



OREGON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For release: September 1, 2009

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PRESS RELEASE

TOXIC AFRICAN PLANT WANTS TO CALL EASTERN OREGON HOME

SALEM, Oregon—A county in the middle of Oregon hardly seems like the proper place for a plant native to the deserts of Africa and southern Asia to take up residence, but much to the dismay of residents in Harney County, African rue showed up and staked its claim in 2008. And because of its unruly characteristics, it is the Oregon Invasive Species Council September 2009 Invasive Species of the Month, featured online at www.oregon.gov/OISC, and is on Oregon's 100 Worst List of invasive species at http://www.oregon.gov/OISC/most_dangerous.shtml.

Why the concern about this plant? African rue is a bushy, multi-branched plant that has been reported to be toxic to domestic ruminants—cattle, goats, sheep, deer, and pronghorn, for example. The seeds and fruit of the plant are the most toxic part—it only takes ingesting 0.15 percent of an animal's body weight to be lethal.

It is very difficult and costly to control, and like all invaders, it outcompetes native vegetation by germinating earlier in the spring. If that news isn't bad enough, most parts of the plant contain chemicals that reduce the growth of other vegetation, including beneficial native plants, such as saltbush and grasses. African rue prefers disturbed environments such as roadsides, fields, and rangelands in desert and semi-desert areas, thus its affinity for desert-like places east of the Cascades. It is often found in soils with high salinity.

African rue is listed by the State of Oregon as a noxious weed, one that is injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or any public or private property. African rue is further distinguished as an "A" noxious weed—one that is of known economic importance that occurs in the state in small enough infestations to make eradication or containment possible. That is why early detection of "A" weeds is so important. If they can be found in small numbers, they can be quickly contained and eradicated. The Oregon Department of Agriculture features African rue and other "A" listed weed on their website at http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/profile_africanrue.shtml.

Dan Hilburn, Plant Division Administrator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, commented on the type of effort it's going to take to eradicate African rue. "The newly-discovered infestation in Harney County includes 2,700 acres and 19 landowners," said Hilburn. "It is going to take a full court press for several years to clean it up. If we're successful, it will be the largest ever weed eradication project in Oregon."

Jesse Barnes, Weed Control Coordinator for Harney County, said that everyone is working together to control and treat this high priority invader. "This new infestation shows just how important the control of invasive weeds is to landowners in Harney County," said Barnes. "The grant funds we received from the Oregon State Weed Board have allowed for a full inventory of the Harney Valley and treatment of about 175 acres with the average cost per acre to treat with herbicide at \$70.00."

How did African rue get into the United States, let alone Harney County, Oregon? It all started with someone who thought they had a good idea. In the Middle East, the native plant has been used for hundreds of years to make dye for Persian rugs. In 1928, a farmer brought the plant to New Mexico to do the same thing—only it naturalized and began invading native habitats in places throughout the southwestern United States. The plant was first reported in Oregon in Crook County in 1967.

The mission of the Oregon Invasive Species Council is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon.

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