control efforts.

For information or assistance with weed identification, herbicide recommendations or any other noxious weed related questions that you may have, please give us a call at 422-7165, send us an email at noxiousweeds@co.okanogan.wa.us, check out our website at www.okanogancounty.org/nw, or stop in and see us in room 102 of the Okanogan County Courthouse.