



Thurston County Noxious Weed Control Board

2014-2019 Strategic Plan



Board Members

Gene Little, Chair, District 3
Martin Casey, Vice Chair, District 1
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Plan approved by the Thurston County Board of Commissioners, June 4, 2013

Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

MISSION

Protect the citizens, the natural resources, and the agricultural resources of Thurston County from the degrading impacts of invasive noxious weeds.

VISION

The Thurston County Noxious Weed Control Board (Weed Board) and Agency Unit (Weed Coordinator and staff) are innovative and responsible leaders in noxious weed control. We deliver highly effective and efficient weed control programs to Thurston County residents, inspiring and enabling them to reduce and prevent the adverse economic and health effects of noxious weeds to agriculture, recreation, animals, and people in the county

VALUES

Stewardship: We are responsible stewards of our county's natural and financial resources.

Leadership: We seek out leadership opportunities in noxious weed control policy and methods.

Partnership: We collaborate with each other, governmental entities, educational institutions, and community stakeholders to produce solutions.

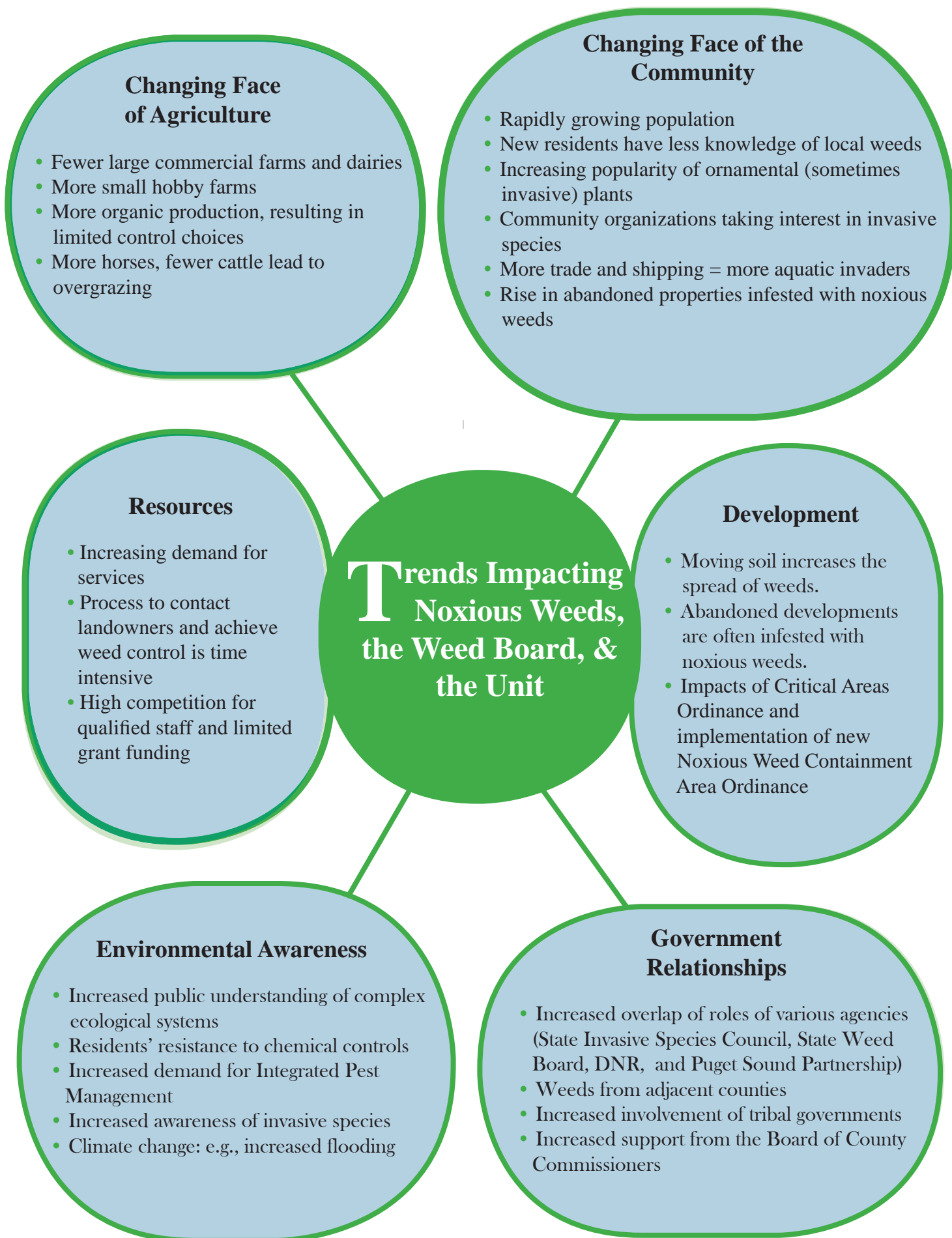
Accountability: We honor our commitments and are accountable to the people of Thurston County.

Diversity: We respect and value our rich diversity and recognize the common strength derived from a culture of equal access and opportunity.

Integrity: We demonstrate and promote respect, honesty, professionalism and ethical conduct.

