

Gem County Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMA)

Jake Wyant, Gem County Weed Control Superintendent

In 1998 the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), in cooperation with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), started implementing a grant process that would help counties address their noxious weed issues where funding was not otherwise available. As invasive weeds do not respect political boundaries, such as county lines, Forest Service and BLM borders, private properties, etc., County Weed Superintendents were encouraged to set up Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) that would encompass large drainages and involve all land managers within. Many Weed Superintendents, including Gem County's banded together and developed Cooperative Agreements with all government agencies, Federal, State, and local, that stated they would all work in unison to control specific noxious weed invasions.

As Gem County has land types that range from farmland to desert in the lower half of the County and ranches to rangeland in the upper half, a boundary was set at Black Canyon Dam. All drainages that empty into the Payette River above the Dam joined forces with Boise and Valley Counties and is called the Upper Payette CWMA. All drainages that empty into the Payette River below the Dam joined forces with Payette and Washington Counties and was called the Lower Payette CWMA. The ISDA will only recognize one CWMA per area of land.

Both CMWAs held meetings with all cooperators and both decided to set aside three days per county to conduct joint work projects where all cooperators would come together to treat a specific noxious weed in a specific area. This allowed each county to bring many hands and their spray equipment to focus on their larges problems and by involving private landowners, could ignore all political boundaries.

Through the 50/50 grant process, the ISDA would contribute funds to purchase the herbicide. The sponsoring county would track all work performed and under ISDA guidelines convert that work to a dollar amount, called *In Kind*, to compare to the funds contributed by the ISDA. These amounts needed to match at a one-to-one ratio but usually ended up at a three-to-one ratio in the county's favor.

In 1999, Gem County sponsored the first of these joint projects in Southwest Idaho, treating a large infestation of Dalmatian Toadflax on BLM and private lands on both sides of Ola Highway about seven miles above Sweet. After eleven years of this Upper Payette project, this large infestation has been reduced to where the new private landowner can finish the eradication process and Gem County Weed Control will eradicate this noxious weed on BLM property under our regular Agreement.

Another successful joint project through the Upper Payette was treating Canada Thistle in the BOR owned Montour Wildlife and Recreation Area. This noxious weed has been reduced to where Gem County Weed Control can finish eliminating it and many other noxious weeds through our regular Agreement with the BOR.

Our current Upper Payette joint project is on Forest Service land in the Sage Hen area treating Houndstongue. In June of 2012, herbicide applicator crews from Boise County, Valley County,

and the Forest Service joined the Gem County crew in treating roadsides and Houndstongue infested areas in the forest for three days. The herbicide not used those days will be used on our regular Agreement with the Forest Service, stretching the amount of noxious weeds we will be able to treat on their property.

In return the Gem County crew helped Boise County treat Dalmatian Toadflax and Spotted Knapweed for three days in the Lowman area, which also helps keep those high priority noxious weeds seeds from washing into the Payette River and being diverted into Gem irrigation systems that would deliver them to our properties.

Gem crews assisted Valley County treating Rush Skeletonweed for one day to keep it from escaping into another drainage of pristine Idaho forest. The Gem crew will also assist for two days treating Canada Thistle around Cascade Reservoir.

CWMAs also fund projects so that Counties can address noxious weed problems without outside help. Currently the Upper Payette provides herbicide for Gem crews to treat two areas, one ranch in Sweet and one area near the mouth of Squaw Creek, to eradicate Yellow Starthistle, another high priority noxious weed. The Upper Payette also provides funding to purchase herbicide for our Landowner Assistance Program. Any landowner with noxious weeds who is willing to treat them may be provided with CWMA herbicide in trade for the application information in order to calculate the In Kind. The main target weeds are mid-priority Scotch Thistle and Whitetop, however any noxious weed qualifies. The main goal is to educate private landowners on herbicide selection specific to their land and weed, choosing the appropriate rate, calibrating their spray equipment, and the benefits of using a proper adjuvant (spreader/sticker). This is equivalent to giving a hungry man a fish and teaching him how to catch more fish.

