Kansas Department of Agriculture

Noxious and Invasive Weed Update
Plant Protection and Weed Control

Spring 2020

New Law, New Regulations, New List...

Special points of interest:

- Laws are created by the legislature (or Congress) and set down broad directives, whereas regulations are created by government agencies and are more detailed and specific, rules on how to carry out the law.
- The creation, or revision, of a regulation involves input from the Departments of Administration and Budget, the Attorney General's office, a Legislative committee, and the general public.

As you may remember, the noxious weed law was revised in 2018. Part of that revision was to remove the official noxious weed list from the law and insert it into the regulations. In order to do that, we have to revise the regulations, and, by law, we have until December 31, 2020 to do it or the noxious weed list disappears completely.

Therefore, the State Noxious Weed Advisory Committee has been meeting to discuss, not only placing the list in the regulations, but whether or not to change the list at all while the move happens. Their decision was to propose a tiered list, which I explained in detail in an earlier newsletter but, as a quick refresher, the tiered list prioritizes the lesser abundant species over those with larger populations. The committee is also proposing the removal of Pignut (Hoffmannseggia glauca) from the noxious weed list.

Another proposed change to the regulations include removing the control plans for multiflora rose and bull thistle, because they will no longer be county option weeds, which is another change that was made to the law. Requiring that county weed directors be county employees instead of contractors and removing the education and experience requirements for hiring weed directors are another couple of proposed changes to the noxious weed regulations.

While we were at it, we went through the entire document and corrected typos and inserted missing words.

Inside this issue:

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... New Laboratory

While this is unrelated to the legal revisions that have been going on, it is happening at the same time so I thought I should mention it. The Kansas Department of Agriculture's laboratory is moving from its historical location at Forbes Field in Topeka to a brand-new building adjacent to KDA's headquarters building in Manhattan.

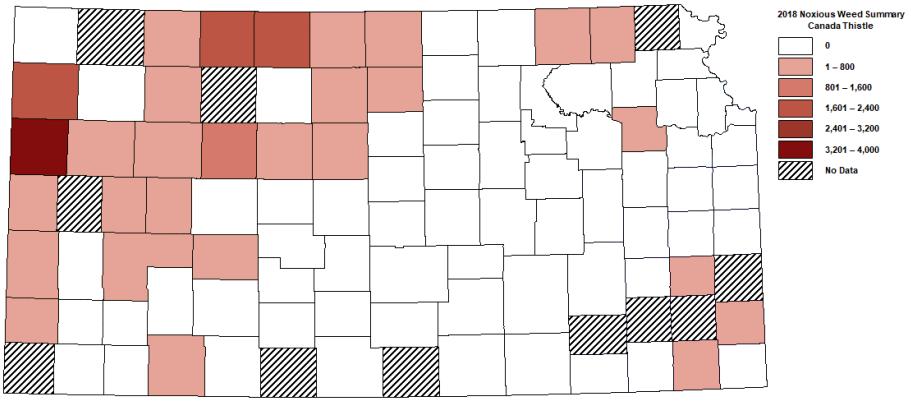
This move will not affect many people because the lab works mostly behind the scenes, testing and analyzing samples collected by those regulatory officials that people do see. These samples include fertilizers, pesticides, animal feed, meat, poultry, dairy products and industrial hemp. The results of the lab work often determine whether or not regulatory action is necessary.

The move has pretty much already happened, now we just have to unpack all of the boxes.

Weed Maps from Weed Surveys

You may have seen noxious weed population maps like the one below before in papers or presentations. If not, I would recommend you check them out at http://agriculture.ks.gov/noxiousweeds. They are updated every year and are very useful for knowing which weeds are, or may move into, your neighborhood.

These maps are based upon annual surveys completed by each county weed director. To accomplish this, the weed directors visit ten, randomly chosen sections in their county, survey each of those sections for each of the noxious weeds, and then perform some basic math on the results to extrapolate what they have found from 6,400 acres (ten sections) to the entire county. To this number they add whatever amount of each weed they see during their other duties throughout the year. This gives us a rough estimate of the amount of each weed in each county, and therefore throughout the state.



While the maps give us a visual aid as to where each weed is in the state and how large, or small, the infestations are, they do more than that. The help the counties determine the amount of funding to budget for the weed program each year and they help the weed directors and landowners decide how to prioritize their own funding and workload. So, if you see the weed director looking over your fence, invite him or her to wander around that part of your land that is not visible from the road, it can only benefit you in the long run.

Control Corner: Revising the Control Programs

Since time immemorial, well, at least since 1937, there have been control programs that outline the official methods for control and eradication of noxious weeds. Back then, the official control methods for field bindweed, the only noxious weed at the time, included cultivating an infested field every two weeks, followed by the planting of a smother crop of sweet sorghum or by the application of salt (at the rate of 16 tons per acre) or sodium chlorate. The only other option was to apply 160 pounds of sodium chlorate to every acre of infested area.

Since then pesticides have become safer and more effective and we have a better understanding of the effects of excessive working of the soil on erosion, but we still have comprehensive control programs for each of the designated noxious weeds.

As part of our revision of the noxious weed regulations, we are carefully updating the current control programs. We are ensuring that each weed has as many Integrated Weed Management options as possible so that every landowner can have a choice as to how they manage their land. Unfortunately, not all of the weeds have as many options available as others. For example, biological control options are only available for five of the twelve noxious weeds.

These control plans also encourage every landowner to use as many of the different options available as possible when treating any of the noxious weeds that may be infesting their land, because a multi-pronged approach, using as many available tools as possible will result in a much more efficient control plan.

Kansas Department of Agriculture

Plant Protection and Weed Control

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Plant Protection and Weed Control staff work to ensure the health of the state's native and cultivated plants by excluding or controlling destructive pests, diseases and weeds. Staff examine and analyze pest conditions in crop fields, rangelands, greenhouses and nurseries. Action taken to control potential infestations of new pests, whether they are insects, plants diseases or weeds, is beneficial to the economy and the environment.

Our mission is to:

- Exclude or control harmful insects, plant diseases, and weeds;
- Ensure Kansas plants and plant products entering commerce are free from quarantined pests;
- Provide customers with inspection and certification services.

Invasive Species Spotlight: Medusahead and Ventenata

A couple of species we are really keeping an eye out for are Medusahead (Taeniatherum caput-medusae) and Ventenata (Ventenata dubia). These are both cool-season grasses which means that they begin to grow earlier in the spring than our native, warm-season prairie grasses. This gives them an edge competitively because they get first crack at the water and nutrients in the soil, making them very aggressive at becoming established into monocultures. Their best advantage is that they are highly adapted to fire in ecosystems where other species are not.

In Kansas, the habitat we are most concerned about as far as these two species are concerned, is short grass prairie ecosystem in the western part of the state. This area is not as adapted to fire as is the tallgrass prairie in the Flint Hills and would be severely threatened if either of these species were to become introduced.

Ventenata grows from 6 to 18 inches tall and has an open panicle, or sparse, stemmy seed head similar to Johnsongrass. It has distinct color changes as it develops . Plants are bright green in early spring then the nodes turn reddish- to purplish-black in late spring. They become distinctly shiny when flowering and developing seedheads, then turn silvery-green before they turn tan when in late summer.

Medusahead grows just a little bit taller (8 – 20 inches) and has distinct, long twisted awns that grow up to three inches long and have barbs that will stick to clothing and fur. The plant is slow to decompose and will develop thick mats of fine, highly flammable stems that greatly increase the threat of fire in established populations.