

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED MANAGEMENT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Noxious Weed Act, Title 35 Article 5.5, (“Act”) requires the San Miguel County Board of County Commissioners (“BOCC”) to adopt a noxious weed plan. The plan shall include all of the requirements and duties set forth in the Act by reference and incorporation.

The San Miguel County Noxious Weed Management Plan (“Weed Management Plan” or “Plan”) is intended to govern noxious weed management activities on the unincorporated lands within San Miguel County (“County”). The BOCC recognizes the need for and agrees to effectively manage all noxious weeds appearing on the San Miguel County Noxious Weed List.

- Private landowners within the unincorporated portions of the County are responsible for noxious weed management on their lands, however, the County’s Manager of the Vegetation Control & Management department (“Weed Control Manager”) may enter into agreements with private landowners to complete this work if there is no private company to do the work and County staff are available.
- State boards, departments, divisions, and agencies are required by the Act and the Weed Management Plan to manage noxious weeds on lands under their jurisdiction. C.R.S. § 35-5.5-110.
- The BOCC may enter into cooperative agreements with Federal land management agencies to facilitate or compel effective noxious weed management on the substantial land base managed by Federal agencies within the County. C.R.S. § 35-5.5-111.
- The BOCC may also enter into intergovernmental agreements with other local governmental entities within the County to facilitate or compel effective noxious weed management on lands under their jurisdiction.

At least once every three years, the Board of County Commissioners, the Citizen’s Weed Advisory Board, and concerned citizens will review the Weed Management Plan for modification. At that time weed management plans may be requested from local, State, and Federal entities that manage public lands for review and comparison. Species or class upgrades or changes in classifications of noxious weeds may be added to the list after having a public hearing with 30-day notice to gain citizen input on the proposed new listing. C.R.S §35-5.5-108(3). Any declaration of additional noxious weeds shall include the management objectives for all affected landowners. A local governing body may adopt eradication, containment, or suppression standards that are more stringent than the standards adopted by the State. C.R.S. §35-5.5-108 (2)(III)(b).

II. ABOUT SAN MIGUEL COUNTY

San Miguel County is situated on the northern side of the western San Juan Mountains in Southwest Colorado. The County encompasses the headwaters of the San Miguel and Dolores rivers watersheds. Portions of four major ecological zones (not to be confused with the land use and building code zones) are present in the County with elevations that range from 6,000' to 14,200'. These include the foothill and valley zones from approximately 6,320' to 7,000'; the montane zone from approximately 7,000' to 9,500'; the subalpine zone from approximately 9,500' to 11,500'; and the alpine zone from approximately 11,500' to 14,150'. Within this broad and variable range of ecological zones, many habitat types exist that each supports their own native plant communities as well as numerous invasive, non-native plants, many of which are now viewed as noxious weeds.

III. GOALS OF THE WEED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Weed Management Plan provides guidance and support to the San Miguel County Vegetation Control & Management department (“Vegetation Management”) for the long-term effort of effective control of noxious weeds in San Miguel County. **It is clearly understood that noxious weeds will never be fully eradicated from San Miguel County.**

The Weed Management Plan is intended to guide this and future generations in what will hopefully become a unified and concerted effort to bring these invasive plants under the control of an effective management program. Citizen awareness of the value of native biodiversity is the key to the success of this program.

The following are the general 10-year goals (2023 to 2033) of the San Miguel County Noxious Weed Management Plan:

- Eradication of "priority" species indicated as noxious weeds of concern for San Miguel County.
- Control of noxious weeds to manageable levels of scattered occurrences.
- Restoration and enhancement of native rangeland with native or other appropriate seeds and plants.
- Maintain the native biodiversity, and promote ecological health.
- Conduct educational and public awareness programs geared towards noxious weed awareness and the preservation of native root structures.
- Pursue additional sources of funding.

Vegetation Management's preventative focus is two-fold. In addition to the implementation of weed-free products, the department will focus on the elimination of noxious weed species in all County-run gravel pits. Whenever possible due to schedules and weather issues, all County departments and Vegetation Management will work together to maintain roadsides in the County by eliminating noxious weeds, and reseeding disturbed roadsides.

Effective weed management requires cooperation between all stakeholders since noxious weeds rarely occur in isolation. Many noxious weeds have seeds that can be viable for 15 years or more and management of these species will span an equal length of time. Vegetation Management's goal is to promote the ecological health of County landscapes; however, the success of our program is dependent on the cooperation of County departments as well as private landowners. Treatments of noxious weed infestations will, over the long term, improve the ecological health and visual resources of San Miguel

County.

Due to increasing diversity in the local human community and a general lack of connection to a land-based economy, the difficulty of managing invasive weeds has increased. If, however, maintenance of a high level of native biodiversity becomes, and remains, a significant element of the local human culture, then the task of managing noxious weeds will be more successful.

