



U N C O M P A H G R E P L A T E A U P R O J E C T

Early Detection Species for the Horsefly WMA

Yellow starthistle

Yellow starthistle is a winter annual. Flower heads are yellow, located singly at the ends of branches and are distinguished by sharp, straw-colored thorns, which are up to 0.75 inches long. Basal leaves are deeply lobed while the upper leaves are entire and sharply pointed. Mature plants are 2-3 feet tall and have rigid, branching, winged stems that are covered with cottony hairs.



Yellow starthistle invades rangelands, pastures, roadsides, cropland and wastelands. It is a pioneering plant that becomes established on disturbed land. It forms dense infestations, reducing the available edible forage. It causes a neurological disorder called chewing disease in horses that eat it.

Purple loosestrife

Purple loosestrife is a perennial introduced from Europe. The erect, square stem is multi-branched and 1-1/2 to 8 feet tall. The leaves are lance shaped, entire, and are whorled. The magenta-colored flowers, which have five to seven petals, are arranged in long racemes.



Purple loosestrife can be found in moist wetland sites through-out the state. It is an ornamental species that often escapes. It is a highly aggressive invader species. If left unchecked, a wetland will eventually become a monoculture of loosestrife. This plant poses a severe threat to waterfowl habitat and can impede water flow in irrigation ditches.

Leafy spurge

Leafy spurge is an aggressive, long-lived, perennial weed. Flowers are yellowish-green, small, and arranged in numerous small clusters. Leaves are alternate, narrow, and 1-4 inches long. Mature plants are up to 3 feet tall.



Leafy spurge can invade rangeland that is in excellent condition, making it worthless for cattle and horse grazing and reducing land values. It rapidly displaces native species, forming a monoculture. Leafy spurge produces a compound that inhibits the growth of other plants. The milky latex associated with leafy spurge can cause irritation, blotching, blisters, and swelling in sensitive individuals.

Yellow toadflax

Yellow toadflax was introduced from Europe as an ornamental. It is a perennial reproducing from seed, as well as from underground root stalk. The stems are from 8 inches to 2 feet tall and leafy. The flowers are bright yellow with deep orange centers.



Yellow toadflax has become a serious problem to rangeland and mountain meadows. Its displacement of desirable grasses not only reduces ecological diversity, it also reduces rangeland value and can lead to erosion problems. Because of its early vigorous growth, extensive underground root system, and effective seed dispersal methods, yellow toadflax is difficult to control.

Information and photos courtesy of the Colorado Weed Management Assoc.