

Flower: Weevils play dead when shaken

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cupies about 7 million acres of Western Oregon lowlands and a few areas in Eastern Oregon, according to the department.

The Bonneville Power Administration has furnished a helicopter for the weevil-drops.

"There's yellow everywhere," said Eric M. Coombs, an entomologist with the department.

Coombs said the broom has spread steadily since it was imported from Great Britain to California in 1861 for use as an ornamental plant.

Oregon's battle with it didn't begin until the early 1980s.

"Initially, everybody thought it was pretty," Coombs said. But now, with broom growing everywhere, "It outcompetes desirable flora."

Because it came from a different ecosystem, the plant has few natural enemies in Oregon.

The broom-eating weevils orig-

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Eric Coombs
Oregon Department of Agriculture

inally were imported from Europe, too. But at best, they only can slow the broom invasion. Each broom plant produces thousands of seeds.

Coombs said other insects need to be found that will eat other parts of the broom without harming native species and crops.

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said. "We want insects that will eat the leaves. We're looking for insects that will burrow into the roots and eat the plant from the ground up."

Oregon biologists are working with researchers from the Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

When the state needs weevils, workers go to "nursery sites" where the bugs are abundant.

They shake broom plants over insect nets. The weevils, which play dead when confronted, fall into the nets along with assorted other bugs.

Workers then must sort the bugs.

The weevils are put into biodegradable paper cups with plants and toilet paper for climbing and await their big drop.

It could take decades to control the broom if it can be done at all.

"It will continue to get worse," Coombs said.

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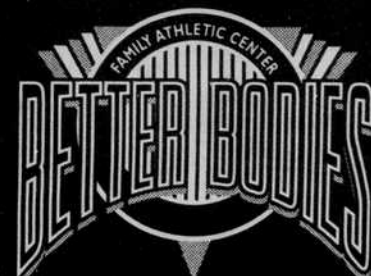


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