



# 2016 Weed Awareness

The Weed Control Authority is responsible for implementation of the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act throughout Lancaster County. The authority has also provided the inspection and administration of the City of Lincoln's Weed Abatement Program since entering into an interlocal agreement with the city in 1996.



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## Controlling Noxious Weeds in Lancaster County is Working Thanks to Landowners and "Early Detection – Rapid Response"

**BY BRENT MEYER**  
Lancaster County Weed Superintendent

As a society we tend to focus on the things that are bad and want to fix them. In the noxious weed business we focus a lot of time on the problem and work with property owners to control infestations. We don't focus enough on the successes, and YES, there are encouraging success stories to tell.

We can all agree it is easier to eradicate a problem when it is small, rather than waiting until we have a huge problem, we then wonder how am I going to manage that? Similar to a fire, it is easier to put out a small fire rather than waiting until the entire forest is on fire. It is similar with invasive plants. We call this Early Detection – Rapid Response (EDRR) we want to find the infestation early on, while it is still manageable and then attack it, and eradicate it before it becomes a large infestation making it almost impossible to eradicate.

In the early years of noxious weed control, the process was to take the invasives that were out of control, taking over the land, and add them to the noxious weed list. Typically it was too late to ever eradicate the problem. Today, with the help of the Weed Risk Assessment (WRA) we are able to detect plants with the potential to become invasive, add them to the noxious weed list early and begin working to contain or eradicate the problem before it becomes widespread.

The opening statement in the Noxious Weed Control act reads: "The Legislature finds and declares that: The failure to control noxious weeds on lands in this state is a serious problem which is detrimental to the production of crops and livestock and to the welfare of residents of this state and which may devalue land and reduce tax revenue."

Recognizing the potential harm invasives can do is the reason we all need to work together to control invasive plants. Noxious and invasive weed control has come a long way over the years.

Property owners now understand the importance of controlling invasives and preventing them from taking over their land. Even musk thistle today is less of a problem than it was 20–30 years ago. Today's landowners and managers understand musk thistle and how quickly it can take over if uncontrolled, however, some of the new invasives are less recognizable by the public. By learning how to identify and how to control the new invasives, together we should be able to

keep them from taking over the landscape.

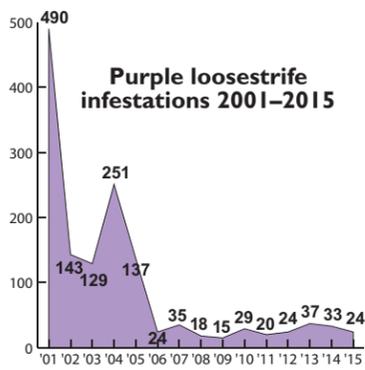
Let's take a look at some of the Noxious Weeds landowners in Lancaster County have been successful in containing.

### Purple Loosestrife



Purple loosestrife in Lincoln, 2012

In 2001, purple loosestrife was declared a noxious weed in the State of Nebraska because of its ability to rapidly spread and take over wetland areas, rivers and streams. This was a very difficult decision because this plant was also a top seller for the nurseries as a favorite for homeowners in their flower gardens and landscaping. The characteristics that made it so popular with the homeowner; easy to grow, flowers for a long period of time, etc., were the same characteristics that made it so aggressive when it escaped into our natural habitats in the state. In the end, the risk outweighed the reward and the Director of Agriculture added purple loosestrife to the noxious weed list.



In 2001, Lancaster County reported 490 parcels infested with purple loosestrife. Through years of education and outreach, helping property owners recognize the potential danger of this high seed producing plant, we now document around 20–40 parcels per year that remain infested. The central part of the state, especially along the Platte River in Hall and Buffalo counties, aren't as lucky and continue to battle large infestations of purple loosestrife every year.

