Columbine District
Wilderness Weed Management
2000 Accomplishments
Submitted
By
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During the 2000 fiscal year we made a concerted effort to increase our management activities for noxious weeds within the Weminuche Wilderness, on the Columbine Ranger District.

The reason behind this increased effort was the realization that our previous efforts in prevention, education, inventory and limited mechanical treatments were not satisfactory in checking the spread of noxious weeds into and within the Weminuche Wilderness. We have found that even very small infestations in remote areas pose significant risks to increase and spread. While the effort and cost of treating these small, remote infestations is extremely high, it is imperative to catch these infestations before they become large and spread even more. If infestations in remote wilderness locations are allowed to grow and spread, the chances for controlling and eliminating these weeds becomes negligible.

Efforts in education, prevention, inventory and mechanical treatments were continued this season through several training sessions with the wilderness staff and two training sessions completed at the Wilderness Ranger Workshop in June. These sessions were well received and the concept of the need to be proactive, in order to minimize impacts on wilderness values, was continually emphasized.

A proposal to treat noxious weeds with herbicides within the Weminuche and South san Juan Wilderness Areas was completed in June, 2000 and sent to the Regional Forester for approval.

This request consisted of:

- A completed Minimum Requirement Decision Guide
- A Wilderness Weed Management Plan from the Columbine Ranger District.
- A Wilderness Weed Management Plan from the Pagosa Ranger District.
- A copy of the San Juan/Rio Grande National forest Environmental Assessment for Management of Noxious Weeds.
- An FS-2100-2 Pesticide Use Proposal.

The proposal was approved by the Regional Forester on July 3, 2000. We began herbicide treatments of Musk thistle using the saddle-lite sprayer in Pine River drainage on July 25, 2000.

Due to the unusual fire season during the summer of 2000 and the demand for resources, which developed as a result, we had to adjust our planned treatment schedule. We treated all planned areas in the Pine River and Lake Creek drainages and actually treated more acres than were originally planned in these areas. We attempted to treat in the lower Vallecito drainage, however, we were not able to complete and treatments because numerous people were camped in all of the targeted areas. We also were not able to complete planned treatments in the Burnt Timber Creek, Needle Creek and Elk Park areas (see Table 1).

Table 1
Areas planned for Herbicide treatment in 2000

Pine River	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**15 acres**
Lake Creek	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**5 acres**
Burnt Timber Creek	**4 horses, 4 crew members**	**20 acres**
Needle Creek	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**5 acres**
Elk Park	**4 horses, 2 crew**	**5 acres**
Vallecito Creek	**4 horses, 2 crew**	**10 acres**

Treatments in the Pine River drainage and Lake Creek totaled **68 acres**[*] with the target species being Musk thistle, Houndstongue and Canada thistle. We have also updated our inventory in this area to reflect the additional areas of infestation which were previously undocumented.

Trudy Kremer with "Chief" treating Musk thistle in a park along the Pine River, in the Weminuche Wilderness during August 2000.

[*] See explanation of acres calculation on page 6.

Neighboring private lands in the Pine River Valley are heavily infested with Musk thistle, Houndstongue and Canada thistle.

These neighboring infestations provide a continuous source for seeds to be carried into the Wilderness via wind, wildlife, recreationists and a host of other methods.

This past summer we coordinated treatments and shared technology and information with this landowner. Multi-ownership coordination is the only way that this type of problem can be resolved. We intend to continue and strengthen these relationships in the future.

Trudy Kremer and "Chief" treat Canada thistle along the Pine River Trail in the Weminuche Wilderness in August 2000.

Travel corridors, such as trails, are the most common places for noxious weeds to become established. People, pets and livestock unknowingly carry weed seeds, which are then distributed along trails in receptive soils. Given time, these small infestations grow and spread, eventually taking over native vegetation.

Wildlife and wind then carry seeds into more remote areas, causing infestations to develop in places with little or no human activity. These are the most difficult infestations to manage since they often go unnoticed for many years and can be in places, which are very difficult to reach.

Trudy and crew on the Pine River Trail at Lake Creek.

When managing natural resources, especially wilderness, public opinion is an important factor in the decision making process. The Pine River trail is very heavily used and Trudy encountered numerous people each day she worked in the wilderness. We had predetermined that public education was one of the goals of this project and Trudy spent a great deal of her time visiting with the public and explaining the methods and goals of this weed management project.

She found the public to be both very curious and strongly supportive of our efforts to reduce the spread of noxious weeds within the Weminuche Wilderness.

Although we were not able to treat all of the areas we had planned during the 2000 field season due to an unusually demanding fire season, we feel that our efforts were very successful. We have learned a great deal about the logistics of treating in the backcountry using the saddle-lite sprayer and have conditioned several horses to the sounds and sights of the equipment. We were able to treat 68 acres* and make dozens of positive public contacts.

For the 2001 field season, we would like to continue where we left off. There is still a great deal of work yet to be done, both in initial treatments, and now in follow up treatments (see Table 2). Inventory and monitoring efforts will also continue to be a priority, along with other aspects of our integrated pest management program, such as, prevention, education, multi-jurisdictional cooperation, and mechanical treatments.

Table 2
Areas planned for Herbicide treatment in 2001

Pine River (re-treat)	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**70 acres**
Lake Creek (re-treat)	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**5 acres**
Burnt Timber Creek	**4 horses, 4 crew members**	**20 acres**
Needle Creek	**4 horses, 2 crew members**	**5 acres**
Elk Park	**4 horses, 2 crew**	**5 acres**
Vallecito Creek	**4 horses, 2 crew**	**10 acres**

Interdisciplinary cooperation within the Forest Service is a key element, which will prove to determine the final success of these weed management efforts. Expertise, time and funding, all need to be shared and focused in order to effectively solve this problem. We all need to be on the same team. This is not just a Range problem, nor is it just a Wilderness problem. This is the very essence of ecosystem management and we must act swiftly and appropriately before it is too late. The lessons learned in the Wilderness Areas of the Northwest should serve as sobering reminders of the severe consequences that lie just around the corner if we are not successful in our weed management efforts.

*****Treated acres are estimated by the crew at the time of treatment. Acres treated and inventoried vary in the density of infestation. Acres treated along trails are determined by multiplying the average distance treated, from the center of the trail, by the distance covered along the trail. This calculation results in square feet treated, which is then converted to acres.