



Whatcom Weeds

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MEADOW KNAPWEED

Centaurea jacea x nigra

THREAT: Meadow knapweed is a highly competitive plant, displacing native plant communities and reducing forage for wildlife and livestock. The plant exhibits low palatability and competitive superiority and has the ability to inhibit the growth of surrounding vegetation by exuding toxins through its roots and leaves. It can easily invade disturbed lands and deteriorated or overgrazed pastures. Thousands of acres of valuable grasslands and pasture in Eastern Washington and Montana are now lost to knapweeds. The structure of the plant is similar to tumbleweed and increases its ability to spread seeds great distances. Plants and seeds are most often picked up and carried by vehicles. Once thought to be aggressive only east of the Cascades, knapweed has now become a significant problem in most Western Washington counties.



DESCRIPTION: Meadow knapweed is a perennial in the composite (sunflower) plant family. The upright branching stems are up to four feet tall. The solitary flowering heads are surrounded by bracts with a comblike fringe near their tip. Meadow knapweed is usually found growing in the heavier clay soils typical of much of the county. The flowers are pink to purple in color and occasionally white.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Unfortunately, meadow knapweed is sometimes collected and even cultivated for its ornamental beauty, a practice which results in further seed spread. It is important to be able to identify knapweed in the early stages of an infestation to prevent its spread from seedfall. There are cultural, chemical, and biological control methods for knapweeds. Repeated mowing may suppress the plants' ability to produce seed, but in some cases only lower the blooming height. Hand pulling is difficult due to the plants' tough perennial root crown. The plants usually will

not come out easily, making hand digging necessary. Proper pasture management and a combination of methods is necessary to achieve long-term control. Contact the Weed Control Board for site-specific or chemical control recommendations.



Meadow knapweed in spring, before stem elongates for flowering.