### Saltcedar

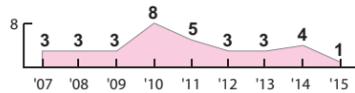
Saltcedar exploded onto the scene during the drought years. Mature saltcedar trees consume as much as 200 gallons of water per day. This is a major concern when



Saltcedar in Lincoln, 2005

it is infesting our lakes, rivers and wetlands already stressed for lack of water. Saltcedar loves to take over any area vacated by receding waters. This was especially evident on Harlan Reservoir and Lake McConaughy in the early 2000s when both water bodies saw record low levels. Thousands of acres of exposed lake beds led to major infestations of saltcedar. The Director of Agriculture declared saltcedar a noxious weed in Nebraska in 2007.

Saltcedar infestations 2007–2015



While the central and western parts of the state continue to battle saltcedar, Lancaster County has always been able to detect the infestations early and control them, never reporting more than eight parcels infested in any one year. We will continue with our EDRR program on saltcedar and make sure it never becomes a widespread problem.

### Knotweed



Japanese knotweed infestation in Lincoln, 2012

Knotweed is considered one of the top 10 most aggressive and destructive plants in the world, existing primarily in the eastern part of Nebraska. Knotweed comes in many subspecies including, Japanese knotweed, giant knotweed, bohemian knotweed and variegated knotweed just to name a few. These were the first plants in Nebraska to go through a scientific Weed Risk Assessment (WRA) to determine its ability to grow and spread in Nebraska. With the WRA done by USDA APHIS, it was determined that knotweed ranked very high to become a problem in Nebraska. With today's technology we're able to

determine if a plant species has the potential to become aggressive and begin working on control before it becomes a "huge fire."

Knotweed was another plant being used in the ornamental market and being planted in landscaping; however, when it escapes into the rivers and wetlands is when it becomes a major problem. This is one of the few plants responsible for property to be condemned. Knotweed will grow right through cracks in basement walls and destroy the foundation. The research from around the world made this an easy decision to add knotweeds to Nebraska's noxious weed list in 2011, requiring it to be controlled by landowners and stopping the sale of new plants.

### Teasels



Cutleaf teasel in Lincoln, 2014

When infestations of common and cutleaf teasel started to be found in Lancaster County, the Weed Control staff began researching this plant, the results were alarming. Teasel has every indication of being very destructive to our pastures, rangelands and roadsides. Lancaster County proceeded with the hearing process according to the Nebraska Weed Control Act and declared both common and cutleaf teasel as noxious weeds in Lancaster County in 2014.

Many states have declared one or both teasels to be noxious, requiring them to be controlled. Illinois, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri are all states with widespread teasel infestations. Because the plant has no value as a forage crop and its ability to produce a tremendous amount of seeds and rapidly take over, it was determined teasel be controlled by the landowners of Lancaster County in the future. If left untreated, there is little doubt it has the potential to be as bad as, or worse than, musk thistle, invading similar habitats. With an aggressive EDRR program, we want to make sure Lancaster County never ends up losing productive pastures, rangelands or habitat to this invader.

### Sericea Lespedeza

Sericea lespedeza was added to the State's noxious weed list in 2013, while only infesting about a dozen counties in southeast see *Sericea Lespedeza* on next page

## So Many Ways Weeds Can Spread

**BY PAT DUGAN**  
Lancaster County Weed Chief Inspector

In order to control weeds, it is very important to understand how weeds spread. If an area of land is scraped, burned, tilled or otherwise has desirable vegetation removed, invasive weeds can move in very quickly because the competition from desirable plants has been eliminated. If you have ever had a flower garden or vegetable garden, you may have noticed how rapidly common garden weeds move into areas you have hoed or tilled with a roto-tiller.

Invasive weeds are spread primarily by seeds, but some plant fragments — such as roots — can take hold in a new place if moved. Seeds often remain viable in the soil for many years, sometimes decades. Here are a few ways seeds and plant fragments can be transported:

- wind,
- wildlife and domestic animals — on animal hooves and hair, or through the digestive tracts,
- water — such as flooding, streams and irrigation water,
- contaminated gravel, topsoil and livestock feed — such as hay,
- non-certified grass seed,
- uncomposted, fresh manure used to fertilize crops and gardens,
- straw bales used for environmental protection projects such as erosion control,
- mud on shoes, boots, ATVs and all types of vehicles,
- farm tillage equipment, mowers, construction equipment, loaders, dirt movers and graders, and
- boats and boat trailers (especially aquatic vegetation).

