



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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SPOTTED KNAPWEED

Centaurea biebersteinii

THREAT: Spotted knapweed is a highly competitive plant, displacing native plant communities and reducing forage for wildlife and livestock. This plant exhibits low palatability and competitive superiority. Spotted knapweed has the ability to inhibit the growth of surrounding vegetation by exuding toxins through its roots and leaves. It easily invades disturbed lands and deteriorated or overgrazed pastures. Thousands of acres of valuable grasslands and pasture in Eastern Washington and Montana are now lost to this weed. The structure of the plant is similar to a tumbleweed which 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 problem in most Western Washington counties.

DESCRIPTION: Spotted knapweed is a perennial in the composite (sunflower) plant family. A rosette of deeply lobed leaflets is formed in first year. Subsequently, it sends up erect branching stems, up to four feet tall. The plant has a stout taproot. The solitary flowering heads of spotted knapweed are surrounded by bracts with a dark spot on their tip, giving the plant its common name. The flowers are pink to purple in color and sometimes white. Spotted knapweed is related to bachelor button but can be distinguished by differences in the leaf shapes and flowers.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Unfortunately, knapweeds are sometimes collected and even cultivated for their 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; however, proper pasture management and a combination of methods is necessary to achieve long-term control. Small infestations of spotted knapweed can be controlled by hand-pulling or digging. Mowing will neither kill the plant nor eliminate seedfall. However, if the area is mowed as if it were a lawn, the seedfall is minimized and less likely to move to adjacent properties. Contact the Weed Control Board for site-specific chemical control recommendations.

