LANCASTER COUNTY
Weed Authority

2022 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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Redcedars Are Invasive, But NOT Noxious

Eastern redcedars (*Juniperus virginiana* L.) are quickly becoming one of the more talked-about species causing concern for landowners. Many times the question is asked, when will redcedar be designated a "Noxious Weed"? The answer will always be, it WON'T, because it is a native plant to Nebraska, and native plants are not be listed on the state's Noxious Weed list. Only non-native plants may be considered for listing.

While considering a plant "noxious" will not automatically make it go away, recognizing it is invasive and beginning to properly manage it, is important. Native plants have always been here, and typically the thing that has changed is management, or lack of management.

History

First observed at Roanoke Island, Va. in 1564, and described by the early colonists as "the tallest and reddest cedars in the world," the Eastern redcedar quickly became prized for building purposes. Finding the heartwood to be rot-resistant, the colonists used it to construct furniture, rail fences, poles, coffins and log cabins.

It is famously known for its fragrant oil, which is a natural insect repellent. Because the scent repels moths, the aromatic wood has been used for centuries in the construction of chests, closets and wardrobes to protect woolen clothing. Redcedar sawdust or wood chips may also be used in kennel bedding to repel fleas and minimize odors.

Concern

While almost everyone agrees redcedars are invasive and causing concern in pastures and rangelands everywhere, management seems to vary from landowner to landowner. The trees have been planted in shelterbelts throughout the state for many years, and serve a valuable purpose in that setting.

Redcedars have both male and female trees. The female trees produce the seeds which causes spreading. The challenge we face is, we can't, at this time, identify the male from the female until it is 4–7 years old. In a shelterbelt, the trees may be 4–7 feet tall by then, and no one wants to remove them at that point. When the seeds are eaten by birds and deposited where they aren't wanted, redcedars become a concern.

Negative Impacts

At a minimum, redcedars can be a nuisance, particularly in open fields and abandoned properties. Worst case, they have the capacity to negatively impact certain ecosystems by crowding out other species.

Redcedar encroachment is often ignored because of the initially slow process of the encroachment. Most landowners admit to seeing redcedars for years and not properly managing them, but the problem gets out of control. Once redcedars are established, they expand quickly, converting rangelands into redcedar woodlands, and have major negative impacts, including:

- Reducing forage for livestock and wildlife by 75%.
  - 80% decline in profitability for ranchers.
  - Reduces funding for public K–12 education generated through grazing leases.
- Increases the risk that wildfires pose to society.
- Displacement of upland game animals.
- Displacement of many grassland bird species at 25% redcedar cover.
- 75% reduction in small mammal diversity at 40% redcedar cover.
- Host for cedar-apple-rust, a fungus that affects the health of apple trees.
- 90% reduction in plant diversity underneath redcedar woodlands.
- Up to a 40% decline in streamflow.
- Shallow roots take up most of the moisture in woodland understory, causing the other deciduous trees to lack water.

Benefits

In a controlled environment and in the right setting, redcedars are a landscape asset worth having. Despite the negatives, they have plenty of good qualities, including:

- Resistant to extremes of drought, heat and cold.
- Tolerant of a wide range of soils — poor, dry soil, alkaline soil and dry, rocky outcrops, as well as wet, swampy land.
- Tolerant of windy conditions, so much so that the species was planted as windbreaks to offset the dust bowl conditions of the 1930s.
- Salt tolerant, which means it can be used near roads, driveways and sidewalks. It can tolerate brackish, marshy sites in the southeastern part of Virginia and coastal sand dunes that are subject to salt spray.
- A significant source of food and shelter for wildlife. The blue fruits on the female trees are consumed by a wide variety of wildlife, including the Cedar Waxwing songbird which is named for this tree.
- A moderate- to long-lived evergreen. Some specimens have been known to live more than 500 years. Large specimens are often found in old cemeteries and other older, undisturbed properties.

Management

Redcedars need to be managed aggressively like any invasive. Control is relatively easy when the trees are small, since they will not regrow when cut below the bottom branch at, or near, ground level. Young seedlings can be regularly mowed or dug out. Older trees can be cut with a chainsaw. Some spot treatment methods with herbicides can be used with limited success.

One of the control methods that kept redcedars in check for many years was fire. As human populations increased and spread across the country, controlled fires ceased being a viable option. When we stopped having prairie fires is when redcedars began to spread. Any aggressive plant will seize the opportunity when humans change the way we manage. Prescribed fire is still one of the best ways to manage large infestations.