Through all the potential pathways, it's really no wonder weeds spread so quickly.

### 14 Steps for Effective Weed Control

What can you do about the weed problem we have in Southeastern Nebraska? If you have read the Weed Awareness insert in the NEBLINE, you have done something — you've started educating yourself about noxious weeds. You can also help by participating in volunteer efforts to control see *Control* on next page

# WEED AWARENESS

## CONTROL

continued from previous page  
weeds in your community. The list below summarizes 14 steps to take for effective weed control on your property and working with others around your community.

- Learn what problem weeds look like, from the seedling stage to the flowering and fruiting plant. For help, use the "Weeds of the Great Plains" published by Nebraska Department of Agriculture, or contact your local Weed Authority.
- Inspect your property often to catch the presence of weeds as early as possible.
- Identify your problem weeds. Whenever possible, bring a fresh sample stored in a paper or plastic bag to your local Weed Control office, Nebraska Extension office or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. Be careful not to spread seeds while transporting the sample. Double bagging the sample is recommended.
- Gather information on your weed. Obtain any available publications or other materials. Your local weed control offices have fact sheets discussing integrated weed management of specific invasive weeds. The Nebraska Extension publication *Guide for Weed, Disease, and Insect Management* (EC130) is available at <https://marketplace.unl.edu>
- Learn the life cycle of the weed. Is it an annual, perennial or biennial?
- Determine whether the weed is a broadleaf or grass plant.
- Evaluate the reproduction method and likely means of spread of the weed.
- Learn what time of year is best to control the weed.
- Keep desirable landscape plants or pastures healthy and vigorous so they can out-compete weeds. Don't overgraze pastures, or weeds will invade.
- Create a plan for the eventual revegetation of the land once the problem weeds have been eradicated.
- List and assess the treatment options for the weed and the site: cultural, mechanical, biological, and chemical.
- Prevent annual weeds from flowering and setting seed whenever possible. This can be done for some species by mowing or using another mechanical control method at the most effective time. Consider such alternatives as burning, if permitted, or mulching.
- Perennials cannot be controlled by interrupting the seed production. Instead, learn how the plant spreads and determine whether pulling, digging or disking will be effective. Some perennials will require chemical applications for control.
- Complete your weed management plan and evaluate its success.

## SERICEA LESPEDEZA

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Nebraska. The WRA indicated sericea lespedeza has the potential to infest up to 97 percent of the landscape in Nebraska. This alarming number raised concern among land managers.

Sericea lespedeza was originally planted as a cover crop and thought to be good for wildlife. As it turns out, this is not the case, escaping onto pastures and rangelands where it can completely take over the landscape. As more landowners continue to learn how to identify this invasive and learn how to manage sericea lespedeza, the amount

of acres infested should begin to decline. While it is still too early to determine if sericea lespedeza will become a success story or not, by adding it to the noxious weed list before it is widespread should help contain this aggressive invader.



Sericea lespedeza infestation in Lancaster County, 2012

## Frequently Asked Questions about Noxious Weed Control

### Where did all the noxious weeds come from in the first place?

Most of our noxious weeds came from Europe. Many were brought over in the ballast of ships. Some were brought on purpose as ornamentals. The problem is the natural enemies were not brought along, and this gives the invaders the opportunity to crowd out native plants.

### Why do I need to control my noxious weeds?

First of all, it's the law. It is the duty of every landowner to effectively control noxious weeds on his or her property. As a landowner, you will find out quickly if you do not control noxious weeds, they will reduce cropland yields, reduce livestock forage and crowd out native vegetation.

### Where can I find more information on weeds?

You can spend hours on the Internet looking for

information about noxious and invasive weeds. Your local county weed superintendent can help with identification and control recommendations. The Google search engine can locate information and photographs of all noxious weeds. So do websites such as <http://neweed.org> and <http://lancaster.ne.gov/weeds>

### How should I control weeds along my creek?

Some herbicides, called aquatic herbicides, are meant for use in areas like this. Learn to identify the weeds, control them at the proper time and always read and follow the herbicide label.

