REGIONAL BIOSECURITY UPDATE – February 2022

VELVETLEAF

Velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*) is a cropping weed that can cause significant production losses through reduced forage crop yields. If velvetleaf infestations are not contained, the economic impact on NZ could be a reduced value of real gross national product (GDP), of between $294.4 and $484.7 million by 2030.

MPI lead and fund the programme for a containment strategy until the end of June 2023.

February – March is a good time to be on the lookout for Velvet Leaf. If you see it, report it.

https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/long-term-biosecurity-management-programmes/velvetleaf/#overview

BIOSECURITY ACT REVIEW - UPDATE

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has advised the Biosecurity Act review discussion document has been finalised, MPI will be seeking public feedback. This is now likely to occur in early to mid-2022.

FERAL ANIMAL MANGAGEMENT

There is widespread concern across agencies and the public alike about the increasing numbers of feral ungulates (deer, pigs, and goats). Localised individuals and groups are calling for something to be done about these animals. Environment Canterbury is receiving increasing enquiries requesting assistance with the control of feral ungulates.

Often there is confusion about which group or agency (if any) has responsibility for control. In some areas landowners have grouped together and undertaken collaborative control operations. This tends to be more often on open farmland than privately owned native forested land.

A higher-level agency meeting is planned for late February.

Desired meeting outcomes.

- Agencies have a common understanding of current policy and responsibilities.
- Agencies can provide landowners and community groups with consistent information to manage their expectations about responsibilities for feral ungulate management.
- Some understanding of what is realistic for reducing and maintaining future population densities of these animals.
- How can we work together?

NASSELLA TUSSOCK – NEW INFESTATIONS

Two new infestations of Nassella tussock have been reported in South Canterbury on properties not previously known to have this plant. One of these properties has approximately 35 hectares of moderate to dense Nassella tussock infestations with scattered plants and patches outside of this area. Most of the plants are of considerable size and have been present for some decades.

NATIONAL WILDING CONIFER CONTROL PROGRAMME

Background

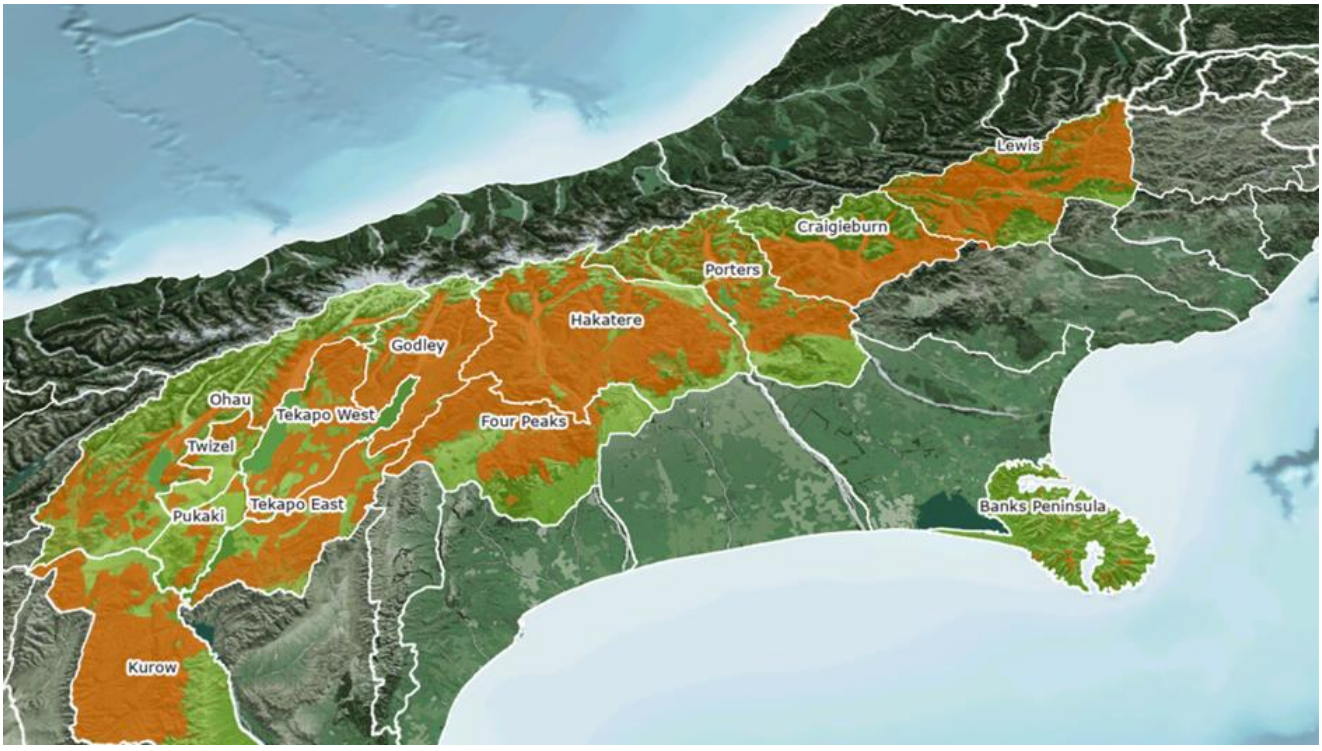
- The National Wilding Conifer Strategy 2015-2030 was launched in 2014 providing a nationally coordinated view on the risks of wilding conifers and programme to defeat them.