Sources:
- *Nebraska Department of Agriculture*
- *Nebraska Invasive Species Project*
- *Piedmont Master Gardeners – Pros and Cons*

TAKE 2

Two minutes to **read about** two invasive plants which are working to establish themselves in Lancaster County

Scouring Rush/Horsetail
(*Equisetum hyemale* L.)

Scouring rush is sometimes sold as an ornamental and sometimes can be considered invasive. This plant is a perennial and native to North America, dating back to ancient times. Scouring rush is so invasive and difficult to control, it is very important to prevent it from becoming established.

Description

Scouring rush is evergreen with leafless, hollow, segmented stems that have ash-colored bands. Stems grow to about 1/2 inch in diameter and reach up to 5-feet tall.

Range & Habitat

Scouring Rush is a common plant that occurs across Nebraska, where it is native. Habitats include wet areas such as riverbanks, field drainages, meadows, roadsides, and low areas in pastures and prairies. This plant is usually found in degraded habitats and less often in higher-quality, natural areas.

Means of Spread and Distribution

This plant spreads primarily by spores and aggressively spreading rhizomes. Each stem is fertile, having small, rounded cones containing reproductive spores at the tips. Widely distributed in North America.

Uses and Values

Because the stems are rough and durable (due to their high silica content) they were called "scouring rushes" because early pioneers used them to scrub pots and pans.

Impact

This plant can spread aggressively, especially in locations where the soil is poorly drained. It has few problems with pests and disease organisms.

Because of its tall stems and tendency to form dense colonies, Scouring rush provides excellent cover for various kinds of wildlife, including wetland birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

Management

A sound management plan of foliar herbicides will take a commitment of several years to ensure the population has decreased significantly and is not a serious problem. Lasting control of scouring rush is difficult to achieve because of the high level of food reserves stored in the rhizome.

Toxicity

Scouring rush is toxic to livestock and can kill animals that eat large amounts of it. While it is rare for an animal to consume sufficient quantities of fresh scouring rush to cause serious illness or death, it is much more common when cut and dried in hay. In high densities, scouring rush reduces crop yields by producing chemicals that suppress the growth of neighboring plants. Along roadsides, it can restrict water flow, cause pooling and increase ditch maintenance costs.

ID and Control

For help with identification or control recommendations, contact your local county weed control superintendent.

Sources: Illinoiswildflowers.info *and* Maine.gov.

Yellow Flag Iris
(*Iris pseudacorus* L.)

Yellow flag iris is a new invasive to Lancaster County, and the first patch that escaped from its ornamental planting was recently discovered in southeast Lincoln. Yellow flag iris was thought to be just another pretty flower until it started moving across the state. It is believed to be first introduced as an ornamental in the early 1900s at Cook Ranch near Agate Fossil Beds in western Nebraska. It is native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa.

Whether alteration of the river flow by nature or by manmade bridges, the yellow flag iris now crowds out native vegetation and has formed a monoculture in some areas in the state.

Description

Yellow flag iris is an aggressive, perennial plant that germinates from seed, spends the first year or more as a rosette, and in the second year or later, bolts to a height of 2–6 feet as a mature plant. Showy, yellow to pale-yellow flowers are present June through late August.

Habitat

The preferred habitat is in shallow water and wet places along rivers, lakes, ponds and in wetlands. While being found across Nebraska, the heaviest infested area of large, dense colonies is found along the Niobrara River channel in Sioux County.

Means of Spread and Distribution

This plant grows from a rhizome and spreads primarily by both rhizomes and seeds.

Impact

This invasive iris forms dense monoculture stands over very large areas, crowding out other species and restricting water movement.

Management

A sound management plan of foliar herbicides is necessary to manage this species and will take a commitment of several years to ensure the population has decreased significantly and is not a serious problem. Cattle have been shown to be effective in controlling the plant during the early growth stage with no noticeable effects to the cattle.

Toxicity

The mature plant is toxic to animals and fish, since yellow flag iris contains glycosides which can poison. It is generally avoided by livestock while actively growing. Hand pulling is **not** recommended — it causes skin irritation in humans after handling plants or seeds. Appropriate protective clothing including gloves, long sleeves and long pants should be worn, and direct contact with the plant should be avoided.

ID and Control

Yellow flag iris is on Nebraska's Invasive Plants Watch List and its spread is being monitored.

For help with identification or control recommendations, contact your local county weed control superintendent.