### I spray and spray...will I ever get rid of these weeds?

Timing and persistence are the two keys to winning the battle against noxious weeds. Be sure the herbicide you choose is labeled for the weed or weeds you are trying to control. Use the proper amount of water, herbicide and adjuvant to get the best results. Read and

follow the herbicide label for the best application times, any personal protective equipment may be necessary and any other important information.

### Questions to ask yourself when developing a Management Plan:

- Have I identified the location, species, life cycle and reproduction method of my problem weed?
- Have I identified the extent of the infestation? Is there one plant, a few plants, nearly an acre, more?
- How will the site be used? What do I hope to do with the site? Does it require frequent cultivation or tilling, which may favor the increase of rhizomatous perennials? Are there other site conditions that cannot be changed?
- Have I incorporated prevention methods to keep from reintroducing weeds?
- Do I know what the most



Beau Wolfe, cameraman for 5-City TV and Brent Meyer, Lancaster County Weed Superintendent.

to identify leafy spurge, musk thistle and purple loosestrife. More videos will be produced in the next few years.

View the videos at <http://lancaster.ne.gov/weeds>



If you find a noxious weed, mark the location using GPS location, if possible, for future treatments.

effective methods of control are? Have I considered cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical controls?

- Can I afford to follow all the elements of my weed control plan? Is it economically viable?
- Have I read the herbicide safety information, product label and safety data sheet (SDS), so that I will not endanger myself, others or the environment when applying herbicides?
- Does my plan help reach the goals of my weed control authority (WCA) or weed management area association (WMA)?

## Hidden Word Find

Responsible landowners take pride in their management efforts to control weeds in order to protect our environment. Sometimes the greatest challenge is to understand how invaders spread, the groups involved in treating them and tools they use.

Find the words in the puzzle and send your completed form to Lancaster County Weed Control for your chance to win the "Weeds of the Great Plains" book published by Nebraska Department of Agriculture. **All entries must be postmarked by April 16.**

If your name is drawn, the book will be mailed to you. This information will not be used to contact you with any other offer.

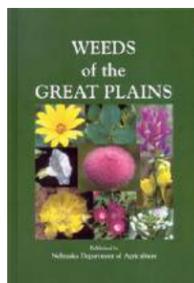
Enter drawing to win:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send completed Word Find to: Lancaster County Weed Control, Weed Book Drawing, 444 Cherrycreek Rd., Bldg. B, Lincoln, NE 68528



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|----------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Annual         | Knotweed   | Lancaster    | Noxious weeds     | Purple loosestrife | Weed watcher |
| Biennial       | Herbicide  | Leafy spurge | Perennial         | Saltcedar          |              |
| Canada thistle | Introduced | Mapping      | Phragmites        | Sericea lespedeza  |              |
| Knapweed       | Invasive   | Musk thistle | Plumeless thistle | Teasel             |              |

P P E R R T T P M I N V A S I V E L D  
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F S C A N A D A T H I S T L E I H E M

# Nebraska's Noxious Weeds

It is the duty of each person who owns or controls land to effectively control noxious weeds on such land.

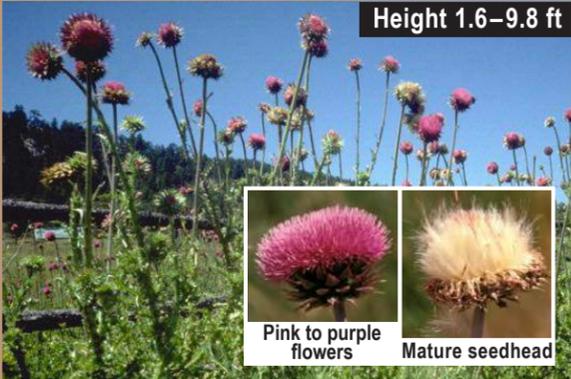
Noxious weed is a legal term used to denote a destructive or harmful weed for the purpose of regulation.

