

Weed control program targets new threat

Hoary alyssum found in few counties so far

By CLAYTON FRANKE
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Jeffrey Pettingill is fortunate that the rural roads west of Haines don't harbor much traffic. His eyes wander often.

He's searching for signs of an enemy.

An enemy that, when faced in a one-on-one battle with Pettingill's burly 6-foot-2 frame, doesn't stand much of a chance. He can win by simply gripping the base of its green-gray stem, pulling and exposing its annual root, which is only a few inches long.

But Pettingill is outnumbered — this battle will require a more strategic approach.

Chemical warfare, perhaps.

Pettingill, Baker County's weed control supervisor, is facing the county's newest noxious weed, hoary alyssum, which he hopes to control before it poses a greater threat to livestock, crop production and native plants.

The first step for Pettingill is identifying where exactly the hoary alyssum — which travels mostly by hitching rides on equipment and the hooves of livestock — has spread.

That's what he set out to do in late July, when he traveled to a property in the foothills of the Elkhorns to see how much of the plant was there.

When Pettingill first saw the weed in the pastures near North Rock Creek Road west of Haines in the summer of 2020, he wasn't certain he was dealing with hoary alyssum. Its spindly stem and small white flower can be tough to pick out — even with Pettingill's trained gaze — from clusters of yarrow, a native plant with a similar white flower that grows in similar areas to the hoary alyssum, like fields, rangelands and pastures.

Pettingill applied for a state grant through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement



Hoary alyssum is a noxious weed that invades pastures, fields and rangelands.

Clayton Franke/Baker City Herald

'WE'RE DEFINITELY OUTNUMBERED BY WEEDS.'

Jeffrey Pettingill | Baker County's weed control supervisor

Board to help identify where the weed had spread. He was awarded \$9,500 in July 2021, paid for by Oregon lottery dollars, which supported on-foot surveys that confirmed hoary alyssum's spread in Baker County.

He also sent a letter to 82 landowners informing them about the new weed.

Although 2020 was the first sighting, Pettingill said he didn't know when the weed actually arrived in the county and how long it went unnoticed — its modest appearance might have allowed it to spend years growing and spreading under the radar.

According to the state's noxious weed profile, hoary alyssum was already widespread in the Northeastern United States by the 1890s after it was originally transported to North America from Europe as a seed contaminant. It's listed as a noxious weed in several other Western states.

But hoary alyssum isn't widespread in Oregon. Other

than the recent Baker County infestation, two isolated patches of the plant exist: one in Wallowa County near the town of Wallowa and a dense infestation near Sisters in Deschutes County.

Pettingill said he doesn't know exactly how the weed spread into Baker County, and that he initially underestimated its local prevalence.

"We didn't know how vast it was," he said.

Pettingill discovered that the weed wasn't only in pastures near Haines, but also in higher elevations in the foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains. Pettingill said he wasn't aware last summer that the weed had also spread to the pastures near South Rock Creek Road.

He said he believes the weed started in the hills and then moved into the pastures.

Pettingill applied for another state grant of the same amount to continue fighting the weed in 2021 and 2022. Over a third of the grant went to buying herbicides, enough to treat 300

acres of hoary alyssum.

He said he's already sprayed that amount this year.

He said the amount of the grant is "unfortunate, based on how many acres we found. We need to try to write another one this winter to supplement somehow."

Since the state has classified hoary alyssum as noxious, property owners who find it on their land are required to take some kind of action — either themselves or through Pettingill's program — to control it.

Landowners can also participate in a cost share program, separate from the hoary alyssum grants, where the county will reimburse owners for half the cost of herbicide and then train the owners with weed-spraying practice.

Pettingill said he needs as much help as he can get from landowners because he's had trouble hiring a weed control staff to help him with spraying projects. The Baker County Weed Control team is made up of Pettingill and his black Lab, "Jack," who is probably more likely to spread weeds than control them.

"We're definitely outnumbered by weeds," Pettingill said.

Lambert: A PGA junior league also in the works

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"I've been here almost three full months, so I'm feeling a lot more comfortable," Lambert said. "Everybody at the club has been great. All the employees, the members ... they've been very welcoming and amazing at making me feel at home."

