

Appendix F: Cooperative Weed Management Areas

A Cooperative Weed Management Area is an excellent tool for coordinating action and sharing expertise and resources to combat common weed species in a defined geographical area. Local organizations bring together landowners and land managers (private, city, county, state, and federal) to effectively manage weeds as a unified group. Locally-driven CWMAs are especially effective at generating public interest in weed management and organizing community groups to support on-the-ground programs.

Developing a CWMA in Montana

In Montana, every county has a weed district with a county weed management plan. In cooperation with the county weed coordinator, CWMAs may be established by landowners or land managers to encompass part of a county, or a natural land area (such as a watershed) that includes adjoining parts of several counties. CWMAs do not supplant CWDs; but can facilitate cooperation across private, county, state, and federal boundaries.

CWMAs often function under the authority of a mutually developed Memorandum of Understanding or Cooperative Agreement and are governed by a steering committee. In designating a CWMA, the first steps are:

- **Invite all landowners/managers:** Call an organizational meeting to bring together all the potential partners, listen to each other's ideas and concerns about a CWMA, and begin to develop a group vision and plan.
- **Develop boundaries:** Establish clearly-defined boundaries, generally coordinated with counties and possibly adjoining CWMAs. Boundaries of a CWMA may be created according to watersheds, topography, weed species, land usage, and/or rights-of-ways.
- **Identify special management zones** within the CWMA such as: aquatic areas, habitats of threatened and endangered species or species of special concern, recreational/special use areas, transportation corridors, and relatively weed-free areas. For instance, weed-free areas should be identified, prioritized for prevention, and given special designation and protection.

Creating a CWMA Management Plan

Together, CWMA partners develop a comprehensive weed management plan for their area. Detailed information regarding development of Weed Management Areas is described in "Guidelines for Coordinated Management of Noxious Weeds: Development of Weed Management Areas."¹ CWMA plans include weed surveying and mapping components as well as strategies for IWM and prevention. More comprehensive plans may include public education and training, early detection of new invaders, monitoring, and annual evaluation and adaptation of the weed management plan.

¹Available [Online] http://weedcenter.org/management_guidelines/tableofcontents.html

An initial assessment of the situation (landowner involvement, weed abundance and distribution, impacts of weeds, current management, level of community support, etc.) will determine the weed management objectives. For example, rather than treat weeds immediately, it may be most effective to establish awareness and prevention programs first.

Elements of a typical weed management plan include:

- A complete description of the proposed area, including natural features, soil types, transportation corridors, population centers, maps, and descriptions of weed infestations.
- Goals and objectives, including long-term priorities and planning (five to 10 years), which may address prevention strategies; weed reduction, containment, or eradication; and educational programs.
- Budgets, including funding sources (federal, state county, local landowner, grants) and shared equipment, supplies, and staffing. Determine short- and long-range needs: equipment purchases, herbicides, rearing cages for biocontrol agents, public outreach materials, etc. Develop a yearly procurement plan to include personnel, operations, equipment, and supplies.
- Cooperators' roles and responsibilities, including a list of agencies and jurisdictions involved, and a timeline.
- A list of target weeds and potential control methods with pros and cons of each. Note recommended control for a specific area, the timing of control, and recommended rates.
- Special management zones, including areas with stringent management criteria, relatively weed-free areas that would benefit from site-specific prevention strategies, and disturbed areas (for example, burned or flooded sites) that may require immediate attention.
- Strategies for gathering public comment on the management plan. This can help increase public awareness and build public support.
- Evaluations, which should be conducted annually and should include a weed inventory to determine whether the long-term goals of reducing weed populations or preventing infestations are being met. Management plans will change over time to insure their effectiveness as new situations arise.

ADVANTAGES OF A CWMA

CWMAs encourage long-term planning to a successful resolution. Planning establishes priorities – cooperators can emphasize a particular species or area. CWMAs focus attention and provide a united front to state and federal legislators, as well as communicate to the general public the seriousness of good land management and the value of healthy ecosystems. CWMAs pool talents and resources; address the problem of weeds spreading from neighboring land before the damage occurs; provide channels for communication between cooperators; and adequately assess the risk of damage to water, crops, threatened and endangered species, etc. CWMAs base control efforts on biological and geographical factors rather than legal divisions, thus increasing the effectiveness of weed management. And finally, CWMAs may help secure more stable funding for long-term management and prevention efforts.