The Director of Agriculture establishes which plants are noxious. These non-native plants compete aggressively with desirable plants and vegetation. Failure to control noxious weeds in this state is a serious problem which is detrimental to the production of crops and livestock, and to the welfare of residents of this state. Noxious weeds may also devalue land and reduce tax revenue.



## Musk Thistle

Height 1.6–9.8 ft



Pink to purple flowers

Mature seedhead

## Canada Thistle

Height 1–3.9 ft



Pink to purple flowers

## Plumeless Thistle

Height 1–4.9 ft



Purple flowers

## Phragmites

Height 3.2–20 ft

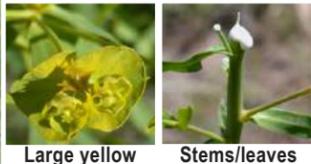
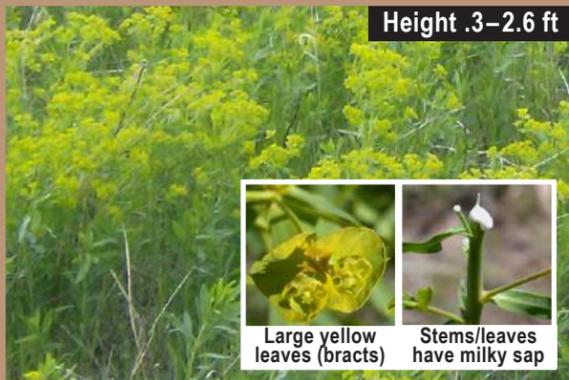


Young seedhead

Mature seedhead

## Leafy Spurge

Height .3–2.6 ft



Large yellow leaves (bracts)

Stems/leaves have milky sap

## Sericea Lespedeza

Height 1.5–6.5 ft



White or cream to yellowish white flowers

## Japanese Knotweed

Height 3–10 ft



Creamy white to greenish white flowers

## Giant Knotweed

Height 8–13 ft



Creamy white to greenish white flowers

## Purple Loosestrife

Height 1.3–8 ft



Purple to magenta flowers

## Saltcedar

Height 3.3–20 ft



Pink to white flowers

## Spotted Knapweed

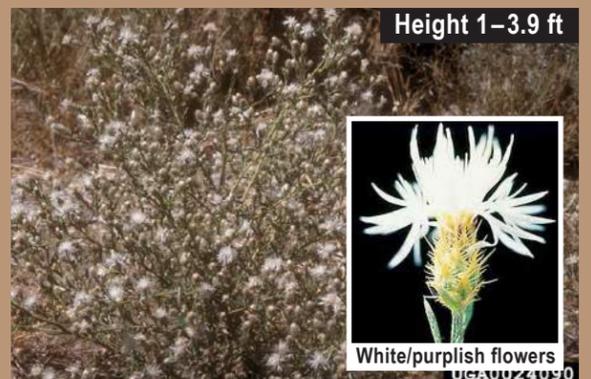
Height 1–3.9 ft



Lavender to purple flowers

## Diffuse Knapweed

Height 1–3.9 ft



White/purplish flowers

## Lancaster County's Noxious Weeds

## Cutleaf Teasel

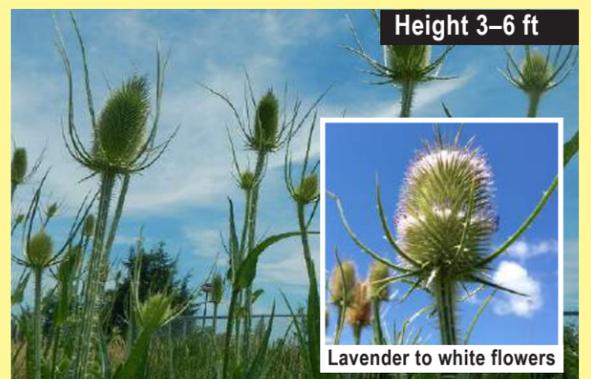
Height 4–8 ft



White flowers

## Common Teasel

Height 3–6 ft



Lavender to white flowers

Good neighbors control noxious weeds — If you have questions or concerns about noxious weeds, please contact your local county noxious weed control authority, Nebraska Weed Control Association ([www.neweed.org](http://www.neweed.org)), or Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

# WEED AWARENESS

The County Commissioners serve as the Lancaster County Weed Control Authority. Currently Brent Meyer serves as the superintendent and supervises a seasonal staff of six weed inspectors with the assistance of Chief Inspector Pat Dugan and Account Clerk Jasmine Mau.

