

February 22, 2017

Joint Committee on Ways & Means Committee on Natural Resources

Dear Legislators,

It has come to my attention that the Oregon Department of Agriculture is in the midst of making some very tough decisions regarding funding levels for State and County Noxious Weed Control Programs. The purpose of this letter is to express my support for these programs and the valuable service they provide to the natural resources of the State of Oregon.

Of greatest concern is the necessity to keep the Biological Control Program for Noxious Weeds funded. Oregon's Biological Control Program has been recognized as one of the top 5 programs in the **world** and the leader in the United States.. Along with that distinction, an economic study that was done on the success of biological control for tansy ragwort alone showed a 13:1 cost benefit ratio to the state. Furthermore, the loss of the biological control program would lead to the increased reliance on pesticides to control noxious weeds in our state.

Along the same lines, Early Detection, Rapid Response weed control programs have been shown to provide a 34:1 cost benefit ratio. A return on investment that is hard to beat.

Working hand in hand with the State, the County weed programs provide valuable local control efforts on noxious weeds. At the present time though, only 23 of 36 counties have weed control districts and many of those are struggling to stay afloat.

Natural Resource agency budgets combined make up less than 1% of the State budget while at the same time agriculture provides for 30% of the gross product of the State. Agriculture is very important to the economy of the State and the protection of its natural resources is vital to sustain its future.

We ask that you consider supporting a funding proposal for Noxious Weed efforts in the amount of \$3.3 million. The State ODA Noxious Weed Program would receive \$1.5 million of that to help support their efforts and keep the biological control position intact and the Counties would receive \$1.8 million in the form of grants to help support their local programs.

Morrow County supports its noxious weed control program and the ODA Noxious Weed Control Program and the support they provide us in protecting and preserving the State's valuable natural resources. We ask that you support this funding proposal and help us in protecting Oregon State's Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Respectfully,

Dave Pranger  
Morrow County  
Weed Coordinator/Inspector

## **Oregon Noxious Weed Control Proposed Funding Concepts 2017-19 Biennium**

**Background:** Historic investments into noxious weed control programs at the state and county levels have contributed tremendously to the protection of natural resources and Oregon's economy. Funding to support these programs has declined over the last decade. To continue these successes, adequate stable funding is essential.

**Why are These Programs Important:** Noxious weeds make significant impacts to natural resources and our agricultural economy. Noxious Weeds have direct adverse impacts on highly valued environmental resources such as water quality and quantity, fish and wildlife habitat, and the overall health of watersheds. They cause direct impacts to agriculture, livestock, timber and other natural resource industries. A recent report, *Economic Impact from Selected Noxious Weeds in Oregon*, documented these impacts and the value of having noxious weed control programs. The study looks at 25 of 128 state listed noxious weeds and shows a current \$83.5 million annual impact to Oregon's economy. Predictive modeling also revealed there is a potential economic impact of \$1.8 billion a year from these same weeds if they are allowed to spread uncontrolled into all suitable habitats. Additionally, programs directed at early detection and control are shown to be highly effective by this study. For example, investment into early detection and rapid response (EDRR) projects, for control of emerging infestations, provides a 34:1 benefit-to-cost, meaning these efforts save \$34 for every dollar spent.

### **Existing Needs:**

**County Support:** Currently there are only about 23 out of 36 counties that have a County Weed Control District. However, overall funding for county weed programs has declined, including many counties that historically had active programs such as Wasco County.

House bill 3358, passed during the 2011 legislative session, is now outlined in ORS 569.520 and provides the process for funding designated county weed control districts. ORS 569.520 is currently unfunded, and the next steps in the process will be to secure funding and to develop administrative rules.

**ODA Support:** The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Noxious Weed Control Program is the leader in coordination and implementation of noxious weed control projects. Adequate funding for staff and infrastructure has become a challenge over the last decade. While program costs have increased due to inflation, there has been a reduction in available funds at the federal and state level. Demand for the program's services have increased and are changing as new noxious weed issues take a toll on Oregon's natural resources. For example, flowering rush and water primrose directly effect water quality and quantity when left uncontrolled, and rangeland weeds are contributing greatly to the degradation of sage grouse habitat.