Lancaster County Weed Control 2021 Review

The Lancaster County Noxious Weed Control Authority serves the citizens of Lancaster County to protect effectively against designated noxious weeds which constitute a present threat to the continued economic and environmental value of lands in Lancaster County.

Our office implements the mandates of the State of Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act by setting forth management objectives which includes plans, methods or practices utilizing a variety of techniques for the integrated management of noxious weeds. In establishing a coordinated program for the integrated management of noxious weeds, it is the County's intent to encourage and require all appropriate and available management methods, while promoting those methods which are the most environmentally benign, and which are practical and economically feasible.

Noxious Weed Program

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

Phase 1: Prevent the development of new noxious and invasive weed infestations.

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

Phase 3: Provide ongoing management of State of Nebraska and Lancaster County designated noxious weeds, as well as the City of Lincoln Weed Abatement program.

Nebraska's Noxious Weed Control Act states: It is the duty of each person who owns or controls land to effectively control noxious weeds on such land.

Noxious Weeds in County Roadsides

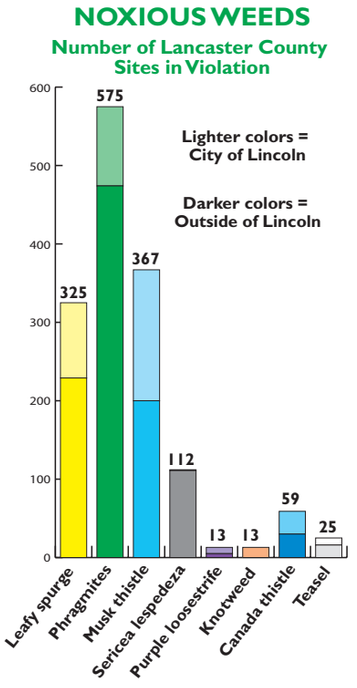
Landowners are encouraged to control noxious weeds along property they own. If not controlled by the adjacent owner, Lancaster County Weed Control will control the perennial noxious weeds such as phragmites, sericea lespedeza and leafy spurge in the county roadsides.

Lancaster County works closely with landowners with specialty crops and offers, free-of-charge, "NO SPRAY ZONE" signs when an agreement is signed. The agreement requires the landowner to control all the noxious weeds in their adjacent right of way.

City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Program

Lancaster County Weed Control Authority is responsible to carry out the administration of the City of Lincoln's Weed Abatement program since entering an interlocal agreement with the city in 1996.

The City of Lincoln's 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. Our inspectors complete inspections based on pre-selected properties due to their history, request from the public and by observing severe yards while conducting other inspections. When a property is found to be in violation, the owner of record is notified with a legal notice. If the property remains uncontrolled at the expiration of the legal notice, the Weed Control Authority will hire a contractor to cut the property. Landowners are responsible to pay the cost of control, plus an administrative fee. If the cost of control remains unpaid, a lien is placed against the property until paid.



City of Lincoln Landfills

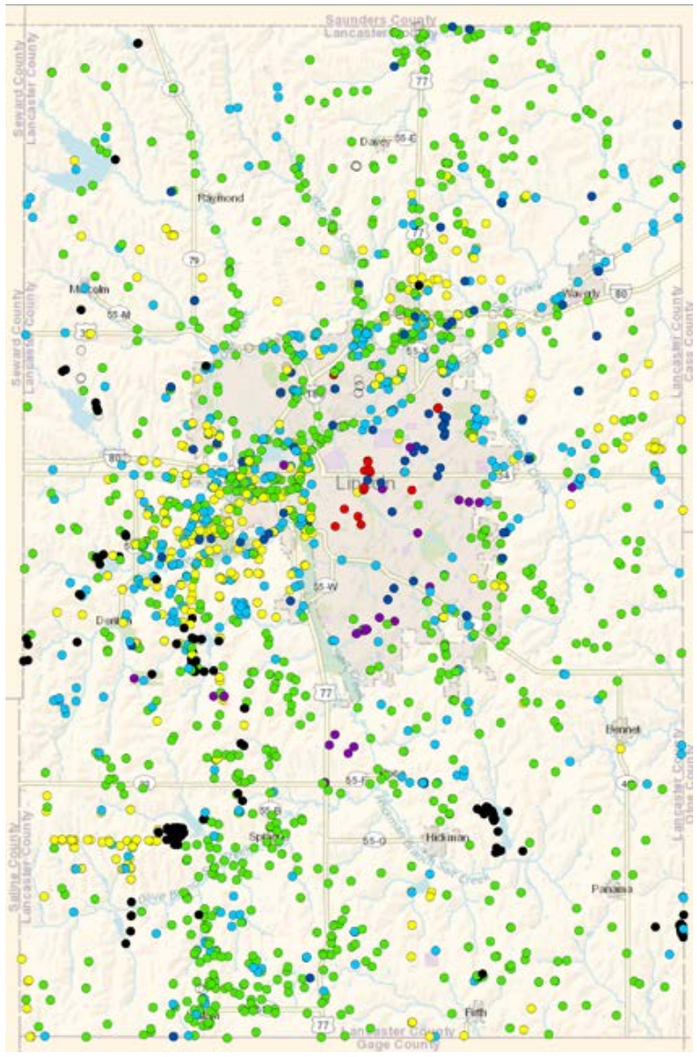
The Weed Control Authority is responsible for managing noxious weeds at the 48th Street and the Bluff Road landfills. To track the spread of noxious weeds and the effectiveness of the control, the landfills are annually inspected and GPS mapped prior to treatment.

