

Invasive weed of the week

By Jeffrey Pettingill

The enemy

Prairie fleabane or Daisy fleabane (*Erigeron strigosus*)

The strategy

This plant was found in Richland and Halfway area. It was brought to my attention as it was invading large tracts of land under the guise of oxeye daisy. I also thought it was oxeye daisy, but upon close inspection it didn't look right. Fleabane has a much smaller daisy-like flower and the leaf structure is much different. Like oxeye daisy, this plant is a biennial, but unlike oxeye daisy it happens to be a native plant. Fleabane has oval shaped leaves of which are quite hairy. It can produce up to 200 flowers on branching stems. The flowers are generally less than ½ inch wide and it generally grows up to a height of 3 feet.

The attack

This is a perfect example upon how a native can become a “weed.” Although this plant's leaves are edible and can be used medicinally, it is normally avoided by livestock and wildlife. It makes a great ground cover for desirable seeds to get a head start, but it can also get so abundant



Jeffrey Pettingill/Contributed Photo

Prairie fleabane (above) has a different leaf structure than the otherwise similar oxeye daisy (below).



Jeffrey Pettingill/Contributed Photo

that it outcompetes the desirable vegetation for valued water and nutrients. This can cause overgrazing of the desir-

able plants of which perpetuates the growth of the weed due to the animals taking out the competition.

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.

The defense

First of all ensure that you want to remove this native plant. Oxeye daisy should be removed as it is non-native and listed as noxious in many areas. As Prairie fleabane is a biennial, mechanical control is a viable option. Once you realize it is too late for that then treating with 1.0 ounce per acre of Telar XP or Escort XP or Opensight at 3.3 ounces per acre, or Milestone at 7 ounces per acre applied at the pre-bloom stage. Ensure you are using a good surfactant to help the herbicide get through those fine hairs on the leaf.

INCOMING

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But the current councilors invited the five people who were elected Nov. 3 to meet with the three city manager candidates at City Hall the evening of Nov. 12, and to share their thoughts with the Council prior to its meeting tonight.

Four of the councilors-elect — Shane Alderson, Kerry McQuisten, Joanna Dixon and Johnny Waggoner Sr. — said they preferred Jonathan Cannon. He has worked as city manager in Saluda, North Carolina, a town of about 700, since August 2015.

The fifth incoming councilor, Heather Sells, could not be reached for comment in time for this story.

Alderson said Cannon came across well in what amounted to a job interview.

“I think that the area that he's coming from is a very similar size and feel to Baker City and I think that his overall appraisal of the fire department and the city police, what they need in the future, and to come up with a plan for budgeting was spot on,” Alderson said.

He said he was also impressed with the two other finalists, Steve Ashworth of Alpine, Wyoming, and Scott McClure of Monmouth.

Alderson said the City Council did a good job in paring the list of 14 applicants to the finalists.

Alderson said McClure, who has served as city administrator in Canby, south of Portland, and as city manager for Monmouth, seemed like a good candidate, although Alderson said he felt some of McClure's answers were not specific enough when discuss-

ing Historic Baker City and the downtown district.

“We had talked about the historic theatre in Coos Bay but I kind of got the impression that he wasn't as hands on as somebody I would like to see come to our community,” Alderson said.

He said he thought Ashworth was forward-thinking and has a good understanding of what Baker City needs.

McQuisten reiterated a concern she has raised in a previous interview with the Herald — that the current Council, rather than hire the new city manager soon, should leave the choice to the newly elected councilors who will actually be overseeing and working with the manager.

“I know that at least one of the candidates kind of expressed a little bit of concern over that,” McQuisten said. “And it just seems to put them almost at a disadvantage. It's hard enough being a new person in a new position and then to have all the players change out just seems rough.”

Like Alderson, McQuisten said she was most impressed by Cannon, saying she found his interest in moving here sincere.

“When someone's authentic like that, they have more staying power,” McQuisten said. “They'll be willing to stay in the position longer term and I didn't have any concerns at all about his abilities and background either.”

McQuisten said she liked McClure but was concerned about how he left his two previous jobs.

According to a story by the Canby Current, the Canby City Council in February 2020 voted to fire McClure about 4 months after hiring him. The Canby city councilors

didn't give a reason for their decision.

McClure was also fired by the Coos Bay City Council in September 2006 after working as city manager in the coastal city for 23 months.

According to a story in The Register-Guard of Eugene, the Coos Bay City Council had evaluated McClure six times, largely to “try to iron out differences between the manager and the council,” but were unable to come to terms.

McQuisten said McClure's experiences in Canby and Coos Bay “raised a lot of concern for me.”

“He mentioned in the public questioning that he went six months in the last position and had absolutely no idea anything was wrong,” McQuisten said. “And to me that just doesn't happen with an employee unless there's a huge communication issue, which also is not a good thing.”

Waggoner also liked Cannon.

“He's been that working guy. He hasn't always been a city manager,” Waggoner said. “He's worked as a business owner, he's worked as a laborer, and everything. So, that's what I liked about him.”

According to his resumé, before working for the city of Saluda Cannon owned a gutter construction company. He also worked as a project manager for a company in North Carolina for almost 5 years.

Waggoner said he didn't care for Ashworth's comment about Baker City being in a bubble.

“In a lot of ways, I think Baker is not really in a bubble, but I don't think that

is the term we want to use for Baker,” Waggoner said. “We just don't want to lose our identity. So I just didn't like his terminology.”

Waggoner expressed concerns with McClure's termination from his previous city management jobs. Waggoner said McClure seemed like a nice guy but “you just never really know.”