## 2015 Annual Report

Lancaster County Weed Control Authority's purpose is to educate the public concerning noxious weeds, exercise the necessary authority to obtain effective control of noxious weeds county-wide, educate the public concerning weed abatement and to exercise the necessary authority to cut and clear overgrown weeds and worthless vegetation in the city of Lincoln. We accomplish this by:

- educating the landowners of Lancaster County about the legal requirements and benefits of controlling noxious weeds,
- providing information to the citizens of Lincoln about the legal requirements and benefits of cutting and clearing overgrown weeds and worthless vegetation,
- efficiently and effectively exercising authority, when necessary, to obtain acceptable noxious weed and weed abatement control and
- improving efficiency and effectiveness of operations through management techniques.

### Noxious Weed Program

Lancaster County Weed Control office utilizes a three-phase program to assist landowners in reducing the number of noxious-weed-infested acres in the county.

#### 1. Prevent the development of new weed infestations

Prevention is the least expensive and most effective way to halt the spread of noxious and invasive weeds. Integrated weed management includes preventing encroachment into land not infested, identifying the pathways in which weeds are spread, detecting and eradicating new weed introductions, containing large-scale infestations using an integrated approach and often re-vegetation.

#### 2. Provide education and public outreach on noxious and invasive weed control

The public is generally not aware of the economic and environmental impacts of noxious weeds. There is a need to improve awareness of noxious weeds and to provide educational information to cooperators, land managers and the public. As people become more aware of noxious weeds, the probability of detecting them is greatly increased, which allows for more effective and timely control.

Education and awareness assist:

- weed identification
- reporting new infestations
- prevention
- control
- fostering cooperation and partnerships

#### 3. Provide for ongoing management of State of Nebraska-mandated noxious weeds

Noxious weed management is the systematic approach to minimize noxious weed impacts and optimize intended land use. It is very important for all infested areas to be treated with effective methods. Integrated management

is a program of noxious weed control that properly implements a variety of coordinated control methods. Types of control methods include mechanical, cultural, chemical and biological. Integrated management greatly improves the success rate for your weed control plan. All noxious weed management must be applied and evaluated over an extended period of time to be successful.

### Noxious Weed Overview

No piece of land is safe from noxious weeds. They are found wherever they are able to establish a root system. In 2015, our inspectors documented 1,503 sites infested with noxious weeds, 367 of those sites were located within city limits. Due to their introduction as ornamentals saltcedar, purple loosestrife and knotweed are more commonly found in the city than rural areas in Lancaster County. In order to prevent the spread of noxious weeds, an aggressive management plan is required on all noxious weed sites no matter where they are found.

**Musk Thistle** — Musk thistle is a commonly-reported noxious weed due its easy identifiable bright rose-purple colored head. The key to successful musk thistle control is to prevent seed production. A total of 828 inspections were made on 463 sites. There were 309 sites found to be in violation amounting to 788 acres infested. Legal action was taken on 2 parcels, resulting in a \$1,500 fine on each parcel.

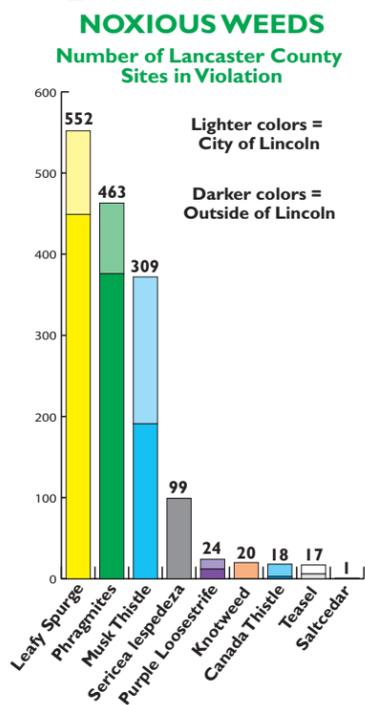
**Phragmites** — We continue to find new infestations of phragmites throughout Lancaster County. Phragmites is an aggressive noxious weed and immediate action is required to keep this noxious weed under control. In 2015, we identified 463 sites infested with phragmites.



