

# VENTURA COUNTY WEED MANAGEMENT AREA (VCWMA)

## STRATEGIC PLAN

### 2010

#### I. Introduction

The Ventura County Weed Management Area (VCWMA) is a focused group of individuals, Federal, State and County public agencies, special districts, municipalities, environmental coalitions, agricultural concerns and others who have banded together under a mutually developed Memorandum of Understanding, to fight the spread of invasive and noxious weeds in Ventura County.

The Ventura County Arundo Task Force (VCATF) began in 1999 to focus specifically on *Arundo donax* (Arundo) in Ventura County. A broader need was identified. The VCATF expanded its mission to include all invasive and noxious weeds within Ventura County, thus forming the VCWMA. The membership of the group will continue to expand to include all groups or individuals interested in the common goal of weed eradication.

#### II. Mission Statement

The VCWMA will strive to initiate, coordinate, and promote activities necessary to prevent, control the spread of invasive and noxious weeds, and eradicate all existing invasive and noxious weeds in Ventura County. The emphasis of these activities will be focused on preventing the introduction of new species, halting the spread of invasive and noxious weeds, reducing the areas under infestation, promoting Integrated Weed Management techniques, eradicating certain species where possible, and educating local agencies, municipalities and the general public within Ventura County about the problems associated with invasive and noxious weeds.

#### III. The Challenge

What is a Noxious Weed? As defined by the **Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974**, “noxious weed” means any living stage (including but not limited to, seeds and reproductive parts) of any parasitic or other plant of a kind, or subdivision of a kind, which is of foreign origin, is new to or not widely prevalent in the United States, and can directly or indirectly injure crops, other useful plants, livestock, or poultry or other interests of agriculture, including irrigation, or navigation or the fish and wildlife resources of the United States or the public health (Title 7, Chapter 61, Section 2802).

As defined by **Section 5004 of the California Food and Agriculture Code**, “noxious weed” means any species of plant that is, or is liable to be, troublesome, aggressive, intrusive, detrimental, or destructive to agriculture, silviculture, or important native species, and difficult to control or eradicate, which the director, by regulation, designates to be a noxious weed.

Lists of noxious weed species can be found on both the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) websites ([www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov) and [www.cdffa.ca.gov](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov)). The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal IPC) has published a list specifically for California, the "Exotic Pest Plants of Greatest Ecological Concern in California." ([www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org))

Other species of plants considered by conservationists to be invasive and noxious in a given area may not be legally defined as “noxious weeds” because they have not been listed at the state level as such. These plants, not yet listed, are often available for retail purchase at nurseries and other outlets. Becoming a listed “noxious” plant is a vital step in the fight against their spread. The CDFA defines weeds into categories based on required action. Their rating system can be found at:

[www.cdffa.ca.gov/phpps/ipc/encycloweedia/wininfo\\_weedratings.htm](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/phpps/ipc/encycloweedia/wininfo_weedratings.htm).

Invasive and noxious weeds are very often found throughout a defined watershed, regardless of political or property line boundaries. The invasive and noxious weeds threatening any geographical area may be different than those in other areas. Some overlap is expected in adjacent geographic areas having similar climates, contiguous habitat corridors, roads, railroads, and land uses. Invasive and noxious weeds which spread through seed carried by birds or other animals are extremely insidious. Their range of infestation is as large as the territory of species of animals which carry the seeds.

Many invasive or noxious plants were intentionally introduced for erosion control, ornamental decoration, construction materials, and animal fodder or accidentally introduced as a contaminant of crop seed or other imported item. As is often found with introduced species of plants or animals, the impact of the introduced species on an ecosystem is not considered or sufficiently understood to keep disaster from happening.

#### **IV. Program Goals**

The overall goals for this coordinated management effort are:

- Protect and enhance the native biodiversity of flora and fauna and maintain and restore natural habitats of Ventura County
- Reduce the fire hazard, erosion damage and flood danger caused by invasive and noxious weeds within the county
- Increase the value and usefulness of cropland, pastureland, stream corridors, natural open spaces (wildlands), and parks

To achieve these goals, some short-term goals have been set:

##### **First Priority**

- Develop an infrastructure for the base of VCWMA operations, including a coordinating staff person and a Steering Committee
- Hold regular meetings
- Update and maintain the VCWMA web site
- Collect all known vegetation mapping within the county and watersheds that drain into the county. Determine any data gaps in the existing data and find funding to fill those gaps. Mapping would include all known sightings of noxious weeds within the county
- Using all collected vegetation information, add to baseline inventory of the known noxious weeds and the extent of their infestation within the county
- Develop a list of priority weeds for Ventura County efforts of eradication
- Establish an eradication project list and a method of prioritizing potential projects
- Investigate the feasibility of developing regional permits and/or environmental documents for the removal of noxious weeds within jurisdictional areas
- Establish an education/outreach subcommittee to further the awareness of noxious weeds

##### **Ongoing**

- Coordinate and carry out workshops and other outreach activities
- Coordinate with other groups, agencies and WMA's to perform eradication projects, primarily Arundo removal
- Carry out eradication projects (other than Arundo) as opportunities arise and funding become available
- Promote and assist with private landowner eradication efforts on private property
- Continue to build membership

- Continue working to find alternative funding sources for education and outreach activities as well as eradication and restoration projects

## **V. Program Elements**

### **1. Management and Staff Funding**

A dedicated staff-person will coordinate and oversee the activities of the VCWMA. The staff who manages the VCWMA activities will be housed at the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and will be under the supervision of the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner and the Steering Committee for the VCWMA.