Lancaster County Abandoned Cemeteries

Mowing and 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.
- Dave Miller for mowing Jordan.
- Larry England for mowing the Poor Farm.
- Clark Liesveld and Boy Scouts of America Troop 64 for mowing Dietz.
- Terry Briley for mowing Evangelical.
- Troy Henning for mowing Highland Precinct and Uphoff.



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 Danni McGown.

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.

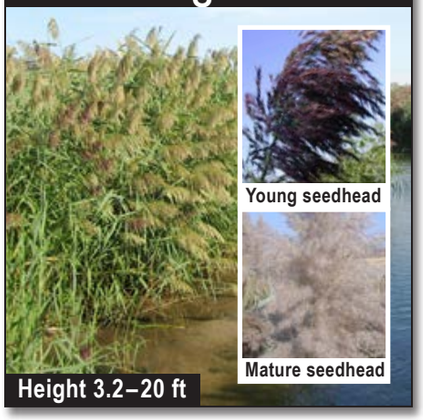
Play Clean Go
STOP INVASIVE SPECIES IN YOUR TRACKS.
PlayCleanGo.org

Musk Thistle

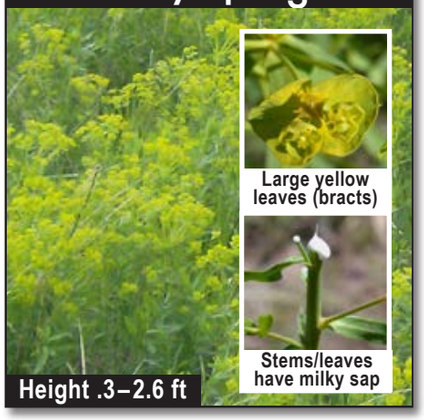
Canada Thistle

Plumeless Thistle

Phragmites



Leafy Spurge



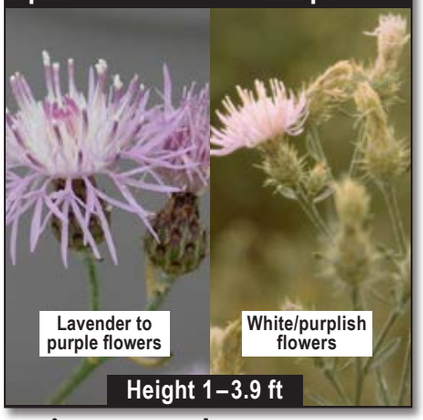
Sericea Lespedeza

Japanese & Giant Knotweed

Purple Loosestrife

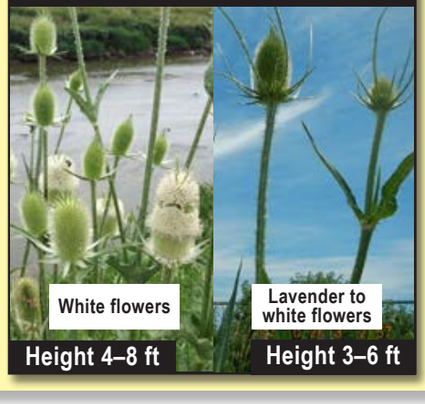
Saltcedar

Spotted & Diffuse Knapweed



Lancaster County's Noxious Weeds

Cutleaf & Common Teasel



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) or Nebraska Department of Agriculture.