Accomplishment of these broad general goals will require a significant effort on the part of a great many individuals, agencies, and organizations. The coordination of the combined efforts of the San Miguel County Board of County Commissioners, the County Vegetation Control & Management department, other County departments, private citizens, municipalities, corporations, and land management agencies will be necessary for success.

IV. SAN MIGUEL COUNTY WEEDS OF CONCERN

Noxious weeds are presently known to exist in San Miguel County. Weeds are classified according to a State noxious weed priority list: A = Eradication is a must; B = Manage and control the spread of these species; and C = Support the use of integrated management methods and provide educational, research, and biological control resources.

The following are the noxious weed species that are present or are of concern to San Miguel County.

Common Name	Scientific Name	State Class.	County Class
Meadow Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigrescens</i>	A	A
Myrtle Spurge	<i>Euphorbia myrsinites</i>	A	A
Purple loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	A	A (priority)
Yellow Starthistle	<i>Centaurea solstitialis</i>	A	A (priority)
Absinth wormwood	<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>	B	B
Black henbane	<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i>	B	B
Bull thistle	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	B	B
Canada thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	B	B
Chinese Clematis	<i>Clematis orientalis</i>	B	B (priority)
Common tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	B	B
Dalmatian toadflax	<i>Linaria dalmatica</i>	B	B
Dame's rocket	<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>	B	B (priority)
Diffuse knapweed	<i>Centaurea diffusa</i>	B	B (priority)
Hoary cress (whitetop)	<i>Cardaria draba</i>	B	B
Houndstongue	<i>Cynoglossum officinale</i>	B	B
Jointed goatgrass	<i>Aegilops cylindrica</i>	B	B
Leafy spurge	<i>Euphorbia esula</i>	B	B (priority)
Musk thistle	<i>Carduus nutans</i>	B	B

Oxeye daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	B	B (priority)
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Perennial pepperweed	Lepidium latifolium	B	B
Plumeless thistle	Carduus acanthoides	B	B
Russian knapweed	Acroptilon repens	B	B
Salt cedar	Tamarix chinensis, parviflora, ramoissima	B	B
Scotch thistle	Onopordum acanthium, tauricum	B	B
Spotted knapweed	Centaurea stoebe	B	B (priority)
Sulfur cinquefoil	Potentilla recta	B	B
Yellow toadflax	Linaria vulgaris	B	B (priority)
Common burdock	Arctium minus	C	C
Common mullein	Verbascum thapsus	C	C
Downy brome (cheatgrass)	Bromus tectorum	C	C
Halogeton	Halogeton glomeratus	C	C
Poison hemlock	Conium maculatum	C	C

Two species of note:

- 1) Kochia (Kochia scoparia or Bassia scoparia) and Russian Thistle (Salsola tragus) are tumbleweed-type plants that have a weedy appearance and are generally unpleasant looking to most citizens. Neither species is on the A, B, or C list from the Colorado Department of Agriculture. Since they aren't listed, they won't be routinely managed. Both species are extremely widespread and no reasonable amount of time and resources would accomplish the eradication of these species. If the management of these species occurs, it will be on a case-by-case basis.

- 2) Cheatgrass (Bromus tectorum) is a C-list grass species that is also widespread in San Miguel County. Management of this species will also occur on a case-by-case basis due to limited time and money resources in the County. Where this species presents a wildfire hazard, or the management of this species affects threatened and endangered species, management by the County can occur.

V. THE PLAN

A. Integrated Management of Noxious Weeds

It is widely accepted by noxious weed control professionals that an integrated management approach to weed infestations provides the greatest level of success. Complete reliance on a sole method of noxious weed management can result in outright failure of the effort or damage to non-targeted organisms and the environment. The Colorado Noxious Weed Act requires that both government entities and private landowners develop integrated noxious weed management plans. Broadly speaking, there are five primary management options included in an integrated management plan and all of these management options will be considered when evaluating a noxious weed infestation in San Miguel County:

1. Prevention

Prevention is the first and perhaps the most important step in a noxious weed control program. In addition, preventative measures are probably the most cost-effective method of weed control. Preventative weed control includes (among others) weed-free crop seed, weed-free manure and hay, clean (weed-free) harvesting and tillage equipment, and the elimination of weed infestations in areas bordering cropland, irrigation ditches, and canals. Cleaning is recommended for 4-wheel drive vehicles, ATVs, and other equipment, which may have been exposed to weed areas.

2. Cultural

The “cultural” option includes, but is not limited to, establishing and managing an adequate population of desirable vegetation to compete with the weeds, utilizing livestock when possible (cattle, goats, sheep), mulching, and burning when appropriate.

Many of the noxious weed infestations in the County are established on disturbed ground of some sort. Land use activities that limit the amount of ground disturbed at a given time, or that limit the amount of time ground remains disturbed without reestablishing a native vegetative cover, would result in fewer and less severe noxious weed infestations. All disturbed areas shall be reseeded as soon as possible after the disturbance.