“I just think there's more to him than meets the eye because he said he was fired from Canby but he didn't know why,” Waggoner said. “And I just can't see how you can work for a place for six months and not know that something's wrong. You've got to know something even if it's just a clash of personalities.”

Dixon also liked Cannon, citing his extensive experience dealing with infrastructure issues.

“He seemed to, I felt, to be a better fit for this community than the other two,” Dixon said.

She said McClure interviewed fairly well, but she shared concerns about him being let go from two positions, in particular the Canby administrator job and his statement that he didn't know why he was fired.

Dixon said she wasn't fond of Ashworth, saying “you meet somebody and you just kind of have a feeling.”

“I don't think he had the experience,” Dixon said of Ashworth, who has worked as executive director of Parks and Recreation at Jackson, Wyoming, since 2009.

She said even though he lives in a smaller community — population about 850 — she didn't feel he “really has a feeling for small communities.”

CAUTION

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She said she understands there will continue to be gatherings as the holiday season nears.

But Staten urges residents to follow distancing recommendations and to wear a face mask when they can't maintain at least 6 feet of distance.

“Does that take away all risk? Absolutely not,” Staten said. “But we know these steps lower the risk of transmission.”

Staten said she realizes that nobody intentionally infects a friend or relative.

But the risk is real, she said, particularly because many people who are infected don't have symptoms.

“You're fine ... until you're not,” Staten said. “It is concerning, with the holidays coming up. We want people to be really smart.”

She also noted that the 2-week “freeze” that Gov. Kate Brown announced, which will be in effect from Nov. 18 through Dec. 2 statewide, includes a limit on social gatherings of six people from no more than two households.

Staten said contact tracing by county health officials has not shown any indication that Halloween trunk-or-treat events in the county, including one in Baker City, were sources of COVID-19 infections.

That could be a reflection of the difference between an outdoor event where participants are moving from place to place frequently, and an indoor gathering where people tend to be in relatively close proximity for long periods, Staten said.

Indeed, she said the standard definition of what constitutes a “close contact” — a person who is asked to self-quarantine — is a person who is within 6 feet of someone who tested positive for at least 15 minutes, cumulative, during a 24-hour period.

A child participating in a trunk-or-treat event is less likely to meet those standards because of the nature of the event, Staten said.

She emphasized, though, that it's impossible to make definitive statements about whether a particular activity or event poses no risk.

“It isn't all black and white, but people want black and white answers,” Staten said. “If there's anything unpredictable it's COVID-19.”

Schools

Staten commended Baker County school districts for striving to protect their students as well as prevent schools from being a place where the virus can spread.

“I think our schools are doing a great job,” she said.

So far the Baker School District has reported that five elementary students have tested positive for COVID-19. Two third-graders at Haines Elementary tested positive in late October. A third-grader at Brooklyn Primary in Baker City, and a sixth-grader at South Baker Intermediate, tested positive earlier this month. Two students from the Pine Eagle Charter School in Halfway tested positive in late October. School officials there said the students were at the secondary level, grades 7 to 12.

The most recent case was a first-grader at Brooklyn, whose positive test was reported by the student's family on Sunday, said Mark Witty, Baker School District superintendent.

Staten said county officials are still investigating that case, but in five earlier instances the evidence points to the students being

infected somewhere other than at school.

Staten said she believes the schools' protocols, including screening students when they arrive each day, and quarantining all students who attended the same classroom with an infected classmate, are keeping COVID-19 out of schools.

Witty is also pleased with how the Baker School District has dealt with the positive cases among students.

“We cannot fully mitigate all risks, but at this juncture it does appear that the many protocols we have in place are being effective at preventing the spread in schools,” he said. “But we've got to stay on our game.”

Like Staten, Witty said he is anxious about the potential for the virus to spread during Thanksgiving, with the potential for infected students to return to classrooms.

Witty said students' families have a crucial role in keeping the virus at bay in local schools.

“I'm asking the community to help us out,” he said. “It really matters what our neighbors do in this situation.”

Witty noted that the “Safe Harbors” state guidelines, under which Baker schools can continue to have in-person classes every day for elementary students and one day per week for middle schoolers and high schoolers, are set to end Jan. 4.

If nothing else changes, based on the county's current rate of new cases, the district would have to return to fully online learning after the holidays, Witty said.

“Our students are doing better when they're in school,” he said.

Restaurants

Another issue that has gotten considerable attention since Brown unveiled the 2-week freeze involves restaurants.

During that period, restaurants statewide are limited to offering takeout meals.

Industry groups have criticized the governor's decision, noting that official data show that the virus is not being spread widely in restaurants.

The Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association in a Monday press release cited Oregon Health Authority (OHA) reports showing that of 2,893 COVID-19 cases statewide associated with workplaces, just 22, or less than 1%, were tied to restaurants.

“Our industry, along with the fitness industry, are the official targets of the latest directives from Governor Brown's office,” Jason Brandt, president and CEO of the Association, said in the press release. “We desperately need an explanation, and we are not getting straight answers. If 0.76% of active workplace outbreaks represent a need to shut down an entire industry, we have a real time crisis in how we are making regulatory decisions as a state.”

Staten said she believes local restaurants “for the most part have done a really good job” in complying with mask requirements, sanitizing their businesses and taking other steps to stymie the virus.

Although she said she can't say that no one has been infected while patronizing a restaurant, based on contact tracing, restaurant dining has had a “minimal” role in the county's infection rate.

“I feel for the restaurant owners,” Staten said, referring to their being limited to takeout meals over the next 2 weeks.

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