



Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Board

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Leafy Spurge *Euphorbia escula L.*

Description: Leafy Spurge is an aggressive perennial weed that grows up to 3 feet in height. The alternate leaves are yellowish-green until they turn yellow or red with the first frost. The inconspicuous flowers are subtended by showy yellowish-green bracts in the early spring. Seeds can be shot 20 feet or more when the ripened capsules explode. Seed maturation often coincides with hay harvest, thus aiding in its spread. Seeds can remain viable up to 8 years and emerge from a buried depth of 6 inches. In addition to a massive network of small lateral roots, the taproot may reach 21 feet in depth. The leaves, stems, and roots all exude a white latex sap that can cause severe dermatitis in some individuals.

Habitat: Leafy spurge can reduce the carrying capacity of pasture and rangeland by 75% or more. It is responsible for lost wildlife habitat and associated recreational activities. It survives under a wide variety of conditions. Because it begins growth in early spring it out competes native vegetation.

Mechanical: The plant has numerous stem buds that cover the thick roots. Mechanical injury stimulates growth of these buds. Additionally, small root fragments can themselves produce new plants. The high food reserves stored in the roots, enables the plant to recover quickly from mechanical and chemical injury. Roots systems can regenerate even if removed to a depth of 3 feet. However, intensive cultivation for many years has successfully reduced populations in some areas.

Biological: There are numerous species of flea beetles that have been released for the control of leafy spurge. Some states have had excellent results. Wallowa Resources and APHIS (Spokane) reports that although flea beetles are numerous on their spurge, no reduction in weed population has been noticed.

Fire: Not effective because of the deep root system.

Cultural Control: Planting competitive vegetation in addition to herbicide treatments has been successful in some situations. It is unpalatable and toxic to cattle and horses. Sheep and goats are not affected by the toxins and are being used to reduce leafy spurge's populations especially in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. Before using sheep and goats in any weed reduction program, it is recommended that the land

owner/manager contact WDF&W for updated safeguards regarding the potential for passing along pasturella bacteria to bighorn sheep.

Fertilizer: Herbicide application followed by fertilizers to encourage the growth of forage grasses has been successful in some areas.

Chemical: These chemical recommendations are for noncropland areas and are summarized from the “Pacific Northwest Weed Management Handbook - 2003”. These recommendations are not intended to be a complete resource guide. Label requirements need to be followed for restrictions, concentrations, timing, and nontarget interactions. Chemical control can be effective, but must be maintained for several years to exhaust the seed bank.

Analysis of leafy spurge plants has shown that it is not a single species, but a collection of closely related variants. This variability affects response to herbicides and biocontrols. Herbicide programs must be continued for years to eliminate this weed.

Distribution: There are numerous patches along the Grande Ronde River. There are four patches along the Snake River.

ACNWCB Policy: This weed is mandated for eradication throughout Asotin County.

12/30/03

