Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Board
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(509) 243-2098

Saltcedar

Tamarix ramosissima

Description: These shrubby trees, growing up to 30 ‘ in height, were originally introduced in the late 1800’s to be used as windbreaks, erosion control, and garden ornamentals. Their small cedar-like leaves are gray-green in color, but turn yellow and drop in the winter. The saltcedar trees produce a dramatic pink bloom in April and May. Thousands of flowers cover the trees and can produce over half million seeds. These small seeds have a tuft of hair on one end that enables them to float on water or float long distances by wind. The short-lived seeds must germinate within months after dispersal or they will die. The deep taproot and extensive horizontal root system, makes this tree difficult to kill. They may grow as much as a foot a month.

Habitat: Having escaped from cultivation the saltcedars have become aggressive invaders along streams and other riparian areas. The trees bring up salts through the roots and exude these salts through the leaves. The salts kill native vegetation. Even after the trees are killed, it may take years before other vegetation moves into this sterile area. Saltcedars increase fire frequency, dry up springs, and reduce wildlife habitat by eliminating the food source and cover from native species. The saltcedar tolerates drought, heat, cold, salinity, fire and flooding. Because of saltcedar’s ability to alter stream morphology and endanger water sources it has received significant attention from government agencies and environmental organizations.

Mechanical: Mature saltcedars have been pulled up by their roots with heavy equipment. Young plants can be hand pulled. Regrowth and seedlings then need to be sprayed with a systemic herbicide.

Biological: Diorhabda elongate (Saltcedar leaf beatle) beetles were originally released in 1999. They can produce up to two generations per year. A combination of larvae and adult feeding, defoliates the saltcedars. Research facilities expect to be able to distribute these beetles by 2005.

Fire: The BLM has successfully burned infestations of saltcedar, then followed up regrowth with systemic herbicides.

Cultural control: Damage to riparian areas has increased the invasion of saltcedar. When native vegetation is stressed by drought, saltcedars may also become established.

Fertilizer: Unknown

Chemical: Since these weeds grow close to water sources, the applicator must follow label directions carefully. Systemic herbicides have been shown to kill saltcedars. Yearly inspections are needed to insure total eradication.

Distribution: This invasive tree has not been found in Asotin County. However, a noninvasive genotype (that looks identical to the invasive genotype) is present in Asotin County. This noninvasive genotype was commonly planted as an ornamental 30 to 50 years ago. Other than the fact that this tree is obviously noninvasive, its other characteristic that distinguishes it from the invasive genotype is its shorter bloom time. These noninvasive trees can be seen in Clarkston gardens and less commonly in Asotin gardens. There is one tree approximately 4 miles south of Asotin on the Snake River, one tree approximately 8 miles west of Asotin on Asotin Creek, and one tree along Hwy 12 on Army Corp land. All known trees have been mapped (thanks to Jerry Lindstrom's 4-H group).

ACNWCB Policy: Any new trees are mandated for eradication throughout Asotin County.

4/19/05