2014-2019 GOALS

- 1 Sustain core functions and sufficient funding to deliver essential weed control services to Thurston County residents and landowners.
- 2 Protect the health of humans and animals.
- 3 Reduce the presence and prevent the unchecked spread of aquatic weeds in Thurston County.
- 4 Increase public awareness and effectiveness in controlling noxious weeds by strengthening community education.
- 5 Sustain collaborative relationships with governmental and community organizations and educational institutions.



Overview

Noxious weeds threaten our communities and resources. These invasive species threaten our crops, pets, livestock, waterways, tidelands, parks, wildlife, property values, public health and safety, and the ecological health and diversity of our prized native ecosystems. Once destroyed, these resources are irreplaceable. The Weed Board and staff have stepped up to these challenges by conducting a highly respected and successful weed control program. This Strategic Plan is intended to guide future progress. The Weed Board and Unit have built a strong foundation to move forward. Accomplishments in the past five years include:

- ✓ Producing a comprehensive annual Work Plan to guide daily operations, featuring an innovative Risk Assessment Criteria matrix for determining weed control priorities that now serves as a “best practice” model for other county weed boards and the State Weed Board.
- ✓ Delivering effective services to Thurston County residents, including:
 1. Extensive inventory of existing noxious weed sites (5000+)
 2. Surveillance systems to detect new sites and new species
 3. A strong program of landowner education
 4. Paying for disposal of weeds from private property
- ✓ Leading a successful intergovernmental partnership to eradicate Brazilian elodea on the Chehalis River. The infestation has been reduced from a high of 35 acres in 2005 to about an acre in 2013. To date, 316,866 pounds of Brazilian elodea have been removed from the Chehalis River. Grant collaborators include: The Washington state departments of Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources, and Ecology; the Chehalis Tribe; U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and Portland State University. Between 2008 and 2012, the Unit has been successful in eradicating or significantly reducing species listed on the next page.



Spotted knapweed near the State Capitol



Scotch Thistle



Leafy Spurge



Giant Hogweed

Invasive Species	Historic High	Number of Sites, 2012
Leafy Spurge	3	0
Spanish Broom	3	0
Scotch Thistle	13	3
Dalmatian Toadflax	67	3
Giant Hogweed	138	8
Gorse	151	22
Poison Hemlock	706	428
Spotted Knapweed	794	121



Toadflax



Poison Hemlock



Gorse

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Sustain core functions and sufficient funding to deliver essential weed control services to Thurston County landowners and residents.

Background

The Weed Board and Unit must continue to develop and implement innovative strategies to sustain essential services and sufficient funding.

Strategy 1.1

Weed Board Members and the Weed Coordinator shall annually evaluate and update the Weed Program's Rules, Regulations, and Work Plan.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: Annually, with Weed Board adoption by March

Strategy 1.2

Strengthen the Unit's operational efficiency and customer service effectiveness by establishing a permanent physical location.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014

Strategy 1.3

Weed Board members and the Weed Coordinator shall leverage grant funds and interlocal agreements for special projects, using these funds to maintain the ongoing core program.

- Lead: Weed Board and Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 1.4

The Unit's tasks are performed by part-time, non-regular positions. Providing benefits to those positions as mandated by the National Health Care reform legislation will be a challenge that must be balanced with the essential services the Unit provides.

- Lead: Resource Stewardship Director, Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014

Strategy 1.5

The current noxious weed assessment rate will be capped in 2015. The Weed Board and staff will evaluate future viability of the rate at that time.

- Lead: Weed Board and Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2015

Strategy 1.6

The Weed Board Chair and Weed Coordinator shall review the Strategic Plan annually with the Board of County Commissioners and the Director of Resource Stewardship.

- Lead: Board Chair
- Timeframe: Annually

Goal 1, continued

Key Performance Measures

- Weed Program is sustainable through 2019.
- Rental and transportation costs are stabilized.
- 20% of funding is derived from grants and interlocal agreements.

Partners

Board of County Commissioners, Thurston County Resource Stewardship, State Noxious Weed Board, and Grant Resources

Stakeholders

Landowners, agricultural producers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and general public

Goal 2: Protect the health of humans and animals.

Background

Noxious weeds are terribly persistent. For more than 30 years, the Weed Board and staff have been dedicated to the reduction of tansy ragwort. In the 1960s and '70s, up to 150 farm animals died each year in Thurston County from ingesting the plant. Although tansy has not been eradicated, its once dominant presence in the county has been severely reduced. While tansy ragwort has been checked, other toxic weeds such as poison hemlock (responsible for a human death in Pierce County in 2010), giant hogweed and spurge laurel have emerged in Thurston County. The best defense against these and other toxic plants is public awareness and education.