Decision making at the Steering Committee level and general membership level will be through consensus. The general membership and Steering Committee members will take on the majority of the decision-making tasks needed to accomplish the VCWMA goals.

### **2. Target Species Identification**

Several invasive and noxious weeds are known to occur in Ventura County and are damaging to the environment. They include Arundo, Tamarisk, Yellow Starthistle, and Castor Bean. Many other non-native species are found in Ventura County. A thorough search (literature, mapping databases and informed professionals) for these mentioned, and other occurrences of invasive and noxious weeds will be completed and their relative infestations determined. A prioritized list of invasive and noxious weeds will then be assembled and a plan of attack developed.

### **3. Mapping**

GIS-based mapping has been done to differing degrees throughout the County. An assessment must be done of the amount of GIS data available for any and all invasive and noxious weeds within the County. Once this is established, the VCWMA will develop a strategy to fill any gaps in the GIS data. The maintenance of the data will be an ongoing task of the VCWMA.

### **4. Education, Awareness and Outreach**

General public awareness of the issue of invasive and noxious weed species is low. Education is necessary to increase public awareness on the importance of invasive and noxious weed management. Education will increase the quality and quantity of, and support for invasive and noxious weed control efforts. The VCWMA will establish an Education Subcommittee, which will outline goals, coordinate education and outreach tasks, and conduct public relations efforts throughout the County.

Some examples of types of outreach include:

- Public Seminars or Workshops
  - Sponsor and hold workshops or seminars for target audiences
  - Target audiences to include elected public officials and other policymakers, nursery owners and operators, farm maintenance managers, landscape architects and civil engineering firms, Caltrans and County Roads maintenance crews and other groups identified as critical or showing an interest in the information.

- Literature Distribution
  - Develop and distribute brochures on various weed species and their control,
  - Gather and distribute brochures developed by other entities
- Media Outreach
  - The VCWMA membership will be encouraged to take advantage of local newspapers and industry publications to share information regarding all aspects of the weed eradication efforts of the VCWMA.
  - Locally-based video documentaries may be developed to use for outreach activities.
- Website
  - The VCWMA will update and maintain the VCWMA Website in order to share information with the public and within the group.
- School Curriculum
  - Work with local University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) staff to develop or distribute existing curriculum for school children throughout Ventura County on the topics of weeds and weed management.

## 5. Prevention: Including Exclusion, Detection and Eradication

The most cost-effective method of controlling a weed is to prevent it from becoming established. The components of prevention commonly include exclusion, detection, and eradication.

**Exclusion** includes all activities to keep an invasive and noxious weed species from entering a region. For known, state listed species, exclusion in California includes the efforts of border inspections and inspections of incoming shipments. It also depends largely on informing the general public of the need for caution and diligence when reentering the County from other areas. Contamination can be intentional or unintentional. Both are equally as effective in introducing unwanted species into an area. Education efforts will be targeted at various sectors of the community to assist with our exclusion efforts.

**Detection** deals with finding new infestations of pest plants not earlier detected within a region. Diligence by informed professionals and volunteers is essential. Educating volunteer groups such as Audubon Society, hiking groups, Boy Scouts, and others, will broaden the potential detection capability of the VCWMA.

**Eradication**, especially of newly introduced species, needs to be swift and complete. Swift removal of new infestations in otherwise “clean” areas can save taxpayer dollars and tremendous effort by many. Eradication of species, such as *Arundo donax*, will be a long, arduous, costly effort, which will eventually involve a broad cross-section of the general public and many public agencies in Ventura County.

## 6. Eradication Projects

The VCWMA will undertake eradication projects through its own efforts and will coordinate with any and all groups wishing to carry out eradication efforts using safe and approved methods. Oversight of privately sponsored projects will increase the effectiveness of the VCWMA staff and members.

Funding for eradication projects will primarily come from grants applied for and secured by VCWMA staff. Mitigation banking will be explored as a means of increasing revenues available for eradication projects. VCWMA staff will also explore other funding opportunities as they arise. The VCWMA steering committee

and the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office will be responsible for oversight of all funds expended by the WMA for projects.

Project funding will be sought from various sources, including California Department of Food and Agriculture, Caltrans, California Department of Fish & Game, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and others.