In 2001, the Lower Payette CWMA received help from the ISDA providing herbicide for our Scotch Thistle Project in the Pearl area and Big Flat areas with help from Payette County and Washington County spray crews for three days. In return, the Gem crew helped Payette County treat Poison Hemlock at Birding Islands and Diffuse Knapweed on a large private rangeland for three days. We also helped the Washington County crew treat Leafy Spurge and Scotch Thistle for three days. The Lower Payette CWMA continued through the summer of 2003 when Payette County decided not to continue and Washington County chose to adopt the Lower Payette area into their Lower Weiser CWMA.

As this breakup left the lower half of Gem County unable to apply for CMWA grant funding to carry on our projects, the Weed Superintendent requested the Upper Payette adopt the rest of the County. However, due to the difference of land types, forest lands verses agricultural and Rangeland, the Upper Payette declined. With no other option, the Weed Superintendent notified the ISDA of their plan to create our own CWMA to be called the Lower Gem CWMA. With time running short, the Superintendent developed an Annual Operating Plan, a Strategic Plan, and sent Cooperative Agreements to the BLM, Idaho F&G, Idaho Dept. of Transportation, Department of Lands, and the ISDA. With the application package deadline of December 31, all cooperators returned their signed copies of the Cooperative Agreements with just enough time to get Commissioners signatures and hand deliver the package to the ISDA on the 31st. The Lower Gem CWMA was born.

Current projects for the Lower Gem include the Landowner Assistance program where \$7,000 worth of herbicide is supplied to private landowners who then treat any noxious weed.

Application records are returned to the Weed Superintendent so In Kind calculations can be reported to the ISDA.

The City of Emmett is supplied with \$2,000 worth of 2,4-D so their contracted applicator can treat Puncturevine along roadsides, allies, and other City properties.

The local railroad receives \$1,000 worth of herbicides to treat noxious weeds over their entire Right of Ways.

The County Weed Department receives \$750 worth of herbicide to treat several drain ditches on private properties for Parrotfeather Milfoil, an immersed perennial aquatic noxious weed that can grow stems up to fifteen feet long and form mats that greatly impede water flow.

Current projects in the Upper Payette CWMA within Gem County include \$4,000 worth of herbicide for the Landowner Assistance program for any noxious weed with the same requirements as the Lower Gem Landowner Assistance program.

The Weed Department receives \$500 worth of herbicide to treat Yellow Starthistle on a private ranch east of Sweet and several ranches north and west of Regan Butte, just west of Montour Valley.

The Weed Department also uses \$3,500 worth of herbicide to sponsor a joint work project with the Forest Service, Boise County, and Valley County to treat Houndstongue for three days in the Sage Hen to Third Fork areas along forest roads and into the forest.

Volunteers with spray application equipment are welcome to assist with any of the Weed Department projects.

If there are any groups looking for projects that would help landowners, come talk to the Gem County Weed Superintendent. As we have only a few people to control all the noxious weeds in the County, we do use much of the herbicides. However, hand removal is also a viable option for many weeds—excluding perennials. Some projects could entail removing Scotch Thistle or Poison Hemlock for elderly people who do not want to use herbicides for various reasons. Other projects would entail floating down the river pulling and bagging Spotted Knapweed that is invading from the north, getting a foothold on our river banks.

The CWMA program also allows for equipment to be purchased on a 50/50 basis. Through this process Gem County Weed Control has been able to acquire the following equipment at half of the actual cost:

- Spray tanks, 12 volt pump, hand gun sprayer and boomless nozzles for a Weed Dept. ATV
- A Honda ATV with spray equipment
- A Polaris ATV with spray equipment
- An aluminum boat, trailer, and 15 HP outboard motor
- A PUG UTV with a 24-foot tandem axle trailer