

Invasive weed of the week

By Jeffrey Pettingill

The enemy

Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*).

The strategy

This is a winter annual plant that is extremely invasive to our valuable open range. As mentioned, this invader germinates in the fall (winter annual) when our desirable grasses are dormant, thus getting a head start for nutrients and sunlight in the very early spring. Medusahead generally grows to a height of 10 inches, but can grow to a height of 36 under the right conditions. The seed head contains long spirally awns that grow up to 3 inches long, sometimes being confused with foxtail barley.

The attack

Medusahead is more competitive than Downey brome (*Bromus tectorum*). It creates a worse fire hazard as the plant is heavy in silicone, which does not break down under sunlight. It has shown to be the intermediate invasive plant when it comes to destroying the landscape: First comes cheatgrass, then Medusahead replaces the cheatgrass, then the devil of all plants invades — yellow starthistle. This plant can also cause “chewing disease” in livestock, where the seed head can become implanted between the teeth, fester, and be too painful for the animal to eat.

The defense

As medusahead is a fall annual it can be controlled as the other plants become dormant. Applications in the late fall or very early spring can be made by using products such as Plateau, Open Range G, or in some cases Roundup. There is new product by Bayer called Rejuvra that offers multiple years of control. The plants are controlled and the damage to desirable grasses and forbs is minimal as they are dormant



The spiral awns are a distinctive feature of medusahead.



Medusahead is an aggressive invader of open rangelands.

Series Continues

Jeffrey Pettingill, weed control supervisor for Baker County, will be writing an occasional article about a common noxious weed in the area. Pettingill encourages people to call him if they have weed questions or see a species they're not familiar with. His office number is 541-523-0618 and his cell is 541-519-0204.

COVID-19

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A press release from the county on Saturday announced four new cases, but Staten said one of those cases was reported late Friday, after the press statement had been released.

Staten said that county officials, in investigating each of the positive cases and in interviewing people who might have been in close contact with an infected person, have found a commonality.

Each infected person had been in close contact with another person who previously tested positive, she said.

(Close contact is defined as being closer than 6 feet to another person for at least 15 minutes, Staten said.)

These cases of what's known as “community spread” don't involve one large event, workplace or group housing such as an assisted living facility, Staten said.

Rather, the infections are resulting from smaller “social gatherings.”

The largest number of cases connected to a single group involves five U.S. Forest Service employees, two of whom shared a home and three others who are friends and often visited the house.

Investigators can't always be completely certain about the encounter that resulted in one person infecting another, Staten said.

But they have high confidence in most cases based on interviews with people who are infected.

In some cases, Staten said, the person who tested positive alerted friends or family even before the county's contact tracer had called, so those people were

expecting a phone call.

Staten said people have in almost every case been very cooperative with the county, both those who tested positive and those who were called by a contact tracer.

“I think people want to do the right thing to protect their family and the community,” she said. “I think that's reassuring.”

Staten encourages residents, before agreeing to attend an event that might bring them in close contact with someone — particularly an indoor event, where the risk of transmission is greater — to ask some simple questions.

These include whether the person, or any other people attending the party, might have traveled outside the county or state recently.

And she strongly urges

people not to attend an event

with someone who has had symptoms consistent with COVID-19, such as a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.

Staten said the county's investigations have shown that many people who are the likely source of an infection did have symptoms, so these precautionary questions can give a person good reason to avoid a particular gathering.

She cautions, however, that making a decision solely on whether a person has had symptoms is not foolproof, since some people who are infected never show symptoms.

“There's still a risk, regardless,” of being in close contact with someone, Staten said.

That's why it's important, regardless of the circumstances, to follow other precautions such as wearing a mask and

maintaining a distance, she said.

Staten said that although Baker County has avoided the large outbreaks that have other nearby counties, including Union, Malheur and Umatilla, the local rate of transmission has increased over the past few weeks.

“We're seeing a smaller number of cases than many counties, but we do not want an outbreak,” she said.

Staten noted that if county residents are responsible and adhere to precautions they not only protect themselves and their families, but they also can help local businesses that would suffer if case numbers climb, potentially leading to business restrictions similar to those in place during much of the spring.



The orange-shaded line, on the south side of Broadway Street east of Clark Street, is the area proposed for on-street parking restrictions.

PARKING

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According to a report to councilors from Michelle Owen, the city's public works director, Anderson wants to designate drop-off zones by age group, which isn't possible using only the section of Washington Avenue at the school's front entrance.

The school's goal is to make it possible for students to walk to and from school without having to cross a street.

The Baker School District plans to build a parking lot at Washington and Oak, on the northeast corner of the school, to create more long-term parking, according to the report to councilors from Owen.

Owen recommends councilors approve the resolution. In other business this evening, the Council will:

- Consider approving the second reading of an ordinance allowing candidates to run for a City Council seat by paying a \$25 fee rather than collecting signatures of at least 46 registered voters, which is the current requirement.

Councilors approved the first reading during their July 14 meeting. The ordinance was prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, and in particular the continuing recommendation that people stay at least 6 feet from others. Because social distancing could make it more difficult for prospective candidates to gather signatures, city officials suggested giving them the option of paying a fee instead.

Councilors could approve the third and final reading at a later meeting. The deadline for candidates to apply for the Nov. 3 election is Aug. 25. Six of the seven seats on the City Council will be up for election in November.

- Appoint a three-member committee to oversee the process of recruiting a new city manager. The current manager, Fred Warner Jr., who was hired in June 2016, plans to retire at the end of this year.

- Authorize Warner to sign an agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration accepting about \$99,000 from the federal agency that the city would use to apply a protective sealant to the pavement on the main runway at the Baker City Airport.

- Consider appointing volunteer Judith Stoffer to a 3-year term on the Baker City Public Arts Commission.

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