- It's a foundation document for the Programme and sets out a shared vision "the right tree in the right place"

- The Programme commenced in 2016 with Crown funding through Biosecurity NZ. The Wilding Conifer Programme is a collaborative effort between MPI, DoC, LINZ, NZ Defence Force, community, farming, production forestry and Regional Councils led by Biosecurity NZ

Progress

- Budget 2021-22 $13.9m
- Expenditure $7.6m
- Committed $10.3m (actual plus contracted expenditure)
- 74% of control programme completed
- 188 contracting staff deployed.



Programme work completed to date depicted in orange

GREAT WILLOWHERB – Be on the lookout

The rapidly spreading weed great willowherb (Epilobium hirsutum) has been found at several locations in Canterbury. Biosecurity New Zealand is leading the effort to eradicate this pest from New Zealand.

Great willowherb is an aggressive invader of wetlands and rivers and if left alone, has the potential to spread and damage these environments.

Now is the time of year to be on the lookout for Great willowherb. Situation update attached.

See fact sheet at https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/45019/direct

If have found great willowherb plants, do not attempt to remove them. Take a photo, record the location, and call Biosecurity New Zealand's exotic pest and disease hotline on 0800 80 99 66.

CHECK CLEAN DRY – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF LAKE WEEDS (by Rich Langley)

The 2021/22 summer Check Clean Dry (CCD) campaign saw a lack of events due to the Covid-19 restrictions, we took this as an opportunity to pursue alternative avenues and engage with a broader range of users. These included networking with national outdoor-sport retailers like Kathmandu, Torpedo 7 and Macpac, reaching out to District Councils and engaging with local clubs and youth committees.

This year, Environment Canterbury took on two new advocates to cover the entirety of Canterbury during the key holiday period, rather than restricting face to face advocacy to south Canterbury over Christmas and New Year. This allowed for a more holistic understanding of the level of engagement and awareness the public have of freshwater pests in Canterbury, and better coverage of the region's broad geography. Greater numbers of people could be reached, with varying levels of experience and awareness.

In comparison to previous years, a broad range of users were familiar with the campaign, particularly at the mention of didymo. However, a concentrated effort was made by the advocates to move the conversation away from just didymo to bring attention to more unfamiliar pests including lagarosiphon, elodea, lake snow, rudd and egeria.

Key Observations experienced by both advocates in Canterbury were:

1. Most people agreed CCD was important to keep waterways clean
2. Most people tend to stay in one waterway or have little movement between water bodies
3. Many people who did not CCD in North Canterbury were unaware of the campaign and had little knowledge of the impacts of other freshwater pests
4. Having visual aids was particularly useful in getting the message across, such as using laminated photos and displaying sample weeds found on site
5. Many were interested in how pest fish have an impact on waterways and what was being done to manage these pests nationally

Key Successes for this season were:

1. Alternative avenues were explored in targeting a wider range of freshwater users including 4WD clubs, big-chain outdoor retails, District Councils, youth organisations and outdoor education centres
2. Most of the District Councils approached were in support of the campaign and distributed the CCD message via their internal communications network
3. There was an increased awareness of freshwater pests and how to CCD in the North Canterbury region
4. Many local jet ski outlets were on board with the CCD campaign and accepted collateral to distribute to customers
5. New connections as far north as Kaikoura were interested in engaging with the CCD campaign and distributed collateral
6. Comments were made that the CCD message was well advertised via prolific signage
7. New, user targeted signage was erected at remote locations aimed at addressing specific audiences

Report prepared by
Laurence Smith, Principal Advisor - Biosecurity

AREA BIOSECURITY UPDATE – February 2022

Puna Grass (Eradication Programme)

Puna grass is tussock-like with purplish-brown flowers and a fibrous root system. Puna grass is a pastoral weed and invades riparian and other non-grazed areas. It is not particularly palatable to stock, is spread by seed and is difficult to control once established. Puna grass causes adverse effects to economic well-being due to loss of pastoral agriculture in the hill and high country. It also causes adverse effects on environmental values in tussock landscapes and grasslands.

Puna grass is scattered across 60 hectares at two known sites within the region (and New Zealand). One site occurs in North Canterbury near Amberley. Checking of the site, control work and search has occurred once this season to date. Further inspections will be necessary over the remainder of summer into the autumn.

Bur Daisy (Sustained Control Programme)

Bur daisy is a serious threat to our wool industry due to the cost involved in removing burs from sheep fleeces. If left uncontrolled, bur daisy replaces desirable plant species. It produces many seeds that are quickly spread by stock movement and remain viable for many years.

There are six sites near Amberley of bur daisy covering approximately 20 hectares. Three sites are active. Sites have been inspected once this season and will be rechecked over the summer/autumn period.

