

Rush Skeletonweed

Chondrilla juncea

Rush skeleton is a relatively new invader to Asotin County. It's easy to spot at this time of year since its skeleton-like green stems poke above the surrounding grasses.

Rush skeleton is a perennial plant with a taproot often reaching eight feet. The plant over-winters as a basal rosette that closely resembles dandelion leaves. The mature plant consists of spindly, branched stems with very few, very small leaves. It can reach 1 - 4 feet in height. Distinctive, downward pointing, coarse reddish hairs are found near the stem base. The rest of the stem is fairly smooth. All plant parts have a milky sap when cut or broken. Bright yellow flower heads have 7 to 15 star shaped petals with distinct teeth at the ends. Flower heads are less than 1 inch in diameter and are scattered on the branches singly or in small clusters. Wind, water, and vehicles are the main dispersers of the seeds.

Once established, rush skeleton is very difficult to control. Taproot cuttings as small as ½ inch can produce new plants. An individual plant can produce up to 20,000 seeds that can germinate within 24 hours under optimal conditions. The seeds are dispersed on a parachute like pappus that make new infestations difficult to predict.

Rush skeleton has the ability to invade both crops and rangelands. It is estimated that it currently infests more than 6.2 million acres of rangeland in the Pacific Northwest. On rangelands it can form dense monocultures thus displacing indigenous plants and reducing forage production. Additionally, it has been responsible for reducing wheat yields up to 80%.

No single treatment provides long-term control of this plant. Our first line of defense is to prevent new introductions. Systematic surveys and early detection can help Asotin County control this invasive weed.

If you see it, please report it to the Asotin County Weed Office at 243-2098.