3. Mechanical

The “mechanical” option includes, but is not limited to, hand pulling, hoeing, mowing, and tillage.

4. Biological

Biological noxious weed control involves the utilization of natural enemies for the control of specific weed species. Biological weed control is never one hundred percent effective and can take 5 to 10 years for partial control. Biological weed control is not acceptable as the sole control method for any specific weed species targeted for eradication.

5. Chemical

Noxious weed control with herbicides is an effective tool for many targeted weed species. However, there are several aspects to consider when choosing a chemical program. These include; herbicide selection, the timing of application, target weed, desirable crops or plant species being grown or that will be planted, the number of applications per year, and the number of years a particular species will need to be treated for desired control. Also important are the health and safety factors involved, and the need to consider undesirable impacts. Chemical labels should **always be read first prior to use.**

B. Reduction of Ground Disturbance and Revegetation

Limiting ground disturbances is one of the most cost-effective methods for preventing invasive weed growth and preserving the biodiversity of San Miguel County’s native vegetation. Land use activities

that limit the amount of ground disturbed at a given time, or that limit the amount of time ground remains disturbed without reestablishing a native vegetative cover, would result in fewer and less severe noxious weed infestations. It is the policy of San Miguel County to reestablish a stable community of native or other appropriate plants, primarily grasses, in all areas of the unincorporated County where County related or permitted projects disturb the ground. This will include all areas where efforts to control and manage noxious weeds have left barren ground. All disturbed areas shall be reseeded as soon as possible after the disturbance.

All permitted individuals and entities will also be held to reasonable re-vegetation standards whenever their activities disturb the ground. Incorporated municipalities and Federal land management agencies will be encouraged by the County to incorporate similar provisions into their noxious weed management plans.

The BOCC may require noxious weed control and revegetation bonds or other security from developers as well as weed management and revegetation plans for their projects.

The Weed Control Manager may advise the BOCC with guidelines on the appropriateness of seed mixtures proposed within the various ecological zones of the County. The Weed Control Manager will also inspect revegetation sites and determine the rates of success and make recommendations regarding bond release or forfeiture.

C. Herbicides

The careful and appropriate use of herbicides will continue to be a primary management option for the foreseeable future. In most large-scale infestations and for perennial species of noxious weeds, herbicides are the only effective option, due to extremely long root systems. Vegetation Management recognizes the concern over the use of herbicides, and will consistently use the most effective and least toxic herbicides available.

Vegetation Management will adhere strictly to all health, safety, and environmental instructions and precautions for all herbicides that may be used.

Guidelines for avoiding health and environmental risks are available from manufacturers and government agencies. All herbicides will be applied according to the manufacturer's label instructions and State law.

Infestations on the Colorado Department of Agriculture's List will be monitored on an annual basis. Weeds of lesser concern, including all C list species, will generally be noted as time and resources permit with citizen volunteers encouraged to participate.

D. Individual Management Plan and Enforcement

In an effort to support and accomplish goals of the San Miguel County Noxious Weed Management Plan, most specifically Goals 1 and 2, individuals may be required to comply with an Individual Noxious Weed Management Plan ("INWMP"). Those who may be required to comply with an Individual Management Plan are:

1. Properties infested with noxious weeds that threaten productive agriculture.

2. A complaint filed with the Weed Control Manager from an adjacent property owner that noxious weeds are infesting or have the potential to infest their non-agricultural property.
3. Infestations of State listed "A" species noxious weeds or noxious weeds declared as "priority" species by the County.
4. Infestations of any noxious weed encroaching on County roads rights-of-way.

After formal notification by the County that noxious weeds are present, with the State-required letter, the landowner of such property shall be deemed to be responsible for an INWMP. The primary component of this plan is to institute integrated management of the noxious weeds on the property such that the following two objectives are met annually:

1. The noxious weeds shall not be allowed to produce seed or develop other reproductive propagules, and
2. The population of weeds shall be diminished each year.

The cost of an Individual Noxious Weed Management Plan is a flat rate approved by the San Miguel County Board of County Commissioners. For current rates, please see the Vegetation Control & Management page on the County website.

In the event a landowner fails to proceed with an INWMP and/or fails to meet the two objectives, the County has and may exercise the authority to cause the objectives to be met and may assess the whole cost including up to 20% for inspections and other incidental costs to the landowner. C.R.S. §35-5.5-109(5)(a)(II).

The specific process to be followed by the County requiring an Individual Noxious Weed Management Plan, and the rights of appeal for the landowner are as outlined in C.R.S. §35-5.5-109, as may be amended from time to time.

Please contact Julie Kolb, San Miguel County Manager of Vegetation Control & Management, with any questions or concerns. She can be reached at 970-327-0399 or juliek@sanmiguelcountyco.gov.