

## **OVERVIEW OF IDAHO'S 2004 NOXIOUS WEEDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

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Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Noxious Weeds Program is extremely involved in coordinating statewide weed prevention efforts, identifying and providing funding and resources, and representing the interests of Idahoans regarding invasive species management and control. An ISDA Noxious Weed Advisory Committee, made up primarily of key state legislators and agricultural organization representatives, provides guidance to and advises the Director to assure that the Noxious Weed Program is effective and responsive to the public need.

In May of 1998, the Idaho Weed Summit was held to develop an action plan for the state. The resulting plan, entitled *Idaho's Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious Weeds*, was released in February of 1999. Creation of locally led Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) is the centerpiece of the plan. Top priorities include the involvement of ALL landowners in a watershed or region, development of Integrated Weed Management Plans, and defining roles and partnerships that allow for the blurring of jurisdictional lines of ownership to optimize cooperative efforts. Currently, Idaho has \*\*\*32 successfully functioning CWMAs that cover more than 82 percent of the state.

Success of CWMAs comes from the grassroots involvement and cooperation, public and legislative support, timeliness and effectiveness of teamwork, and energy that is gained by putting a plan into action. Challenges of CWMAs include: changing the old mindset of "mine versus yours"; getting true cooperation versus collaboration; involvements of private landowners; support of county commissioners, and establishing a set of goals and priorities that are the best management plan for the land within the entire CWMA.

On September 26, 2001, Governor Dirk Kempthorne signed Executive Order No. 2001-11 that set the stage for creation of the Idaho Invasive Species Council. Council membership consists of state agency representatives, federal agencies, tribal leaders, and other interested parties. The Council provides policy and budget recommendations to the Governor, as well as considering the scope of the statewide effort to deal with all harmful invasive species: terrestrial and aquatic weeds, and other animals which harm or can harm Idaho's resources. Director Pat Takasugi is chair of the Council, and in April 2003 the Council outlined the following major tasks: 1) Complete a statewide invasive species assessment; 2) Host a statewide invasive species summit to discuss the findings of the assessment; and, 3) Draft an Invasive Species Action Plan by December 2004 for review with the 2005 Idaho Legislature. The Council reviewed and approved the invasive species assessment, *Preparing to Meet the Challenge*, in December 2003. Governor Kempthorne and the Council hosted an extremely successful summit, *Meeting the Challenge*, on February 17, 2004, attended by more than 165 interested and concerned individuals in preparation for completing the action plan.

In addition, subcommittees of the Invasive Species Council are doing on-the-ground work to combat invasives. The Eurasian Watermilfoil Task Group is assisting with the battle against this aquatic weed at water bodies in five counties and is identifying other lakes, rivers, ponds, and reservoirs at risk across

Idaho. The Marina Signage Task Group is working to post educational signs at hundreds of boat ramps around the state.

ISDA Noxious weed staff consists of a Noxious Weeds Program Manager; an Administrative Assistant; an Interagency Noxious Weeds Coordinator (Forest Service and Idaho State Department of Agriculture), working with CWMAs mostly in eastern and central Idaho; a Program Specialist, responsible for Idaho's Noxious Weed-Free Forage and Straw Program, working with growers and inspection staff, as well as assisting with CWMAs in the southwest part of Idaho; and a Mapping and Data Coordinator (position is currently vacant), who will offer GPS/GIS training, standard development, and in-office support. The staff also works to implement the *Idaho Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious Weeds* by assisting with the organization of CWMAs, encouraging County Commissioners and partners to support CWMAs, working with our state, federal, and county partners to better coordinate statewide efforts, and the Cost Share Program. Administration of the Noxious Weed-Free Forage and Straw Program and the Idaho Invasive Species Council has been added to the staff's responsibilities.

