

Conservationists fight worrisome weed

Tansy ragwort can threaten livestock

By McKinley Smith
EO Media Group

Beneath the sun-yellow blossoms of invasive tansy ragwort plants that coat the field south of Seaside, a revolution is taking place. Millions of native plants are growing within and around the clumps of tansy ragwort. They're small now, but they're getting bigger.

"Underneath this canopy ... is many, many millions of alder," said Melissa Reich, the stewardship director for North Coast Land Conservancy.

Tansy ragwort is an invasive species that produces alkaloids, which can present a danger to livestock if ingested. During the 1960s and '70s, the agriculture industry sustained heavy losses due to livestock deaths and tansy ragwort contamination of hay and pastures, according to an Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon State University Extension Service article.

It's a visible species, and the conservancy wants the public to know that they're not ignoring the weed. They've got a long-term management strategy they hope will overthrow the hold tansy ragwort has on their flood plain by restoring the native habitat.

Disturbed habitats

Tansy ragwort favors disturbed habitats where weaknesses in the native flora community allow it to take hold.

"We're not trying to pretend that tansy's good," Reich said. "It's definitely an invasive plant."

"In the long run, we're going to get rid of tansy by shading it out," she added. "It's not being ignored."

In 2013, the berm between the Necanicum River and the



North Coast Land Conservancy Stewardship Director Melissa Reich stands beside a clump of invasive tansy ragwort on the Circle Creek property in Seaside.



Tansy ragwort is an invasive species that can grow abundantly in disturbed areas.

Circle Creek property south of Seaside came down as part of a multiagency effort to restore a historic 100-acre flood plain and prevent water from flooding U.S. Highway 101.

The North Coast Land Conservancy partnered with Clatsop County and the Oregon Department of Transportation in the project.

Now, what had once been pastureland of non-native grasses is undergoing a transformative process.

The conservancy is working to restore the habitat to a healthy flood plain forest, including Sitka spruce swamp. They've seeded the ground with native grasses and shrubs. The last two winters,



North Coast Land Conservancy Stewardship Director Melissa Reich stands beneath the canopy of a stand of trees the group planted to restore the Circle Creek property in Seaside.

they've planted more than 20,000 trees and shrubs.

Mowing forever

Mowing the pasture would endanger the plants they've worked so hard to cultivate and lock them into a management plan that relies on regular mowing to keep the weeds under control.

"We'd be committing to mowing it forever," Reich said.

Instead, they're following recommendations from the Extension Service, relying on tansy ragwort's insect antagonists: the cinnabar moth, ragwort flea beetle and seed head fly.

These insect biocontrols keep the tansy ragwort in check, but eliminating the tan-

sy knocks out the biocontrol, too, leaving it a step behind the plant the next year.

The landscape is already changing. The conservancy placed leashed pilings across the flood plain to create changes in elevation across the largely flat plain. Sometimes, less than a foot can make a difference between being underwater or above it, Reich said. The plain can be several feet underwater during flooding, and the pilings will change the way the water moves, allowing microhabitats to form.

"This excites me," Reich said, remarking on the height of the alder saplings. "They're going to come in and make good habitat for the other species."

Charter school public hearing will continue Sept. 15

School from Page 1A

But teacher's union representative Meyer said the charter school could get the "cream of the crop" of students, with a prospect of smaller classes and more favorable student-teacher ratio because of its 85-student capacity.

"So the haves get more, and the have-nots walk into my classroom of 32 to 33 kids," he said. "Man, that's not a level playing field."

Meyer said he also wasn't happy about the school district potentially losing four teachers due to a decrease in students so the charter can exist.

The charter's teachers would be under a different contract and accountability system, Meyer said, and not part of a team.

Residents disputed Meyer's charge of elitism.

"We don't want a school there because we think we're better than anyone else," Cannon Beach resident Susan Neuwirth said. "We want a school because we live there." Kevin Widener of Seaside said the discussion should be about "what is best for the kids."

The challenges

The obstacles for most charter schools in Oregon are finances and safety, said Jim Green, an attorney for the Seaside School District from the Oregon School Board Association.

Cannon Beach Academy is asking the district to trust it with kids and taxpayer money, Green added. "Your real interest in this is to ensure they are going to do good things for boys and girls in your community," he said.

Cannon Beach resident Mary Peterson expressed

concern for children's safety with area traffic in the proposed location. The charter's temporary location sits near a Highway 101 exit. She said she grew up in a rural school and was happy to move to a larger one in high school where there were more opportunities.

Getting its schools out of the tsunami inundation zone has been a focus of the Seaside School District.

Hull noted the charter school's short-term facility is out of that zone, less than 200 yards away from an assembly area.

Hull, who helped open three charter schools in the state, addressed another "hot button topic" by stating the district could receive a net gain of about \$362,000 if it approves the academy. It would do so through methods including the collection of 20 percent of the charter's state ADM money and reducing its staff.

And Green said he would go over the budget with the academy's board before Seaside's next meeting.

If the school district says no for a third time, Cannon Beach Academy could again appeal to the State Board of Education.

The charter school aims to open in the fall 2016 and be in its temporary location for about three years before settling into a permanent building on the South Wind site, south of town and east of Highway 101.

Hull said they'd like to start hiring early next year if the district accepts the academy's proposal. It's already received inquiries from potential teachers.

The public hearing will continue Sept. 15. The school board will then have 30 days to issue a decision.

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