A manageable infestation of leafy spurge in Lancaster County.

**Leafy Spurge** — Leafy spurge is the noxious weed that seems to sneak up on us in the spring. It can be very easy to detect when the grasses are still trying to grow. Leafy spurge continues to be very difficult to control and requires years of monitoring. In 2015, we made 950 inspections and found 552 infestations. Leafy spurge infests 1,154 acres in the county and city.

**Purple Loosestrife** — Purple loosestrife is known as the greatest noxious weed success story in Lancaster County. Wild purple loosestrife has been found in Lincoln city limits and in rural Lancaster County. Most commonly, purple loosestrife is found as ornamental plantings within the Lincoln city limits. Purple loosestrife was added to the State Noxious Weed list in 2001 and, at that time, we had identified 490 locations. In 2015, we had 24 sites of ornamental or wild purple loosestrife.



**Knotweed** — The majority of knotweed in Lancaster County is ornamental. The key to successfully eradicating knotweed is to educate the landowners about the impact knotweed can have on the environment and on proper control methods. In 2015, there were 20 known sites of knotweed in Lancaster County.

**Canada Thistle** — Canada thistle is on an increase in Lancaster County. Currently we have 18 known infestations in the county and city. Canada thistle, typically known as a row crop problem, is being transported with nursery root stock and is commonly showing up in landscaping around trees and shrubs.

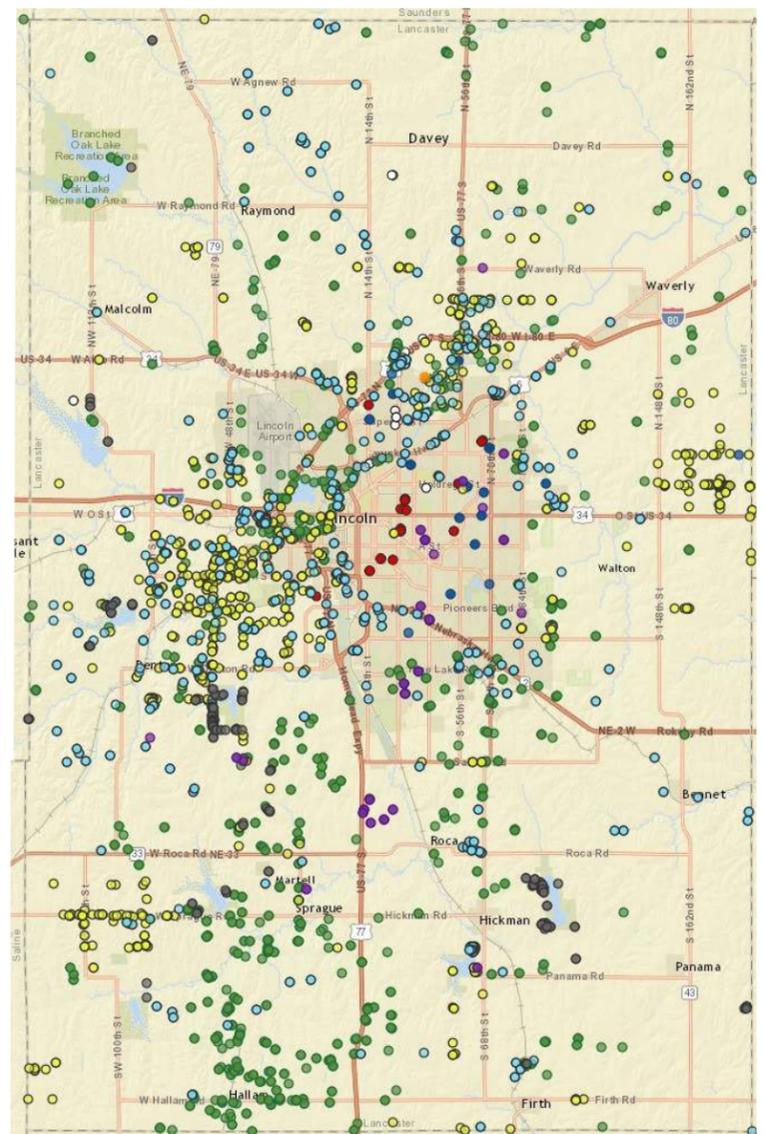
**Saltcedar** — Currently, Lancaster County has one uncontrolled infestation of saltcedar. This low number is due to Early Detection-Rapid Response (EDRR). Saltcedar was identified early on as having the potential to cause problems and action was taken to eradicate it.

