Volunteer Talking Points

What is an Invasive Plant?

- **Non-Native Plant**
  - Any plant not known to historically occur in an area. Only a small percent of non-native plants are invasive.
- **Weed**
  - Any plant growing in an undesirable location.
- **Noxious Weed**
  - Weeds that have been legally designated as pests by a listing authority. A legal term.
- **Invasive Plant**
  - Non-native plants that exhibit aggressive growth that displaces other plants or animals.

What do Invasive Plants impact?

- **Plant communities**
  - Invasive species are from other countries or regions and have few or no natural predators in the areas they have been introduced to. This means that they can outcompete native plants and alter the plant community. A once diverse plant community can become a monoculture dominated by only a few invasive species. Some invasive species, such as knapweed, release phytotoxins which inhibit the growth of other plants.
- **Wildlife habitat**
  - Wildlife are often adapted to feeding or living on particular plant species. Invasive plants can reduce the diversity of species available, and the quality of the habitat. There are butterflies which lay their eggs only on certain species of plants. In addition, many invasive plants are successful because they are toxic to the native wildlife, or are inedible due to spines, hair and other protections on the plant itself.
- **Water resources**
  - Riparian habitats are extremely important, diverse areas. If an invasive plant dominates a riparian area, it destroys this habitat for numerous species. Japanese knotweed is the poster child of riparian habitat destruction.
- **Fisheries**

    - Waterways that are clogged with aquatic invasive species make fish passage difficult, and invasive plants dominating the banks will reduce the diversity of other animals, including insects which fish feed on.
- **Recreation**
    - A landscape dominated by weeds has less diversity and is therefore less enjoyable to recreate in than a natural setting with many species.
- **Natural processes**
    - When you consider all the examples above, it's easy to see how invasive species degrade ecosystems. They can affect the most basic processes such as nutrient cycling, and also disrupt the complex food webs which support the biota of a system.
- **Local and state economy**
    - For example, just 21 of the invasive weeds in Oregon are estimated to reduce the state's income by over $80 million a year, and it costs millions each year to remove these species.

Why is this important?

- *Invasive plants are the second greatest threat to biodiversity after habitat loss.*
- At home in your yard, you can pull a weed. But in natural areas with hundreds of thousands of acres, invasive plants may not be immediately discovered and pulled. This leaves our natural areas exposed to devastating degradation.
- Many invasive species cannot be controlled manually, and populations may explode if they are not controlled by some means.

Activities that spread weeds

- Motorized travel
    - Driving, boating, off-road vehicle use
- Recreation
    - Hiking, biking, fishing, horseback riding
- Disturbance
    - Construction, wildfire, natural events

What are our species of concern?

- Refer to the ***Worst Weeds of the Gorge*** booklet for a reference to the top invasive species of concern in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, as well as surrounding lands on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Mt. Hood National Forest.

What should you do? Take action!

- **Be Aware and Prepare**
    - Clean and check your clothing, footwear, packs, camping gear, ORVs, vehicles and trailers for weed seeds. Weed seeds are often small, and can be transported in the dirt caught in the tread of your shoes. Other seeds are sticky and cling to many surfaces.

    - Brush animals before and after backcountry trips to remove weed seeds.
    - On National Forest lands there is also a requirement to use *Weed-Free Feed* when recreating with horses or other pack animals. This requires that owners feed their stock animals certified weed-free feed several days before and during trips on forest lands.
    - Learn to identify invasive plants found in this area.
- As Trailhead Ambassadors, you will be perfectly placed to alert visitors to the importance of weed prevention. Taking simple steps to clean clothing, gear and animals will dramatically reduce the chance that a visitor will become a weed vector. Familiarizing yourself with the potential species in an area will allow you to warn people about the species to be aware of, and the risks associated with these invasive plants.
- **Report it!**
    - If you encounter invasive species, or hear reports of them from trail visitors, notify authorities, either through a reporting system like an invasives hotline, or by reporting to the land manager, county or Forest Service offices.
        - Oregon Invasives Hotline: https://OregonInvasivesHotline.org/
        - Washington Invasive Species Council: https://InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov/
        - EDD Maps West: https://www.EDDMaps.org/west/report/

Volunteer Considerations

- Bring water.
- Dress for the weather. Layers, rain gear, and boots are best.
- Review the talking points before your shift.
- Bring your tally sheet and a pen.
- Bring a Play, Clean, Go poster if you have one. Also bring tape to post the poster to your table, to a kiosk, or any available surface.
- Weed identification books are helpful for answering questions.
- Bring a chair, table, or other set-up as desired.
- Bring your 'Worst Weeds of the Gorge' booklets to hand out.
- Please take note of any repair that needs to be made to the boot brush. A photo would be appreciated.
- The CWMA has one banner, a canopy, and weed specimens. If you would like those for your booth, contact the coordinator (columbiagorgecwma@gmail.com).

FAQ's

Why do we need Boot Brushes?

- Cleaning boots reduces the spread of weeds from site to site
- It's important to use them both BEFORE and AFTER your hike

    - Before – prevent new infestations of weeds not already present
    - After – prevent new infestations at home or in other natural areas
- Weed seeds can be very small, so clean your boots even if you suspect they are clean
- Many major trailheads in gorge have boot brush stations
- Boot Brushes are simple and easy to use with a big impact

What happens to any seed that collects at the stations?

Trailheads are maintained regularly by the agency responsible for that land. Boot brushes are monitored several times a year and weeds are treated. This year we have a student that is planning to grow out the seed collected from boot brushes around the gorge. He will be able to tell us exactly what weed species the boot brushes are keeping out of our natural area.

What is the difference between noxious and invasive weeds?

An invasive weed is typically a non-native species that easily adapts to its surroundings. Because it did not originally adapt here, it has no natural predators (diseases, fungi, insects, etc) to keep it in check (like our native species do). Often, these species are also able to out-compete other plants by exuding a chemical in the soil that negatively influences growth or reproduction (allelopathic) or is simply able to out-compete for light, water, and resources. Because of these factors, invasive plants can quickly spread and become the dominant species. The term noxious weed is a regulatory term. In both Oregon and

Washington, the state adopts a list of noxious weeds, some of which may be required by law to be controlled or eradicated. All noxious weeds are non-native and are considered invasive.

Why should I brush my boots before AND after hiking?

Weeds spread easily through many vectors. Some weed seeds are often tiny and can lodge in muddy boots, tires, and tools. Other weed seeds are Velcro-like and attach themselves to clothes, shoe laces, and pets. Brush your boots before hiking to keep weed seeds from other areas out. Brush your boots after hiking to prevent infestation of other areas.

Why should people care about invasive weeds?

- Invasive plants outcompete native plants and wildflowers beneficial to local wildlife
- They can spread very quickly, creating a monoculture
    - They lower biodiversity by becoming the only plant at site – impacting needs of wildlife and disrupting ecology of habitat
- Weeds can increase wildfire susceptibility at a site

Columbia Gorge Boot Brush Sites