

# Weed warriors arm for battle

Annual tour offers latest on technology, strategy and rules

By Kathleen Ellyn  
Wallowa County Chieftain

As the vans loaded up with the 2016 weed warriors from Asotin County and Wallowa County on Friday for the annual weed tour, there was an outlier in the bunch.

Usually, the folks who take the weed tour are ranchers and farmers who want to earn their herbicide applicators credits, understand new chemicals and strengthen their weed identification. The vegetation department folks from both counties and Forest Service fellows in charge of managing noxious and invasive species join these folks.

This year, Ingrid Cook of Joseph joined the tour. She is not a rancher or a person who sprays weeds — she's a volunteer at both the Magic Garden and Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site, where she pulls or digs invasive species. She was recently honored with a volunteer award from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

Her two top enemies at Iwetemlaykin are Spotted Knapweed and Hounds Tongue, but she wanted to make herself familiar with more weeds, meet the local weed warriors, possibly drum up some more volunteers for the park and Magic Garden and learn about all the work the weed warriors do.

She was impressive at weed identification. Brian Clapp, Watershed Stewardship Director from Wallowa Resources, put together a great tour with several new features — including his “weed garden” of noxious and invasive species. After a short comparison of Sulfur Cinquefoil and native Cinquefoil, Ingrid was spotted bent over a small plant in the driveway of the College Creek Ranger Station along the Upper Imnaha.

“I think that's Sulfur Cinquefoil,” Cook said.

She peered closer. “No, it's a native,” she decided.

Ingrid's strategy is to only dig the weeds she knows she can get out, and her strategy was confirmed as a good one as weed tour folks learned that some weeds have tap roots that go down 3 feet, or rhizomes with an underground intertwined bulb that extends for 8 feet or more.

Which brings us to the strategy of county weed control and Wallowa Resources projects: knock 'em down with a safe herbicide or combination of herbicides and then introduce biological controls (from bugs to fungus) to keep them down. Some weeds are set upon by as many as five separate biologicals in the effort to eradicate them.

Everyone would love to be able to rely upon the biological controls alone, but that just doesn't work. Especial-



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

Ranchers, farmers and agency representatives stop on the side hill where Brian Clapp (gesturing uphill) and Mark Porter (not present) have tested mixtures of herbicides on plots of Common Bugloss. In the distance you also can see the many mounds of invasive wild rose that dot the hillsides in Imnaha.

ly on water plants along the Grande Ronde, an area where it is very difficult to contain the spread of invasive species. The problem there is not the herbicide, which has been made safe for aquatic life, but the fact that the Grande Ronde floods and abates frequently and when in flood it simply washes the “bugs” downstream. The plants then shake off their new clean leaves and get growing again.

“I've been releasing bio-control since I started on the Grande Ronde,” Clapp said. “But flooding takes them out. Other bugs do well with flooding and they are also being released. We're working on it.”

But what sort of herbicides are safe for that initial knock down? That's why Mark Hansen of CPS was back again this year. His company, which handles the Loveland Products, impressed last year with the safety features that have been added for the protection of the applicator. This year he introduced newer combinations and herbicides that had been tested for the safety of elk, deer, cattle, horses, humans and aquatic life.

Clapp of Wallowa Resources and Mark Porter (weed warrior for the Oregon Department of Agriculture) also put together a test area of Common Bugloss on Forest Service land directly across from the College Creek Ranger Station. On these plots they tested more than a dozen her-

bicides or combinations of herbicide and surfactants to find the most effective mix. Surfactants make the liquids “wetter,” allowing them to get down to the stem of a hairy plant like Common Bugloss rather than bead up on the tips of the hairs. They also make the herbicide less likely to drift and kill plants on the neighboring farm that were not invasive but of the same family.

The weed tour folks walked the steep hill and examined the plots. A few farmers put their heads together and pointed.

