

Noxious Weed Control

Frequently Asked Questions?

What are noxious weeds?

Noxious weeds are non-native plants that have been introduced accidentally or as ornamentals in peoples' gardens. Some are poisonous to humans and livestock and most grow rapidly and are extremely difficult to control. They can reduce crop yields, displace desirable plant species, destroy beneficial native habitat, damage recreational opportunities, clog waterways, and diminish land values.

Why does Kitsap County need a noxious weed control program?

A state law passed in 1969 mandates all counties to have a program to combat noxious weeds. Kitsap County wants to avoid a lawsuit from neighboring counties such as happened in King County in 1995. King County's suit was prompted by complaints from neighboring counties that King County was not controlling noxious weeds as required by state law.

What is the Noxious Weed Control Board and what does it do?

The Kitsap County Noxious Weed Control Board was established to direct the state mandated program as required by state law. The board consists of five unpaid citizen volunteers who represent five districts that cover the entire county. The board meets quarterly and provides vision and direction to the weed control program.

What is the Noxious Weed Control Program?

The Kitsap County Noxious Weed Control Program, when funded, will focus on education, prevention, technical assistance and control of noxious weeds through voluntary compliance. Preventing the spread of weeds is more effective and less costly than eradication.

During the months of April through September, when weeds are growing the most rapidly, the program needs to employ field staff with scientific backgrounds to survey public and privately owned lands in the County for noxious weeds and to work with landowners to achieve weed control. The survey staff would rarely enter private property without the owner's express permission. It is expected that about half of our work will come from citizens reporting infestations and asking for information and assistance in getting rid of noxious weeds on their own property.

How is weed control enforced?

Once an infestation is identified, the landowner is given a variety of options, including hand pulling, mowing or cutting; advice on better pasture management; and using the most effective and least harmful methods of applying herbicides. The Kitsap County Noxious Weed Control Board does not require people to use herbicides to control weeds.

The majority of weed infestations are controlled voluntarily by landowners. Less than 1 percent of the known weed infestations will need to be controlled by the weed program and, as authorized by state law, the landowners are billed.

Why should people who don't have noxious weeds have to pay the proposed \$1.00 per year noxious weed assessment?

Weeds are everyone's problem. Even landowners who don't currently have weeds can be harmed by weeds that spread from adjacent lands. Seeds are carried by wind and cars and the invasive nature of these plants means that no land is immune to their spread. Prevention of new infestations and introductions is a top priority of the weed board.

Why don't you just fine the people with weeds and use the money to pay for the program?

When the state passed the law mandating that counties control noxious weeds, it gave counties only two ways to fund the work. They can either use general fund money, for which there is a lot of competition, or they can assess a special dedicated fee on property. It is not a tax, it is a regulatory fee for a service that is available to all landowners and it cannot be imposed selectively. The county has limited authority to fine people who have weeds. Everyone benefits when we control and prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

How is a plant designated as a noxious weed?

The State Noxious Weed Board, a group of citizen volunteers representing all parts of the state, annually adopts and publishes a list of weeds to be controlled or eradicated based on public comment and input from county weed boards. The Kitsap County Weed Board customizes the state list and puts out a list of Kitsap County's priority weeds that are required by law to be controlled by the property owner.

Why would Kitsap County fine landowners for not controlling noxious weeds yet not maintain noxious weeds on Kitsap County property?

Kitsap County agencies/departments (such as Parks & Recreation, and Public Works, etc) will be notified of and are required to control noxious weed infestations, much the same way private landowners are notified. The perception that Kitsap County is not controlling weeds on County property is a frequently heard and inaccurate one. The public is much more likely to see weeds on public lands, and it is easier to notice where the weeds are, rather than where they are not or where they have been controlled.. Public Works has been very responsive and has controlled a significant number of weed infestations throughout the County.

Where are noxious weeds found in Kitsap County?

Noxious weeds are found everywhere in Kitsap County - in urban, suburban and rural areas; on developed and undeveloped land, farmland, forests and other natural open spaces as well as in lakes, rivers, streams, shorelines and in Puget Sound.

What are some noxious weeds and what harm do they cause?

- Giant hogweed - predominantly an urban weed and an escaped garden ornamental, its sap can cause skin blistering and scarring.
- Tansy ragwort - likely to infest pastures and roadsides, it has toxins that can be fatal to cows and horses and can be found in milk and honey.
- Spotted and diffuse knapweeds - threaten wildlife habitat, pastures, and grasslands by displacing beneficial species.
- Purple loosestrife - grows in wetlands and along lakes, rivers and streams; it chokes out wildlife habitat and clogs drainage ditches and irrigation canals. Loosestrife now invades wetlands in 48 states at an estimated cost of \$45 million a year for control and loss of forage crops, crowding out 44 native plants and endangering the wildlife that depend on the native plants.
- Hydrilla - the most problematic aquatic plant in the U.S., it forms extensive surface mats that destroy freshwater fish habitat and recreation areas.
- Parrotfeather - chokes out prime salmon habitat and reduces availability of refuge, exposing salmon to predators.