

Developing and Implementing a Weed Management Area: The Plumas-Sierra Counties Experience

Suzanne Ebright

Plumas-Sierra Counties Department of Agriculture

The Plumas-Sierra Noxious WEEDS Management Group (P.S. WEEDS) is the second Weed Management Area (WMA) that I have worked on starting. The first, the Lassen County SWAT Team, had more humble beginnings mainly because we were unaware that we were starting a WMA, or at the time what a WMA was for that matter. We simply thought it would be a good idea if the county Ag Department's biologist, the U.C. Cooperative Extension's farm advisor, the botanist from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and a few others sat down and communicated and coordinated their noxious weed control activities. At that time, the focus was on yellow starthistle and developing some sort of inventory — we didn't think that we had very much yellow starthistle but that was because we had not completed an inventory yet — another lesson learned; and we also wanted to do some public education via the local newspaper. We weren't even looking for money back then mainly because we didn't know that there was any available for our purposes. It was a slow start, but the momentum and the group grew, we started applying for grants, and became very successful.

The P.S. WEEDS group had a more typical beginning of the WMAs that have formed since. We knew what we were doing now, or so we thought. I learned a lot from our first big meeting. The first thing that I learned was that the last thing anyone wants is another meeting to go to. Not much I could do to remedy that. Another thing that I learned was that this was a very diverse group of people, some with histories linked together, and that everyone didn't walk into that conference room that first day liking each other to start out. We had the County Agricultural Commissioner, the U.C.C.E. Farm Advisor, Caltrans, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), three of the four National Forests representatives, BLM, California Native Plant Society, private timber companies, county road departments, and others I'm sure I'm forgetting. There is a lot to be gained from diversity if you have a common working ground and I can think of none better than noxious weeds. We made noxious weeds our agenda, our only agenda, and have had only positive outcomes from our differing backgrounds ever since. I realize however, that people are more difficult to manage than weeds, which is why I stick with the weeds.

Have you ever realized that not everyone else in the world is as excited about killing weeds as you are? This is why we need public education on noxious weeds issues. Different pamphlets, brochures, and field identification guides have been published through WMAs in an attempt to get the word out about weeds. P.S. WEEDS has hosted a noxious weed tour through both our counties, formed a speakers bureau to address noxious weeds issues, held a two-day noxious weed seminar, gathered noxious weed reference materials which were donated to two libraries in our counties, put together a huge pavilion display on noxious weeds for our county fair, published "Control of Yellow Starthistle in Plumas and Sierra Counties" an informational brochure on identification and control, published "Learn To Recognize These Noxious Weeds" coloring book for children, had several newspaper articles printed, will be hosting a Land Management Field Day this June, and are presently working on a regional noxious weed

brochure with other northeastern California WMAs to be given to recreationists and tourists traveling through our area. We have accomplished a lot with each of our partners contributing just a little.

Once you have your group formed, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed, and some small projects under your belt, then the real networking and partnering begins. I think big but start small. A biology professor from our local community college called and was looking for some heavy mil plastic bags to be donated as he was having his students during lab pull yellow starthistle on campus. I started making the calls through our partners and in no time had a box of bags from the county road department. Our present weed control crew has its labor funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), spray equipment, supervision and training provided by the County Agricultural Commissioner, herbicides provided by all of the above plus local Resource Conservation Districts, and the pick-up truck and fuel is supplied by the Natural Resources Conservation District. We are presently working with the California Department of Fish and Game on a perennial pepperweed control project at their Hallelujah Junction Wildlife Area. The more projects we take on the more involved our many partners become and the outcome is more than any one partner could ever accomplish by themselves.

And then there's the money — the part you've been waiting to hear about. P.S. WEEDS put in one grant application last year with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and was funded to have a person this season map and inventory our noxious weeds sites using a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) unit. Since last year we have applied for NRCS grants, RCD grants, and five more NFWF grants. There is also project funding available through AB 1168 to be distributed by CDFA that we will be applying for. All of these monies mean more weed control work and public education for your area.

I believe that WMAs are a win-win situation for all of those involved. If you haven't already joined a local WMA I encourage you to do so. They can use your expertise and involvement. I have found them to be very action oriented groups and the most dynamic meetings I have ever attended. And you never know, your local WMA may be funding your next weed control or research project.