

Teton County Weed and Pest District

P.O. Box 1852
Jackson, Wyoming 83001
(307) 733-8419

Weed & Pest News

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Contact: Amy Lerch (307) 733-8419

Weed Alert! - Yellow Starthistle

A Jackson visitor found one of the most feared noxious weeds in the western states, Yellow starthistle. Based on its location, it is suspected to have been brought in with horses in uncertified hay.

Yellow starthistle is in the same family as the Knapweed species. It is poisonous only to horses causing “chewing disease” that is fatal once symptoms develop. Its ability to infest an area causes a decrease of quality wildlife habitat and plant and animal diversity. “It was believed by many that this plant could not survive at the high elevations and short growing season of Jackson Hole,” says Erika Wells, Supervisor of Teton County Weed and Pest.

Yellow starthistle is thought to have been brought over from Eurasia in contaminated alfalfa seed sometime after 1849. It is currently a serious problem in California with infestations possibly covering up to 15 million acres of roadsides, rangeland, and valuable cropland. It is also a serious problem in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. It has been found in 23 of the lower 48 states including all of the western states and across the east.

Prior to this plant, only two others have been found in Wyoming. One was north of Wheatland in 1947 and the other south of Thermopolis in 1959. Using GPS technology, Teton County Weed and Pest will closely monitor this area over the years. Fortunately, this plant was found before it flowered and went to seed.

These plants can grow 1 to 3 feet in height depending on environmental conditions. It has a yellow flower head that is singly located at the branch ends. Sharp, straw-colored spines up to one inch long radiate from the bracts in a star pattern. A single plant can produce 150,000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years.

“With efforts to keep Yellow starthistle and other invasive plants out of the area, Teton County Weed and Pest strongly recommends that Teton county residents purchase only certified weed free forage,” say Erika Wells. For more information and photographs, please check out our website at www.tcweed.org or call 733-8419.