Reducing the dependence of ODA's Noxious Weed Control Program on federal funds will help assure a stronger statewide presence and allow a focus on state priorities and emerging needs such as water quality, EDRR, and sensitive species protection.

**Authority:** State noxious weed control laws are under ORS 569 and provide authority to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Counties, Oregon State University and the Oregon State Weed Board.

*569.180 Noxious weeds as public nuisance; policy. In recognition of the imminent and continuous threat to natural resources, watershed health, livestock, wildlife, land and agricultural products of this state, and in recognition of the widespread infestations and potential infestations of noxious weeds throughout this state, noxious weeds are declared to be a public nuisance and shall be detected, controlled and, where feasible, eradicated on all lands in this state. It is declared to be the policy of this state that priority shall be given first to the prevention of new infestations of noxious weeds and then to the control and, where feasible, eradication of noxious weeds in infested areas.*

### **Roles/Responsibilities and Funding:**

**Oregon Department of Agriculture:** The ODA Noxious Weed Control Program Mission: "Protect Oregon's natural resources and agricultural economy from the invasion and proliferation of invasive noxious weeds." With an increase in state funding, program staff could focus on the highest priorities: early detection and rapid response, sharing current technologies for integrated weed management, education/outreach, and biological control of invasive noxious weeds. Authority for the ODA Noxious Weed Control Program is outlined in ORS 569.185.

**Estimated increased funding needs - \$1.5 million per biennium -** The 2013-2015 state budget for the ODA Noxious Weed Control Program was \$2,177,320. Federal funding for this same time period was \$1.2 million. Estimated needs are an increase of \$1.5 million in state funding for the 2017-19 biennium. Additional funds would support core staff and allow for a paradigm shift in program emphasis directed to high priority activities such as EDRR, coordination, education outreach, and biological control and allow for better technical support of local land managers and resource protection. This would also support core staff, basic infrastructure, and a new NRS 4 Aquatic Weed Specialist position for increased emphasis on water resource protection.

**County Weed Control Programs:** Local capacity and infrastructure at the county level are essential to successful implementation of noxious weed control projects throughout Oregon. County weed control programs are fundamental to implementing priority weed control projects. At the discretion of County Commissioners and as outlined in ORS 569.360, county weed programs are implemented in a diversity of ways that best fit local geographic and political circumstances. Some programs are stand alone at the county level, some are run through road departments, SWCDs, or in partnership with CWMAs. Across the state counties work locally with federal, state, municipal and private land managers to accomplish on the groundwork that protect ecosystem function as well as crop and rangeland productivity according to statewide and local weed management plans.

**Estimated Needs - \$1.8 million per biennium** - Currently there is no consistent dedicated funding source for county weed programs.

There is a mix of funding at the county level from road department budgets, SWCD's, federal contracts, and through grants. Many counties do not have a control program in place at any level due to lack of base funds. ORS 569-520 directs ODA to develop administrative rules to provide grants to counties to support noxious weed control programs. \$1.8 million would provide base funding of \$50,000 per county.

*569.520 Grants for carrying out county weed control district duties; rules. (1) The State Department of Agriculture shall establish a grant program for the purpose of assisting counties in carrying out weed control district duties, functions and powers under ORS 569.360 to 569.495. After deducting department administrative expenses for the program, the department shall apply the balance of moneys received for the grant program to fund grants as described in this section.*

*(2) A county qualifies for a grant under this section if the county has: (a) Established a weed control district under ORS 569.360 to 569.495;*

*(b) Provided county moneys to carry out the duties, functions and powers of the district in an amount that equals or exceeds the grant amount available to the county under this section; and*

*(c) Complied with any department rules adopted under this section.*

*(3) The department may establish rules for carrying out the grant program described in this section. The rules may include, but need not be limited to, rules:*

*(a) Requiring that priority in the use of grant moneys be given to noxious weed control projects that restore, enhance or protect water quality, watersheds and riparian habitats;*

*(b) Requiring a participating county to report to the department concerning the use of grant moneys by the county; and*

*(c) Adopting a methodology for the recovery of the direct and indirect costs necessarily incurred as administrative expenses for the grant program. [2011 c.392 §2]*