

“B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant, but may have limited distribution in some counties

Houndstongue
Cynoglossum officinale

Other common names: Hounds tongue, gypsy flower, rats and mice, dog bur

USDA symbol: CYOF
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Houndstongue is a highly invasive pest of pine woodlands in Eastern Oregon especially in areas where cattle are grazed. Its seeds are covered in hooked barbs that readily attach to wildlife and grazing cattle. This plant was introduced to North America from Europe as a contaminant of cereal seed in the late 1800s.

Distribution in Oregon: Occurs in many counties in eastern Oregon. There are historical sites in Lane and Marion Counties. It continues to expand its range.

Description: Houndstongue is a biennial growing from 1 to 4 feet tall. Rosettes form the first year later sending up a flowering stalk in the second. Leaves are alternate, rough, hairy, and 1 to 12 inches long. Flowers are reddish purple and terminal. It reproduces only from seed with each plant capable of producing up to 2,000 seeds. Houndstongue prefers well drained, relatively sandy and gravelly soils in habitats comprised of shady areas under the canopy of forests, in native grasslands, in pastures, meadows, along roadsides, and in disturbed sites.

Impacts: Houndstongue can be a serious problem in rangeland and pasture. It is highly invasive and can significantly reduce forage. Houndstongue produces barbed seeds, or burrs, which allow the plant to readily adhere to hair, wool, and fur and can in turn reduce the value of sheep wool. The burs can become embedded in the eye or eyelids and cause eye damage to animals. This can increase the cost of raising livestock as well as reduce overall health and value. Houndstongue is also toxic to livestock, containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids, damaging liver cells. Animals may survive six months or longer after they have consumed a lethal amount but are unthrifty. Sheep are more resistant than cattle or horses. In addition, it is a nuisance to recreationists due to its bur-like seeds.

Biological controls: No approved biological control agent is currently available. However, research is being conducted on five promising insects: a root weevil, a stem weevil, a seed weevil, a root beetle and a root fly.

