

Cooperative Weed Management Areas

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Figure 1. Russian knapweed is a noxious, invasive plant that infests yards, river bottoms, roadways and abandoned fields in eight Arizona counties. It causes chewing disease in horses, whether green or dried.

Invasive and noxious weeds are of concern no matter where you may live in Arizona. “Invasive” weeds are plants that are introduced into an area outside of their original native range. They become problematic in their new environment by interfering with native or desirable species. The National Invasive Species Management Plan defines invasive species as “a species that is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.”

“Noxious” weeds are regulated and defined as any plant designated by a federal, state, county, or municipal government to be injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or property. They are regulated with respect to their transport, sale, and eradication efforts. Federally listed species (plants and animals) can be found on the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) web site; while state listed weeds can be found on the Arizona Department of Agriculture website (both are listed below). Not all invasive plants that have encroached into Arizona’s lands and waters are noxious weeds. However, invasive plants that are not listed as noxious weeds are still serious pests.

In addition to the listings above, Arizona’s Governor approved the Arizona Invasive Species Management Plan in 2008. This plan outlines strategies to battle the increase in invasive species infestations in the state (plants and animals). While these efforts keep federal and state agencies focused on harmful non-native species, there is a third level of focus—local Weed Management Areas (WMAs). These groups are composed of local agency personnel and landowners, concerned citizens, conservation organizations, etc. who work to address foreign weed problems in their communities.

There are about twenty recognized weed management groups in Arizona and they vary in their scope and size. All are comprised of volunteers and agency personnel who have a passion for controlling noxious and/or invasive weeds, sustaining our natural landscapes, preventing catastrophic events, and averting human health problems caused by these plants. These are different than weed control boards found in some other states that have regulatory authority and are supported by tax dollars. Arizona’s WMA’s are volunteer-based, have no regulatory power, and rely on grant funding to implement large scale projects. Since invasive weeds establish infestations on a variety of landownership, WMA’s are important in pulling together people who might not normally work together on private, municipal, county, state, tribal and federal lands and waters.

Weed Management Areas use the principals of Integrated Weed Management:

- Education/Awareness,
- Prevention/Early Detection,
- Inventory,
- Treatment (including physical, biological, cultural and chemical methods),
- Monitoring, and
- Long term follow-up.

Members of WMA’s may work in one or two of the areas listed above, or may be involved in more, depending how the WMA is set up and what species they may be targeting. Some examples of WMA activities include: educational workshops for local communities, mapping weed infestations, organizing weed pulls, researching alternative treatment methods, and photographing and monitoring previously treated infestation area.

The least expensive weed control effort is preventing new weed introductions. Educated and involved citizens can make huge contributions to weed management through WMAs. Whether it’s removing noxious weeds from your own land to helping with educational events, volunteers are always welcome. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office or check out the weed management area contact list on the Southwest Vegetation Management Association website listed below to find a weed management area near you.

Internet Resources

USDA-APHIS Federally Listed Plants
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/weeds/

Arizona Department of Agriculture Listed Plants
<http://www.azda.gov/PSD/quarantine5.htm>

Arizona Invasive Species Advisory Council
<http://az.gov/invasivespecies/about.html>

Southwest Vegetation Management Association
<http://www.svwma.org/>