An injunction against spraying any new patches of weeds on Forest Service Land has been in effect since 1992-1994. As a result, Common Bugloss and many other plants had a field day — make that a series of field decades. That injunction was lifted in March, but the pretty blue flowers of Common Bugloss now cover acres of Forest Service or BLM land from the road to the rimrock in Imnaha and other areas. The injunction also allowed giant patches of Meadow Hawkweed in Salt Creek and huge balls of invasive rose plants to take over grazing areas on the steep canyon walls of Imnaha.

Farmers and ranchers, however, were not affected by the injunction and many of the ranches adjacent to federal land are relatively clear of weeds and improved by grazing — as some weeds, though

not the best feed, are palatable to cattle when the plant is young and not dangerous for them to eat. Additionally, it seems that some farmers and ranchers may have sneaked across the road and taken out Forest Service noxious weeds to keep them from spreading to private land.

Roads, creeks and paths are vectors — the paths along which weeds spread. It's important for the Oregon Department of Transportation to spray the edges of the roads where passing vehicles have spread invasive species from other counties or other places along the road.

The weed warriors of Asotin and Wallowa County would like ODOT to step up their weed control even more, as ODOT sprays with 12-foot booms but the right of way extends much further in some areas and a noticeable strip of weeds remains to bloom and travel again.

We got these noxious and invasive species in the coun-

ty because we imported them back when we knew no better. An Imnaha apple farmer imported Common Bugloss to keep his bees fed. The pretty plant flowers from six to nine months, keeping bees fed after the apple pollination ends.

Yellow flag Iris, which is now growing along irrigation ditches, is a very pretty ornamental but will displace cat tails and is one of the plants with a giant root system the size of a van.

A fine example of Meadow Hawkweed can be seen growing in the Joseph City planter in front of Mt. Joseph Family Foods. Just up the main street in Joseph, a caustic invasive succulent is growing in several rock gardens.

Bradley Ward, the founder of Empire Unmanned of Hayden, Idaho, gave the whiz-bang portion of the tour. His company flies drones armed with high-quality cameras that help farmers and agencies identify weed areas in their fields. The weeds already have been identified by their color values and will show up brightly on the resultant film. A complicated mathematical algorithm is then applied and the farmer or agency is presented with an identification of the weeds and their locations in addition to identification of weakened plants the farmer or agency might want to preserve.

A rust problem with wheat this year has taken a lot of the helicopters used for weed control away, so helicopter summer spraying may be limited. However, county Vegetation Department Manager Ryan Oberhelman has \$8,000 left in his cost share account that will give up to \$500 to help farmers spray their invasive weeds. He's also got money for the eradication of Meadow Hawkweed, Spotted Knapweed and Common Bugloss with no upper limit on cost share in targeted areas. Call Oberhelman at 541-426-3332, ext. 206.

## Shamrock pack likely killed calf, ODFW says

Depredations total 9 for 2016

By Steve Tool  
Wallowa County Chieftain

An investigative report released by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on May 27 lists a wolf or wolves as the probable cause of death for a 6-week-old-calf found dead on private land in the Mud Creek drainage area in northern Wallowa County.

According to the report, the owner of the calf found its carcass on May 23 and had last seen the calf alive on the evening of May 22. He called ODFW, and wildlife officials arrived the same day to investigate the incident.

While the investigation indicated no specific evidence of wolf depredation, various bones of the mostly consumed animal suggest it was attacked by a predator with large teeth. A large percentage of the calf was consumed in a short time period, also an indication that wolves may have been involved.

The report states that two collared wolves from the Shamrock pack — OR23 and OR21 — were in the vicinity around the time of the calf's death.

Wildlife officials also recently confirmed a separate depredation involving a sheep on private land near the South Fork of the Walla Walla River in Umatilla County. That kill has been attributed to the Walla Walla pack.

ODFW has either confirmed or reported as “probable” nine wolf depredation incidents in 2016. Seven of those nine occurred in Wallowa County.



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