Strategy 2.1

The Weed Unit will continue to place a high priority on the detection of toxic noxious weeds. Staff will work closely with landowners to eradicate these weeds on their property, while safeguarding human health as well as the health of pets and livestock.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 2.2

The Weed Unit staff will educate landowners and the general public about tansy ragwort, poison hemlock, giant hogweed, spurge laurel and other toxic noxious weeds that threaten the health of humans and animals.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Key Performance Measures

- Number of identified toxic noxious weed sites
- Public requests for technical assistance
- Continued reduction of tansy ragwort, poison hemlock and other toxic noxious weeds

Goal 2, continued

Partners

Federal, tribal, state and local governments and landowners

Stakeholders

Landowners, agricultural producers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and general public

Goal 3: Reduce the presence and prevent the unchecked spread of aquatic weeds.

Background

Today, our state is experiencing the emergence of invasive, aquatic species that could become just as devastating as the decades-old spread of Scotch broom and tansy, which became so entrenched that eradication is now nearly impossible. Unlike determining responsibility for terrestrial weeds, aquatic ownership and jurisdiction is difficult to determine, requiring extensive collaboration and highly sensitive and technical processes. Much progress, however, has been achieved in the past five years on these aquatic species: Brazilian elodea, parrotfeather milfoil, Eurasian watermilfoil, and variable leaf milfoil. As new invasive species move into the waters of Thurston County, staff will be trained in identification of these species to detect them before they become widespread.

Strategy 3.1

Partner with federal, state, tribal, and local governments to pursue grant funding to eradicate Brazilian elodea from the Chehalis River.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 3.2

When feasible, the Unit will provide educational resources and limited consultation to landowners and governmental organizations to encourage the eradication of new and existing infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 3.3

Ensure that the unit has the capacity to meet the current requirements of the *Underwater Diving Safe Practices Manual and Health and Safety Plan* as accepted by the state Department of Labor and Industries.

- Lead: Resource Stewardship Director and Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: Immediately

Goal 3, continued

Strategy 3.4

Maintain continuous surveillance to detect the presence of new invasive aquatic species.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Key Performance Measures

- Number of identified aquatic weed sites
- Amount of Brazilian elodea removed from the Chehalis River
- Classification specifications match work requirement for positions performing aquatic tasks

Partners

Federal, tribal, state and local governments

Stakeholders

Landowners, water recreation enthusiasts, fishers, Chehalis Tribe, state departments of Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife, Enterprise Services and general public

Goal 4: Increase public awareness and effectiveness in controlling noxious weeds by strengthening community education.

Background

The best method for reducing the harmful effects and preventing the spread of noxious weeds is a well-informed and engaged public. The changing face of the community and of agriculture requires continual adjustment of outreach methods. While we have increased education in the past five years, much more is needed, which requires additional staff.

Strategy 4.1

Strengthen the Weed Unit's current educational outreach:

1. Inform public about Weed Unit services through social media outlets,
2. Develop fact sheets and prescriptions for emergent noxious weeds.

- Lead: Weed Unit staff
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 4.2

Within existing resources, the Weed Board will explore educational partnerships including but not limited to homeowners associations, FFA, 4-H, and local jurisdictions to promote awareness of noxious weeds.

- Lead: Weed Unit staff
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 4.3

Coordinate with local nurseries and garden centers to share information about noxious weeds.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: Annually

Goal 4, continued

Key Performance Measures

- Public requests for technical assistance (increasing initially with greater awareness; decreasing eventually with control of weeds)
- Voluntary replacement of invasive species sold at area nurseries in favor of non-invasive alternatives
- Number of social media messages

Partners

State Noxious Weed Board, area nurseries, realtors, and WSU Master Gardeners

Stakeholders

Landowners, developers and construction firms, agricultural producers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and general public

Goal 5: Sustain collaborative relations with governmental and community organizations and educational institutions.

Background

Invasive noxious weeds don't recognize political boundaries or property lines. Leveraging the skills, expertise, and resources of diverse governmental and community organizations results in far more effective weed control activities. Cooperative Weed Management Areas are in force in the Nisqually and Chehalis river watersheds. There is a need to form a coalition of stakeholders in the Deschutes River area as well.

Strategy 5.1

Weed Board members shall serve as liaisons to other key governmental and community partners.

- Lead: Weed Board
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 5.2

The Weed Unit will partner with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and local colleges and universities to share information and conduct weed control efforts. These partnerships will also promote public awareness of the impact of invasive species on habitat. An example of multi-jurisdictional cooperation is the monetary support of the WSU Integrated Weeds Project which employs biological controls of Scotch broom.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator and Weed Board
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Strategy 5.3

The Weed Unit will partner with federal, state, tribal, and local governments to secure grant funding to eradicate Brazilian elodea from the Chehalis River.

- Lead: Weed Board and Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Goal 5, continued

Strategy 5.4

Weed Unit staff will work with the State Weed Board and the neighboring counties of Pierce, Lewis, Grays Harbor, and Mason to discuss issues of mutual concern and identify opportunities to collaborate for more effective noxious weed control.

- Lead: Weed Coordinator
- Timeframe: 2014-2019

Key Performance Measures

- Amount of grant funding secured to eradicate Brazilian elodea from the Chehalis River
- Partnerships in Cooperative Weed Management Areas

Partners

Federal, tribal, state and local governments

Stakeholders

Landowners, homeowners, developers, agricultural producers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and general public