Lambert spent just over a year as the club pro at Salishan.

"I got my trial run of coastal weather and had a great time," he said. "When I told people I was going to Astoria, I was asked 'why?' a lot. It wasn't anything wrong with my last job — I enjoyed it a lot — (Astoria) is just a special club and a job that doesn't come up very often, so I jumped at the chance."

To be exact, the Astoria Golf & Country Club has had just eight golf pros since 1936, including Lambert.

"Astoria is a special place," he said. "They take care of their people here. To be frank, not every place is like that. So to land in a spot like this, I feel very, very lucky to be here."

Last week, Lambert was in the midst of his first Oregon Coast Invitational.

"The Coast" began on Aug. 6, 1910, making it the second-oldest tournament in the state behind the Oregon Amateur Championship. The new challenge is a little daunting for Lambert.

"Fortunately, (club employees) Cody Mullins and Brad Young have been through the gauntlet, and they have been very beneficial to have on the team," he said. "Cody's been here 15 years, and is really familiar and knows what to expect. He has helped a ton."

The invitational was canceled in 2020 — the first time since 1945 — before making its return last summer.

"It's been in the works for nine months," he said. "I just arrived in the middle

of it, so I just hope I don't screw anything up. It's not often you get to run an event that has 350 players, but I'm looking forward to the challenge."

In his role as the club professional, Lambert is also looking at continuing the area's already solid youth programs.

"As far as junior programs and player development goes, there's some new stuff we're trying," he said. "We're focusing on group lessons. We have a couple junior clinics going, and I teach a ladies class as well. They are groups of six to eight players. It's \$250 per person, and they get eight weeks of instruction, one-hour lessons, and they get four nine-hole playing lessons with an instructor. The group format makes it fun for everybody."

He adds, "We're also in the works of doing a PGA junior league here, either this fall or next spring. It's great to see the numbers that the high school programs are able to attract."

But, "I'd like to start that process earlier," with golfers 9 to 11 years old. "That's how you build the winning programs. When you have a high school kid who comes in with four or five years experience already, it's helpful."

Born and raised in central Oregon, Lambert was an all-state golfer at Redmond High School, then played four years at Corban University, where he earned all-Cascade Conference honors as a sophomore, junior and senior, graduating in 2015.

He turned professional in 2016 and played in various tournaments for two years before becoming an assistant club professional at Eagle Crest Resort in Redmond.

He spent part of 2018 at Meadow Lakes Golf Course in Prineville, while working seasonally in Palm Desert.

RV park: Sits on land leased from the Port of Ilwaco

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it has not received specifics from the Werners, despite being told this information would be provided.

Police presence

The Werners, through their company Deer Point Meadows Investments LLC, bought the RV park business from Mayor Mike Cassinelli earlier this year for \$1.5 million. The RV park is located on land leased from the Port of Ilwaco and many tenants have lived there for years.

The Werners' actions at the RV park since before they formally took ownership have been a source of community consternation and the Long Beach Police Department has become a semiregular presence at the property.

Just after the sale was finalized, tenants called police when one of the Werners' representatives showed up openly carrying a gun and saying he was there to begin removing trailers. Police Chief Flint Wright told the man he couldn't take away any private property without a court order.

Police officers responded in late July when demolition crews arrived to tear down some of the trailers.

The police department deals in criminal law, but Wright said, "Civil violations can cross over to criminal violations pretty quick if you're not careful. My hope is they'll stay within the guidelines, but I don't know what's going to happen."

With the turmoil at the RV park and the recent orders from the state, the police department finds itself in a strange position.

'OUR CONTENTION IS WE LOOK AT BEACON RV PARK AS NOT A CAMPGROUND. PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LIVING THERE PERMANENTLY FOR A LONG TIME AND THAT'S HOW WE'RE APPROACHING THIS. THE ONLY WAY THAT ANYBODY IS GOING TO BE REMOVED FROM THERE IS WITH A COURT ORDER FROM A JUDGE SAYING, 'YOU SHALL VACATE THE PREMISES.'

Flint Wright | Long Beach police chief

Officers are now documenting everything going on at the RV park and — so long as it doesn't involve an immediate risk or threat to someone — referring any potential violations by the Werners and their representatives and contractors to the attorney general's office.