**Sericea lespedeza** — Now in our third year of dealing with sericea lespedeza as a noxious weed, we continue to get a better understanding of where it likes to grow. Sericea is commonly found within one mile of wildlife management areas, but has been found in other areas. In 2015, our inspectors found 99 sites infested, totaling 157 acres.

**Teasel** — In July 2014, cutleaf and common teasel were added to the Lancaster County Noxious weed list. Our inspectors found 17 infestations in 2015. Our office is hopeful that Early Detection-Rapid Response (EDRR) will be effective with these plants. We will continue to target teasel in 2016 to ensure it does not spread.

### Noxious Weeds in County Roadsides

Landowners are encouraged to control noxious weeds along property they own. If not



### Lancaster County Noxious Weeds

- Musk thistle
- Phragmites
- Leafy spurge
- Sericea lespedeza
- Purple loosestrife
- Knotweed
- Canada thistle
- Saltcedar
- Teasel

controlled by the owner, Lancaster County Weed Control will control the perennial noxious weeds such as phragmites, sericea lespedeza and leafy spurge in the county roadsides. While you will continue to see the blue flags or ribbon along the roads, our inspectors are now using GPS to mark all the locations. Our contractor is provided with the latitude/longitude points and will begin to use this to treat the locations. Since beginning this process in 2014, we are seeing better control while saving the county money.

### City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Program

The City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Ordinance requires landowners within city limits to maintain the height of weeds and worthless vegetation below six inches. This includes all areas to the center of the street and/or alley that adjoins their property. Three seasonal inspectors assist in administering this program. The seasonal employees complete inspections based on pre-selected properties due to their history, complaints from the public received in our office and by observing severe yards while conducting other inspections. In 2015, our office received 1,863 complaints from the public and additional 1,449 properties were inspected that were observed as having violations. Our office made 7,802 initial and follow-up inspections on 3,312 sites. Properties not in compliance were notified of the violations with 1,895 letters, 1,575 legal notices, 765 reminder letters and 50 personal contacts. Landowners

cut 2,926 sites and forced cutting was contracted on 386 sites. Landowners are responsible to pay the cost of control plus an administrative fee. A lien is placed against the property until the bill is paid.

### City Landfills

The Weed Control Authority is responsible for managing noxious weeds at the 48th Street landfill and the Bluff Road landfill. Presently, we deal with musk thistle and leafy spurge at both landfills and phragmites at the 48th Street landfill. The landfills are annually inspected and mapped. This helps to keep track of the spread of noxious weeds and the effectiveness of the control. Maps are provided to a contractor to complete the control work and follow-up inspections are completed.

### Lancaster County Abandoned Cemeteries

Mowing and general maintenance on six abandoned cemeteries throughout the county falls under the supervision of the Weed Control Authority. Cemeteries included are the County Poor Farm, Dietz, Evangelical, Highland Precinct, Jordan and Uphoff.

Special recognition goes to the following volunteers:

- Lincoln Tree Service for tree trimming and removal
- Steve Wedge for mowing Jordan
- Terry Briley for mowing Evangelical
- Boy Scouts of America Troop 64 for mowing Dietz
- Troy Henning for mowing Highland Precinct and Uphoff