

FC Noxious Weed Control Best Management Practices



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Camelthorn

Alhagi maurorum

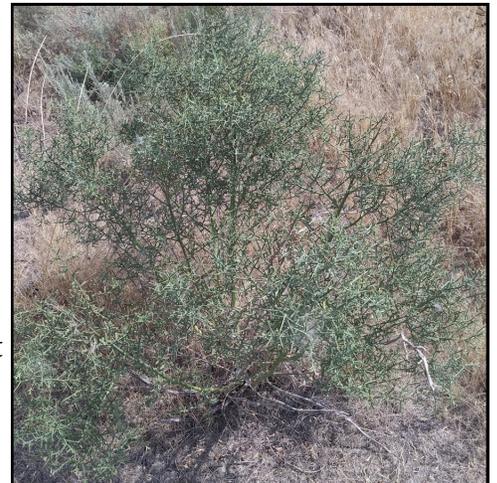
Family: Fabaceae

Class B-Designate Noxious Weed
Control Required

Background Information

Camelthorn is of the Fabaceae family. It was introduced into the United States from Asia and is now reported in Washington and the southwestern U.S. Originally introduced into California from Turkey as an alfalfa seed contaminant, it found its way to Eastern Washington around 1956. This spiny, intricately branched perennial shrub grows up to 4 feet tall. Camelthorn favors deep moist soil; its far reaching vertical roots may extend 6 to 7 feet into the ground where it successfully taps moisture, allowing it to thrive on dry sites. It is well adapted to the loess soils found in the Columbia river basin and Palouse hills. On moist sites, camelthorn will spread rapidly becoming a major problem along streams and canals.

Camelthorn spreads by seed and with its deep vertical and horizontal roots and rhizomes. Rhizomes can produce shoots up to 25 feet away from the parent plant. Pinkish-purple to maroon flowers are produced in summer on short spine-tipped branchlets. In Franklin County there is only one known Camelthorn infestation which makes an eradication program feasible.



Pea-like flowers occur in clusters

Impacts

Camelthorn spines are injurious to livestock and wildlife. Once established in rangeland it will compete against preferred forage and desirable native plants. In semi-arid soils, the plant will change the native ecology by drying up the water supply available to shallow rooted native plants. The species is also a potential alfalfa seed contaminant. In cropping systems, camelthorn is difficult to control because of its extensive root system.



Spine-tipped branches are injurious to animals

Key Identifying Traits

- ◆ Grayish green leaves are alternately arranged with smooth entire margins, oval to lance shaped and much longer than wide.
- ◆ Branched stems are rigid with short, spine-tipped flowering branchlets.
- ◆ Flowers are pea-like, occur in clusters on short spine-tipped branches on the upper portion of the plant.
- ◆ Reddish-brown seed pods have a short, narrow beak.



Seeds clearly outlined in the pod

Biology and Ecology

- ◆ Perennial shrub with extensive root system.
- ◆ Grows in moist or dry soils up to 4 feet in height.
- ◆ Spreads by seed and with deep vertical and horizontal creeping roots and rhizomes.
- ◆ Pea-like pinkish-purple to maroon flowers in summer.
- ◆ Seed establishment rate is low, however; seeds passing through animal digestive tracts germinate more readily.



Flowers concentrated on upper portion of branches

Control Measures

Prevention: Camelthorn is not showy and may go undetected in scrub wastelands enabling the species to escape early detection. Organized detection surveys are recommended which could locate new patches as they appear. Preventive measures include using weed-free hay, preventing overgrazing, and limiting soil disturbances.

Biological: None

Cultural: Preventing the establishment of populations through best management practices is the most cost effective method of control. Clean farm and recreational equipment before moving from an infested area to an un-infested area. Promote desired vegetation to provide competition.

Mechanical: Manual control is not practical due to the deep root system; new shoots will arise from rhizome nodes if damaged.

Chemical: Herbicides known to be effective on camelthorn include Streamline (Aminocyclopyrachlor and Metsulfuron methyl) applied at bolting to early flowering stage and 2,4-D and Dicamba when the plant is actively growing. Due to a lack of leaf area a surfactant (MSO) is needed with any application. As with any established infestations repeated applications and follow-up is necessary.

ALWAYS FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS, THE LABEL IS THE LAW

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Photos: Wes Smalling FCWB and Dan Sharratt, www.oregon.gov