

Diffuse Knapweed
Centaurea diffusa

Currently in Montana, noxious weeds infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list.

Diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) is a Priority 2B listed noxious weed in the state of Montana. Priority 2B species are noxious weeds that are abundant in Montana and widespread in many counties. Management criteria for these species includes eradication or containment where these species are less abundant. Management for these species shall be prioritized by local weed districts. Species listed as Priority 2B noxious weeds are: Canada thistle, field bindweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, dalmation toadflax, St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, oxeye daisy, houndstongue, yellow toadflax, and saltcedar.

Diffuse knapweed is an annual or a biennial plant that is native to Turkey, Syria, the Balkans, Ukraine and southern Russia; it was introduced into the United States by accident in contaminated alfalfa seed. Diffuse knapweed was first identified in Washington state in 1907 and occurs in 19 states across the country. Diffuse knapweed is one of the three types of knapweeds that are listed on the Montana Noxious Weed List. This plant tends to grow in arid or semi-arid environments and can be found along roadsides, rangeland and forest bench lands or anywhere there has been a natural or human caused disturbance.

The leaves of diffuse knapweed are gray-green in color; seedling leaves are finely divided and have small hairs, while mature leaves alternate and are divided into linear segments that are broadly lance shaped and covered with wooly hairs. The stems of diffuse knapweed can grow up to 2 feet in height and they are highly branched. Flowers of diffuse knapweed are white or pink and the bracts form stiff cream to brown colored spines that are divided into comb-like teeth. A single diffuse knapweed plant can produce up to 18,000 seeds. Seeds are small in size and brown or gray in color.

The ways in which diffuse knapweed can be spread are through: agriculture-spreading contaminated seed to uninfected areas, wildlife-animals that eat the seeds or transport seeds in their hair or fur, water- water can carry seeds in stream or river flow for long distances before reaching a point on the shore line where they are deposited and allowed to germinate, and wind-the wind is the primary means by which diffuse knapweed is dispersed. The wind provides the seeds with a vector to be blown out of their capsule and distributed over a short distance. When the plant is dried out, it may become a tumbleweed that can roll for long distances propelled by the wind, spreading seeds the entire distance.

Diffuse knapweed can be controlled by various integrated weed management techniques such as cutting or mowing, herbicides, grazing by sheep, hand pulling, and biological control. Often control measures are most successful by using a combination of control methods.

Please take a few moments to learn about diffuse knapweed and all of the other Montana state listed noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-3144.