Chilean Needle Grass (Sustained Control Programme)

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is an invasive weed that negatively affects both farming and the environment. Infestations reduce the livestock-carrying capacity of pasture and sharp seeds can cause animal welfare issues.

Chilean needle grass is now known to occur over 25 properties in Canterbury with 330 hectares affected in total. 22 of these sites were active this year, no plants were detected at three sites. Most sites have been inspected several times this season.

Recorded sites include 5 district roads, State Highway One and 19 private properties. The affected private properties include two vineyards, two lifestyle blocks and 15 hill-country farms.

Site distribution: One property near West Melton, one property at Waipara and two properties at Omihi. The remaining properties and affected road verges are in the Spotswood area, Leamington Valley and Leader Road East.

CNG Inspection Programme and Searching

One new site was detected by biosecurity staff this season in the Cheviot area. The infestation consisted of 23 plants and was located on a property that has been searched regularly in recent seasons due to an association with another known affected property.

An experienced contractor was engaged by land occupiers to carry out control work on the four most heavily infested properties. Biosecurity staff carried out searching and control work on the low-incidence properties as well as inspections and assessments of the heavily infested properties.

All known sites were inspected up to three times this season and a few were checked four times due to the growthy seasonal conditions.

Searching of possible pathways such as rivers and roads was also carried out as well as properties with an association to known affected sites.

Saffron thistle (Progressive Control Programme)

Once established, saffron thistle can form dense stands, preventing stock movement and competing with pasture species. The sharp spines of this yellow flowered thistle can cause injuries to the eyes and mouths of stock and get stuck in wool. Due to this, saffron thistle can cause adverse effects on economic well-being.

There are 14 active sites in Canterbury. Work to control and contain Saffron thistle is has been occurring over the summer. A lot of this work has been delayed due to the wet season we have had, which has slowed the emergence of Saffron thistle at all sites. A contractor has been engaged to control the larger infestations using herbicide where grubbing and bagging plants is not practical.

Wild Thyme (Site Led Programme)

Wild thyme is very tolerant of both dry and cold conditions and is unpalatable to stock. In these situations, it can form large dense patches, covering hillsides. It can exclude native vegetation and in turn becomes the dominant scrub cover.

Several sites are in the Loburn – Whiterock area. A number of these are historical. Work on the most significant site at Whiterock has been completed with a collaborative approach between the Biosecurity section, Biodiversity section, Department of Conservation, and land occupiers to control the wild thyme and protect the biodiversity values in the area.

Nassella tussock (Sustained Control Programme) Nassella tussock is extremely adaptable and grows in a wide range of habitats. It will displace other plant species. Nassella tussock is unpalatable to stock. A mature nassella tussock can produce up to 120,000 seeds which are able

to disperse over long distances by wind, water borne, animals, human beings (on clothing), on machinery and in agricultural seed.

Nassella tussock is known to have occurred on approximately 1450 properties across Canterbury. This season 384 properties have been inspected to ensure Nassella tussock has been adequately controlled. 60 land occupiers were asked to carry out further control where significant numbers of live Nassella tussock plants have been found.

This year, in the Hurunui District, there has been a noticeable increase of land occupiers leaving Nassella tussock plants to seed before completing control work.

Last few inspections of properties that did not meet requirements are being tidied up in the next few weeks.

Old Man's Beard (Site Led Programme)

Old man's beard grows rapidly, forming dense, heavy masses that dominate canopy of any height. Stems layer profusely, and it produces many long-lived seeds if exposed to frost. Tolerant of cold, moderate shade, damp, wind, salt, most soil types, and damage.

Old man's beard sites within this programme have been inspected or are in the process of being inspected to assess control needs, with contractors due to undertake control work again this season before the end of March.

Yellow Bristle Grass (Eradication Programme) Yellow bristle grass spreads rapidly through pasture reducing pasture quality in late summer and autumn. Being an annual species when it dies off this leads to an open pasture resulting in re-infestation and ingress of other weeds. Where it does get grazed it will pass through the rumen and spread further afield via dung.

Control is being undertaken currently at known sites. A substantial search and awareness programme is underway across the region.

Purple loosestrife (Sustained Control Programme).

A highly invasive pest that threatens native biodiversity and freshwater infrastructure. Purple Loosestrife grows on the margins of waterways, is easily spread, and can block streams and drains.

The Purple Loosestrife programme is a multi-agency effort combining the resources of DOC, CCC and ECan. Inspections are carried out through the summer months and where found control is undertaken annually.

Many of the known sites have been inspected and controlled post-Christmas.

Coltsfoot (Sustained Control Programme)

Coltsfoot is invasive and there is the potential for plant fragments to enter and clog small waterways. The plants can also invade irrigated pasture. Coltsfoot spreads mainly via underground rhizomes (underground stems) or rhizome fragments. It can also be spread by wind-blown seed.

Work to be undertaken in the Eyre River in the next few weeks.

Local report compiled by

Matt Smith
Biosecurity Team Leader