

Noxious Weeds in Kansas: Our threats and opportunities. An Open Dialogue and Information Exchange.

Hosted by the Kansas Department of Agriculture

October 19, 2017

Chad Bontrager, Agri Businesses Services Division Manager welcomed 64 guests to the 10:00 a.m. event.

Presentations were given by:

- Brian Obermeyer, The Nature Conservancy
- Stuart Schrag, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
- David Hoover, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District
- Jeff Vogel and Scott Marsh, Kansas Department of Agriculture

PowerPoint Presentations can be found at:

<http://agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/plant-protect-weed-control/noxious-weed-control-program>

After lunch Bontrager asked those in attendance for topics they wanted to cover during the afternoon open forum. Topics included:

- Review of controls of noxious weeds by the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA)
- Old World Bluestem strategy
- Sericea lespedeza resistance
- How to make noxious weed law better for county government
- Increase focus on invasive species that are not listed
- How will county government fund new actions being taken
- Collateral damage to non-target species and sites
- Does KDA have practices listed for other agencies
- Unmanned Aerial Systems (Drone) regulation and usage
- Cost share for non-listed species
- How the government helps farmers to address the noxious weed before they get too bad
- Usage of the Freeman system
- How will we educate the public about all the above.

Obermeyer, Schrag, Hoover, Vogel and Marsh served as panelists and contributed to the discussion.

Panelists stated control methods are in state regulation and KDA follows the well-defined process of developing and implementing regulations. This includes:

- Having discussions with stakeholders and experts, and
- The formal process may take up to six months to complete.

Discussion followed on control methods:

- Mowing is not an effective control method for perennials
- If counties believe control methods are not effective, they can modify
- KDA gives recommendations on methods, but nothing is required
- “Controlling” weeds means controlling their spread
- Law states eradication is the objective, yet is nearly impossible
- There are different methods of controlling each weed and various methods may be necessary.

To add a species of weed to the noxious weeds list, the KDA must go through legislation and debate the issue. The outcome may depend on public and constituent opinions and testimony. If the list was in regulations, KDA staff and an advisory committee would conduct risk assessments. From there, it would go to the Secretary of Agriculture and he/she could only approve the addition if the advisory committee approved. Checks and balances are contained within the advisory committee process.

The question was posed, does the process of going through the Secretary reduce the opportunity for public involvement? It was noted the advisory committee would be comprised of a variety of stakeholders. Attendees noted it is critical to have the correct makeup of the advisory committee. This would include: plant ecologists, along with weed specialists, and to have a focus on academic background and training diversity within the committee.

It was stated, the weed law was enacted in 1937. It was asked if noxious weeds will be a priority in the 2018 legislative session. Some participants noted they would like the advisory committee to involve the legislature more and the Secretary less. It was stated, many believe that noxious weeds are not a big concern to most people aside from the people in the agricultural community.

Those in attendance agreed on the concept of an Advisory Committee to be presented in the 2018 Session, except for the final portion on who can declare what noxious weed can be added to the list. Additional conversation continued and discussion will continue to find a suitable solution to meet everyone’s concerns.

It was mentioned discussion needs to take place to consider which noxious weeds should be taken off the list in order to save money. It was noted there needs to be a process to prioritize statewide focuses. Panelists stated they have developed risk assessments for some weeds to be utilized in this process.

Panelists stated Kansas State University graduate students are conducting numerous weed science based research projects. KDA is working with the students as they are unbiased on issues within their field of study.

An attendee noted there should be more research and tools provided on Old World Bluestem. This may include: how to possibly deal with it as an invasive plant (control or spot spray brochures), additional awareness as it is not only a Flint Hills issue but statewide and could easily become a problem such as Eastern Red Cedar. Eastern Red Cedar is a native plant relatively easy to control with fire and is not a problem because it got out of control. It was noted Old World Bluestem could become a larger problem than Sericea lespedeza. Numerous possible options for education and control were discussed. This included an opportunity to discuss with the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) on spraying ditches to potentially cut down the spread.

Schrag noted that Australians have the technology which can undermine collateral damage of weed control. A State UAV committee was formed in the last month in partnership with KDOT. It was noted, whatever technology may be adopted needs to be affordable.

An attendee inquired about the resistance to Sericea. Dr. KC Olson stated from his research, late summer burns are a lot safer and more effective than spring burns.

Marsh noted to those responsible for required KDA paperwork, they are trying to push back the date for submission of annual reports by a month.

A question was posed, how do county road and bridge departments communicate? It was noted many are housed in the same physical location as the weed departments. County representatives stated the units work together just fine on many issues.

An attendee asked if counties have the option to cost share on non-chemical controls. The response was that it depends on the mil levy budget for their county. If counties charge above 1.5 mills for noxious weed control, the county can charge between 75% and 100% of the cost of purchasing, storage and handling of the herbicide. Below 1.5 mills the cost range is between 50% and 75% of the cost. An idea was posed to cost share with non-chemical methods to help with prescribed burns, disc and biological controls. According to KDA representatives, Kansas law states cost share is only available for chemicals. It was noted that very few counties have the money to cost share man power. Attendees were also reminded that counties are liable for chemical trespass.

Another question from those in attendance was how does Kansas increase the focus of invasive species that are not noxious? The answer was to educate. There are times when there is currently proper treatment, yet it might be a future problem. Often times the people who listen to the education provided already know the answer and the education needs to reach the people who are not aware.

A follow up question was, how will we require education? Many groups will need to look at alternative methods of education. We are making progress through special interest groups and finding ways to get people excited about the topic.

In conclusion, all in attendance agreed there needs to be more communication, coordination and cooperation between state and federal agencies, local counties, state and county government and organizations and associations to work collaboratively on the issue of noxious weeds.

For additional comments please contact Jeff Vogel, Plant Protection and Weed Control Program Manager, Kansas Department of Agriculture. Jeff.Vogel@ks.gov.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.