"This is an area I have never been in, in 30-plus years of being a cop," Wright said.

The Port of Ilwaco and the Werners have asserted that the RV park is essentially a campground meant for temporary stays, without the protections afforded to tenants of long-term facilities. But Wright disagrees.

"Our contention is we look at Beacon RV Park as not a campground," he said. "People have been living there permanently for a long time and that's how we're approaching this. The only way that anybody is going to be removed from there is with a court order from a judge saying, 'You shall vacate the premises.'"

Community backlash

Concern about the fate of the RV park's remaining tenants and questions about the role of local government has sparked stormy back-and-forth debates at port and

City Council meetings.

The RV park has been home to as many as 100 people, according to local estimates. But "due to Beacon RV's unlawful behavior, a majority of tenants were forced to leave the park," the state noted in its order.

With few affordable rental options across Pacific County, steep costs, crowded RV parks elsewhere and little time to prepare for such a big change, many of Beacon's tenants have been unsure about where they will go. Many live on minimal or fixed incomes; among them are people who are elderly, disabled or facing other health issues.

Cassinelli and Butch Smith, the chairman of the port commission, maintain there is little to nothing the city or the port can do to address the situation at the RV park — an answer that has not satisfied tenants or others advocating on their behalf.

At a recent City Council meeting, Cassinelli was forced to recuse himself from future discussions of the RV park after a vote by the majority of the other councilors.

After issuing several vacate notices to tenants earlier this year that were either

rescinded or considered unlawful by the state, the Werners began formal eviction proceedings against 15 remaining tenants through the Pacific County Superior Court in June.

Robina Rayamajhi, an attorney with Thurston County Volunteer Legal Services, represents nine of the tenants, including Gill. She filed a response to the eviction lawsuits in late July and cited a number of factual and legal issues.

She can't say what will happen next as the matter winds its way through court. For now, her goal is to help her clients achieve their individual wishes when it comes to their residency at the RV park.

"I know none of them really want to be there," she said. "It's not a great situation to be living in."

Meanwhile, the Werners have until Aug. 20 to request an administrative hearing regarding the attorney general's cease-and-desist order or the order will become permanent.

KMUN reached out to the Werners for comment, but received no response.

This story is part of a collaboration between The Astorian and Coast Community Radio.

Warrenton: Second time within last several months that city has named a new city manager

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Moberg, along with Marc Howatt, a former public works director in Warrenton, and Donald Kewley, most recently a senior risk manager for a technical consultant, were named as finalists for the position earlier this month.

The city held staff and community receptions with candidates, as well panel interviews by community leaders, public administrators, city department heads and the City Commission over the past week.

"I'm pleased that we have unanimous support to offer Esther Moberg the job," Mayor Henry Balensifer said in a statement. "We look forward to working together to build a better Warrenton."

Moberg is set to replace

Linda Engbretson, who is retiring. Her last day is Friday.

Mathew Workman, the police chief, will act as interim city manager until Moberg is hired.

This is the second time within the last several months that the city has named a new city manager. In April, Ben Burgener, who held the same role in Stanfield, was named city manager, but contract negotiations failed.

The city then tasked Jensen Strategies, the Portland consulting firm hired to find and vet applicants, with conducting another search.

Ashley Driscoll, the city's attorney, and Balensifer will negotiate the contract with Moberg. A timeline for her arrival will be announced at a later date, the city said.

Indicted: '(Law enforcement) did a good job in digging into this'

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The indictment does not specify the total amount of money in question, but the state alleges the loss was more than \$50,000.

Morrow could not immediately be reached for comment.

Morrow has served as the board chairwoman of the Warrenton-Hammond School District and has been involved in several other boards on the North Coast over the years.

"It sounds like (law enforcement) did a good job

in digging into this," Lynn Brigham, the president of the realty association, said. "We support them, and we're going to continue to do what we can to support our members and keep the integrity of the group together."

District Attorney Ron Brown declined to comment.

Doug Bell, a past president of the realty association, is named in the indictment as a victim of identity theft.

Upon hearing the news of the charges, he said, "Oh, good. Good for her."