

Alien invaders, in the form of plants not native to North America, are threatening to destroy our precious resources. These non-native plants are both an ecological and an economic problem. They are extremely aggressive and can out-compete crops and native vegetation leading to dense, widespread areas of weeds. As a result, the diversity of our native plant communities is decreasing and our ecosystems are being damaged.

As native vegetation is reduced, so is the amount of forage available for wildlife and livestock. Many of these weeds are not considered a food source, are toxic, or cause physical problems to animals and humans. Agricultural and recreational values are also diminished.



Purple Loosestrife

The purple loosestrife growing in this marsh can become extremely thick & slowly fill wetlands. When this happens, shoreline habitat disappears.



/// Aquatic insects need water for laying eggs & developing larvae.



/// Reptiles & amphibians need some shoreline space, as well as some plant cover, for breeding and feeding.



/// Predatory birds, like hawks & eagles, in turn feed on small reptiles, amphibians & rodents.

The seeds of many weeds are covered with hooks, called burrs, making the seeds 'sticky'. Seeds get carried to new locations in the fur of wildlife, livestock, and pets, and on shoelaces and fleece clothing. These burrs can cause physical damage to animals, and can result in increased costs to livestock operators, and ultimately consumers.



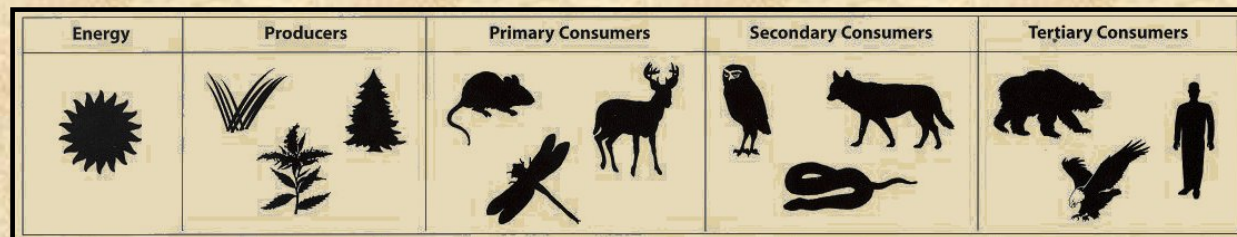
/// When burred weed seeds finally fall off the animal or human that was carrying them, it is often in an area that was previously weed-free.



Hound's-Tongue burrs

/// The hard coating of some seeds is softened by the digestive juices of animals that eat them. When these seeds are excreted by the animal, they germinate readily and grow.

The food chain is a delicate system. Once disturbed the negative effects spread like a ripple on a pond. The direct effects of non-native weeds out-competing plants is obvious. However, it is the indirect impacts farther up the food chain that are initially not recognised, but can be far more devastating.



When weeds take the place of nutritious grasses, wildlife have less to eat in the winter.



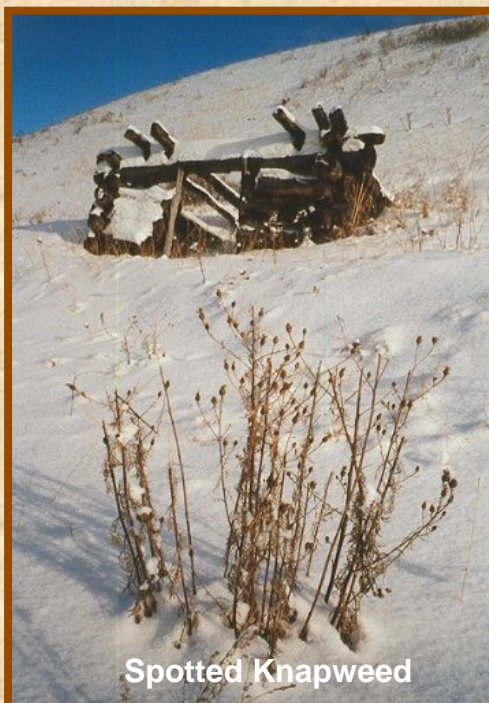
/// Rodents, like mice, and small birds need the seeds of native plants for food in the winter.



/// Predatory birds, like owls, in turn eat small rodents and birds year-round.



/// Deer depend on native plants and shrubs to survive winter.



Spotted Knapweed

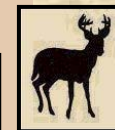


Nodding Thistle

Some weeds grow so big, it is impossible for any other plant to grow near them, or so thick that neither animals or people could pass through.



/// When weeds are better at getting nutrients & water in the soil, they out-compete plants that would normally grow in that spot - native grasses, forbs & shrubs.



/// The spines of thistles & gorse make them hard for deer to eat & unpleasant or impossible for people to walk through.



Gorse



Alien plants are putting wildlife & their habitats at risk...

Introduced to North America without their natural enemies, these plants are displacing native vegetation and having a negative impact on our wildlands.



On windy days, these seeds can travel long distances. Where seeds land, a new weed infestation begins. In the photos below, the purple thistle and yellow tansy blooms show how large a weed infestation can get - many hectares. The weed has crowded out native grasses and forbs. The forage lost affects both wildlife and livestock.

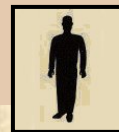
Even when weeds can be eliminated from an area, it takes many years for the native plants to re-establish.



Common Tansy



The forage lost when weeds take over is needed year-round by both ranchers and wildlife.



Canada Thistle



As weeds replace native forage, wildlife become more dependant on browse - the tender, growing tips of shrubs & trees - especially in the winter.



Weeds are spread mainly by people, but also by wind, water, livestock and wildlife. Soil erosion, over-grazing, off-roading and other forms of soil disturbance can further the spread of these alien invaders. We encourage everyone to learn how to identify non-native weeds and to participate in preventing their spread.

For information on identifying weeds, how they spread, and how to prevent weed infestations, please visit our website at <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/biocontrol> or call your local Ministry of Forests office and ask for the pamphlet "Weeds...how they spread and what you can do to stop them."