

YUKON INVADERS



Help Reduce the Spread of
Invasive Plants in Yukon



Invasive Plants

Invasive plants and animals are the second greatest threat to biodiversity after habitat loss. The economics of controlling invasive species damage can be considerable. In 2004-05, the British Columbia government spent \$8 million to protect valuable forest and range land from the effects of non-native plants and weeds.

There are 140 introduced plant species in Yukon. Forty-four are persistent and widespread; 59 are persistent but not widespread; and most of the remaining 37 are casual introductions that may not persist.

Many of these plants are responsible for habitat damage, loss of subsistence resources, and economic loss in other North American jurisdictions. Yukoners are in the enviable position of preventing plant infestations before they become so widespread that control is costly and eradication impossible.

Everyone can help reduce the spread of those already established. Keeping invasive species from becoming established in the territory should be everyone's responsibility.

This booklet highlights eight of the worst invaders.

White Sweetclover (*Melilotus alba*)

Sweetclover is a biennial, occasionally annual plant in the pea family that can attain a height of 2 m but is usually less than 1 m. It rapidly colonizes gravelly well-drained soils such as roadsides, waste areas and river banks and bars. A single plant can produce 300,000 seeds and the seeds remain viable in the soil for many years (80% survival after 30 years). This is likely Yukon's most invasive and problematic species.

Range in Yukon:

Widespread throughout the southern Yukon. It is known along much of the Alaska, Robert Campbell, Top-of-the-World highways and 20 km up the Dempster Highway. It has proved to be highly invasive along the LaBiche River. The only site so far reported on the Yukon River in Yukon is in Whitehorse; although it is a serious problem on Alaskan waterways including tributaries of the Yukon River.



Perennial Sow-thistle

(*Sonchus arvensis*)

Despite the name, sow-thistles more closely resemble giant dandelions than true thistles. Sow thistle is considered a noxious weed throughout most of its range. This is a highly invasive species able to spread long distances by wind-blown seed. It is perennial with

rhizomes that grow up to 3 m deep are very difficult to remove by hand. It is particularly a problem for agricultural producers.

Range in Yukon:

primarily in the Whitehorse area as far north as Carmacks but has been reported from Destruction Bay, Johnson's Crossing and the Kotanelee gas plant; found commonly along highway corridors.



Irina Lapina

Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)

Though named Canada thistle, this species is native to Europe, Asia and Africa where it is called Creeping Thistle. It is one of the most invasive species in North America and is a noxious weed in most jurisdictions throughout Canada and the USA including Alaska.

The seeds of thistle and knapweed continue to mature after pulling. You may put plants into black garbage bags and then leave them in the sun to kill off the plants and roast the seeds. Herbicide control may be required.

Range in Yukon: known from just south of Haines Junction and observed in the LaBiche River Valley.



Irina Lapina

Spotted Knapweed

(*Centaurea biebersteinii*)

Knapweeds resemble thistles but differ in their lack of spiny leaves. They are biennial or short-lived perennials. This species reproduces entirely by seed. Large plants can produce over 20,000 seeds. It has not been known to be a problem in the north, but to date it has not had a chance to get established. Alaska has an active program of eradication.

Range in Yukon: It is presently not known in the Yukon but was removed from Haines Junction after several years of effort. It can be found in Atlin, BC.

Michael Rasy



Greater Butter-and-eggs

(*Linaria vulgaris*)

This very attractive plant resembles a yellow perennial snap-dragon. It is widely found in gardens and invading roadsides in Whitehorse. It is usually less than 50 cm tall. The plant is mildly toxic, persistent, and is known to alter local pollination ecology. It is a restricted noxious weed in Alaska.

Range in

Yukon: Greater butter-and-eggs has been found throughout the Whitehorse area, South Canol Road in the Quiet Lake area, Watson Lake and Haines Junction. It is mainly spread through yard waste.



Irina Lapina

Foxtail Barley (*Hordeum jubatum*)

Foxtail barley is a perennial tufted plant that is native to North America including Yukon. It has feathery looking awns that many find attractive but are barbed and can work their way into the eyes, nose, gums and throats of animals, both domestic and wild. It is potentially invasive especially in the dry alkaline soil of the southern Yukon where it is problematic to agricultural producers.

Range in Yukon: known throughout the territory south of and including the Porcupine and Peel river drainages.

Brian Bell



Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

Common Tansy is a robust perennial plant that grows in clusters and forms flat-topped heads of bright yellow, button-like flowers. The plant emits a strong pungent smell when crushed. It is mildly toxic. It likes growing in full sun usually in disturbed sites such as roadsides, riverbanks and beaches. It is considered as a noxious weed in some areas of BC and Washington.

Range in Yukon: presently known from Whitehorse, Marsh Lake, Kathleen Lake and the Alaska and Robert Campbell highways. It is beginning to be used as a hardy garden plant.

Lloyd Freese



Altai Wild Rye

Leymus angustus

Altai wild rye is an Asian dune grass found throughout Mongolia, Siberia and China. In Canada it was previously only known to occur out of cultivation in Saskatchewan. This is a tall (1 m) coarse grass that reproduces mainly by seed and forms dense tussocks from short rhizomes. This is a dune stabilizing grass that could be a threat to the Carcross Dunes and



the animals and plants that depend on the ecosystem. It may have already entered the Yukon River system.

Range in Yukon: known only from Carcross where it was first reported in 1998.

Definitions

annual: completing its life history in one year

biennial: requiring two years to complete its life history

perennial: lasting many years (example: roses)

native: originating, growing, or produced in a certain place or region; indigenous

noxious: plant species that have been designated "noxious" by law. Harmful to living things; injurious to health

persistent: existing or remaining in the same state for an indefinitely long time; enduring

rhizome: a horizontal, usually underground stem that often sends out roots and shoots from its nodes. Also called rootstalk

taproot: the main, descending root of a plant that has a single, dominant main stem.

tussock: a clump or tuft, as of growing grass

weed: considered undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome, especially one growing where it is not wanted, as in a garden.

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<http://www.rbg.ca/cbcn/en/projects/invasives/invade1.html>

You can help by:

Careful gardening – many of the plants are attractive and are used to beautify homes and offices. Care must be taken when selecting which plants to grow and how to handle yard waste.

Keeping it clean – invasive species can be transported on vehicles, heavy equipment, footwear and clothing. All of these should be inspected and/or cleaned before entering or being used in the territory. Vehicle wheel-wells and CAT tracks are especially likely to hide invasive species and should be cleaned thoroughly.

Requesting and using only weed-free soil, hay, straw, mulch and certified seed.

Becoming aware – learn about invasive species that may be found in your area and report new findings. Learn about new ways to reclaim disturbed land. Seeding may not always be necessary.

Picking and carefully disposing of small infestations encountered, and reporting larger ones.

Spreading the word – Yukon is in a unique position to remain pristine, but the spread of invasive species and the costs and damages associated can only be prevented through vigilance and cooperation.