Through the Noxious Weed Cost Share Program, the ISDA program staff provide funding for applications from Idaho CWMAs and counties for noxious weed-related projects that could not be accomplished by local resources alone. Application deadline is December 31. Applications are reviewed by the ISDA Cost Share Committee, comprised of members from the Idaho Weed Control Association (IWCA), Idaho Weed Coordinating Committee (IWCC), Idaho Association of Weed Control Superintendents (IAWCS), United States Forest Service (USFA), and Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). Yearly evaluation of applications is made based upon criteria for seven difference categories. There are four permanent categories plus three additional emphasis categories that are selected by the review committee on an annual basis. Cooperative Nature of Proposed Projects, Participation of Private Landowners, Accomplishments from the prior Year's CWMA Projects, and Partner Contribution Ration are the four permanent categories. The three additional emphasis categories are determined by the Cost Share Review Committee at their annual meeting. Proposed additional categories that the review committee will use for their selection may include: Use of All Tools, Inventory/Mapping, Restoration/Revegetation, Prevention/Education, Early Detection/Rapid Response, Project Diversity, and Biological Control. Recommendations from the Cost Share Review Committee are given to the Director of ISDA, which he takes into consideration when awarding Cost Share funds.

To assure accountability for the funds, at least 10 percent of all funded projects receive financial performance reviews, and 25 percent of all projects receive field performance reviews. Funding for the 2004 ISDA Noxious Weeds Cost Share Program was provided by the Idaho State Legislature, the Bureau of Land Management, and the USDA-Forest Service. Across the state, \*\*\*29 CWMA Annual statewide education/research projects were funded, totaling approximately \$200,000. Total amount of funding available for 2004 has decreased due to legislative budget cuts and holdbacks, both at the state and federal level. Competition for the funds is greater because CWMA applicants have continued to improve their writing and reporting skills combined and the increased number of applicants, compared to the total amount of funding that is available. There is a disparity of nearly \$800,000 between requests and actual funds available for assistance through the 2005 Cost Share Program.

In 2004, Idaho's CWMAs, Statewide Education, Task Force group, and Applied Research project partners participating in the Cost Share Program matched every dollar given to them with \$3.95, which is a 4-to-1 match ratio. They matched every dollar given to them with \$2.68 in nonfederal funds, or a 2.7-to-1 match

ratio! These matching ratios do not include any matching contribution from ISDA at this time. Additionally, the CWMAs were incredibly successful and productive. They treated 203,475 acres of weeds, revegetated 3,304 acres, mapped and surveyed 347,690 acres, and made 1.4 million public educational contacts in 2004.

Idaho's Cost Share Program has been streamlined and improved. It continues to grow and thrive, thanks to the commitment of the local, state, and federal partners.

Essential to Idaho's Cost Share Program is securing stable funding for continued success. In a state where land ownership is 64 percent federal (with some counties as high as 93.2 percent), the importance of obtaining federal dollars to assist in the management of invasive weeds is critical. SB144 was signed by the President in 2004. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), a division under the USDA, is responsible to set up grant application criteria. As of this writing (February 17, 2005), the project is unfunded for the 2005 fiscal year, and no requests for allocation have been made for the 2006 fiscal year. It is imperative that Congress fund this bill to help continue the outstanding application of federal funds at the local CWMA level.

At the state level, we are rewriting and will expand the scope of the Statewide Strategic Plan, guided by the Idaho Weed Coordinating Committee. The Idaho Weed Control Association is assisting ISDA by leading the effort to update our state's Noxious Weed Law. Focus is on providing uniformity and continuity in the laws covering forage and straw, seeds, organics, and horticulture. The state's list of noxious weeds needs to be categorized based on the level of impact and our ability to eradicate or contain. Additionally, a list of invasive weed species is needed to assist us in identifying those species that have the potential to invade our state and help us in the arena of early detection and rapid response tactics.

What is ahead at the county level? The role of the County Weed Superintendent is changing and growing. Their roles are evolving further into an administrative/managerial role that includes grant administration, public interaction/education, and employee management. With current state regulations regarding noxious weed management, the control authority is at the county level; therefore, the focus of the County Noxious Weed Programs may be expanded to include both invasive plants and animals, as the Idaho Invasive Species Council evolves. This focus may also be felt in the private sector where business opportunities could grow in response to this expansion.

In Idaho, we believe that we have made significant progress towards the goals set by our *Idaho Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious Weeds*. Although there is room for improvement, we are on the right path. With the continued success and growth of CWMAs and the support of our public, private, and legislative partners, we will continue to work to successfully manage the invasion of noxious weeds in our state.