

# WATER - OUR MOUNTAIN GOLD



Suggestions from the  
Central Sierra Watershed Committee

## Noxious Weeds Are Obnoxious!

### Why Should You Care About Noxious Weeds?

Invasive, non-native, noxious weeds are spreading at an alarming rate throughout California and the United States. Sometimes, the weeds are pretty and many people are fooled by the fruits or colorful blossoms of these foreign beauties! It's an explosion in slow motion, a biological wildfire, with noxious weeds increasing their spread yearly across oceans and continents. Landowners and taxpayers are paying millions of dollars every year to halt their spread. In addition to these costs, noxious weeds destroy native ecosystems, plants, animals, and food and forage crops. These invasive non-native weeds are a serious threat to native plants, animals, and cause habitat loss.

**“Weeds are perhaps the greatest threat to forage production, fire protection, home yards, lakes & ponds, wildlife and native plants in the regions”**, says Neil McDougald, Farm Advisor, with University of California Cooperative Extension. “Yellow starthistle alone has dropped land values in adjacent states.”

*Some examples of these noxious plants are:*

- ❖ Spotted knapweed puts out a poison that kills neighboring plants, allowing it to dominate the landscape at the expense of native plants. It is bad forage for livestock and wildlife. Once established, it does not hold the soil in place well, and soil erosion and increased runoff result.
- ❖ Yellow starthistle is poisonous to horses, causing “chewing disease.” It spreads rapidly.
- ❖ Italian thistle crowds out native plants, reduce forage for livestock and wildlife; and because it is prickly and painful, degrades recreational areas.
- ❖ Brooms exclude native plants and increase fire danger because they are extremely flammable.
- ❖ Arundo donax consumes a huge amount of water and is a serious fire hazard.

### Why are these weeds so successful?

These plants come from harsher environments where they've adapted incredible strategies to survive. They know how to COMPETE! In fact, they survive so well in their new American homes that their current rate of spread is calculated to be **10-14% per year**, or **4600 acres per day!**

### What is the definition of a Noxious Weed?

A noxious weed is a non-native invasive plant that has been officially defined as a pest by law or regulation. Both California and the federal government maintain lists of plants that are considered serious threats.

In California, biologists at the California Department of Food and Agriculture recommend plants for listing after consultation with outside experts and the County Agricultural Commissioners. If a plant is found to probably be “troublesome, aggressive, intrusive, detrimental, or destructive to agriculture, silviculture, or important native species, and difficult to control or eradicate,” the Department will designate the plant as a noxious weed.

The term “weed” means different things to different people. In the broadest sense, it is any plant growing where it is not wanted. Weeds can be native or non-native, invasive or non-invasive, and noxious or not noxious. Legally, a noxious weed is any plant designated by a federal, state or county government as injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife or property. A noxious weed is also commonly defined as a plant that grows out of place (e.g., a rose can be a weed in a wheat field).

Of California's 6,000 plants found growing in the wild, about 1,000 are non-native, but only a few hundred are significantly invasive to the point of being Noxious Weeds.

### What do noxious weeds do?

- Crowd out native plants by competing with them for water, light and nutrients.
- Injure and cause discomfort to hikers, anglers, hunters and whitewater rafters with their prickly spines or poisonous sap.
- Decrease in the quality and quantity of fish, wildlife and native plants, including rare and endangered species.
- Increase erosion and runoff.
- Lower property values.
- Crowd out desirable forage plants for livestock and wildlife, including game species.
- Cause illness, injury and sometimes death in wildlife and livestock.
- Reduce the success of reforestation in productive timberlands.

**To make sure you are not spreading noxious weeds:**

- Learn to identify the plants and weeds in your area. Don't pick and transport flowers you can't identify.
- Drive, bicycle, walk and pack on established roads or trails, away from weedy areas.
- Check your undercarriage, boats, hitchhikes, shoes, pant cuffs and animals' fur and hooves before and after moving through an area, and safely dispose of any clinging seeds.
- Be an informed gardener. Don't plant exotic invasive plants in your yard.
- Control weeds on your property. Replant disturbed soil with beneficial plants to keep the weeds out.
- Contact one of the organizations listed below for a listing and photos of the "most wanted" weeds in your area and to receive information about controlling them.

**How bad is the weed problem in Fresno, Madera, and Mariposa counties?**

Compared to other regions in California, our weed problem is just beginning. This means we have an opportunity to ACT NOW and avoid future devastation

**Cooperative weed management is the key to success: What is a Weed Management Area?**

Weed Management Areas are local organizations that bring together landowners and managers (private, city, county, state, and federal) in a county, multi-county, or other geographical area to coordinate efforts and expertise against common invasive weed species. Weed Management Areas educate the public about weeds within their areas and locate funds to get rid of weeds on private and public lands. Weeds do not respect ownership boundaries, so coordination is crucial to effectively stop weeds from spreading.

Because noxious weeds do not respect land ownership boundaries, it is imperative that land managers work together with the general public to address weed problems. For example, if one landowner is controlling weeds while an adjacent landowner is not, the treated area will be re-infested.

Since 2000, the Sierra San Joaquin Noxious Weed Alliance, the local weed management area covering Madera, Mariposa and Fresno Counties, has been assisting property owners in eliminating yellow starthistle. To learn more about this cost-sharing program, please call Judy at 559.642.3310. An estimator will visit your property free of charge and arrange for a licensed pesticide applicator to treat your yellow starthistle safely, or to have a hand crew manually control the weeds.

**Brochures and Websites:**

Look for the brochure *Top 10 Noxious Weeds in Madera, Mariposa and Fresno Counties* at various locations including Ag Commission offices, USDA Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service offices. You may also access this brochure, weed management area information, and additional weed links on the Weed Management Area's Website at [www.cdfa.ca.gov/wma](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/wma). Additional information is available at the CA Invasive Plant Council's Website, [www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org); as well as at [www.cdfa.ca.gov/weedhome](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/weedhome); and <http://pi.cdfa.ca.gov/weedinfo/>.

The CSWC meets on the last Wednesday of every month at the Sierra Ambulance Office, 40755 Winding Way, Oakhurst, at 9 AM, and is open to the public. For information, please email [leavesofgrass@netptc.net](mailto:leavesofgrass@netptc.net).

***The mission of the Central Sierra Watershed Committee is to promote the quality, quantity, and aesthetic values of our water resources through the conservation and restoration of our watersheds.***

CSWC members include: Interested citizens, ranchers, homeowners; local Native American tribes; North Fork Community Development Council; Chowchilla-Redtop and Coarsegold Resource Conservation Districts; Chowchilla City Council; Upper Merced River Watershed Council; California Water Institute; Sierra Foothill Conservancy; Madera Irrigation District; Yosemite Sequoia Resource Conservation & Development Council; US Army Corps of Engineers; Regional Water Quality Control Board; Madera County Environmental Health & Engineering; CA Department of Water Resources; Madera County Board of Supervisors; Madera Agriculture Commissioner; San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District; Natural Resource Conservation Service; and the United States Forest Service.

*Note: The contents of this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the State.*