

Preventing the Entry and Spread of Noxious Weeds in California

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The California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Division of Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services is charged with the responsibility of preventing the entry and spread of noxious weeds in California. The primary enabling legislation is Section 401 to 405 of the California Food and Agriculture Code (FAC). FAC Section 403 states, "The department shall prevent the introduction and spread of ... noxious weeds." FAC Section 5004 defines a noxious weed as "any species of plant that is, or is liable to be, troublesome, aggressive, intrusive, detrimental, or destructive to agriculture, silviculture, or important native species, and difficult to control or eradicate." FAC Section 52256 defines noxious weed seed as "the seed or propagule of any species of noxious weed, as defined in Section 5004."

Noxious weed pests are harmful to agriculture and the environment in many ways, including: invading native plant habitats and outcompeting native plants for resources, becoming troublesome to ornamental plants in nursery settings, interfering with agricultural equipment, invading water transport systems (such as irrigation canals) and impeding the flow of water (this is especially detrimental to agriculture since much of the agricultural production in the state occurs in areas that are essentially deserts (Imperial Valley) and relies on the unimpeded flow of water).

California's noxious weeds are listed in Section 4005 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR). The noxious weed list includes such weeds as Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*). California also includes all the federal noxious weeds (Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 360) as state noxious weeds, by reference (FAC Section 6301 and CCR Section 3161). The federal list includes such weeds as red rice (*Oryza rufipogon*) and giant salvinia (*Salvinia molesta* complex).

The CDFA also classifies noxious weeds as to the extent of their distribution in the state, and to the possibility of successful eradication. A-rated noxious weeds are prohibited from entry into the state, sale within the state, and are subject to eradication. B-rated noxious weeds are prohibited from nurseries and sale by nurseries, and can be prohibited and eradicated at the county level at the discretion of the county Agricultural Commissioner. C-rated noxious weeds can also be prohibited from sale and eradicated at the discretion of the County Agricultural Commissioner. Q-rated noxious weeds are those weeds that are prohibited until more information as to their invasiveness can be determined (further information on CDFA's A, B, C, and Q-rated noxious weeds can be found in CDFA's Plant Quarantine Manual, on the internet at www.cdfa.ca.gov/pqm/manual, then follow the link "Go to *The CDFA Plant Quarantine Manual*," then "Special Handling" and then "Weed Policy").

Once a noxious weed pest becomes established in the environment, it can be difficult and costly to remove. The characteristics that make weeds "noxious" mean they tend to grow and reproduce rapidly, tolerate a wide variety of habitats and climates, and in some cases have the

ability to spread seeds or propagules via wind, water, or other uncontrollable means. Therefore, it is important to prevent the entry of noxious weeds into California in order to prevent the need for costly eradication efforts. Preventing the entry of weeds can be considered “the first line of defense” in the control of invasive weeds in California. It is the responsibility of the Division of Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services’ Pest Exclusion Branch to prevent pests from entering California through various pathways, such as through commerce and travel. For this purpose, agricultural inspection stations are maintained at entry points along California’s borders, and mail and common carrier distribution centers within the state (FAC Sections 6401 to 6403, 6441 to 6442, 5341 to 5350).

Quarantine efforts are equally as important as is preventing the entry of noxious weeds into California to prevent the further spread of infestations within the state. It is the responsibility of the Division of Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services’ Pest Exclusion Branch, with the help of the county agricultural commissioners, to inspect businesses within the state for infested commodities (FAC Section 408).

If a noxious weed enters the state and begins to establish itself, control and eradication efforts are necessary to eradicate the weed from the state, or to contain its spread, or to suppress its population. It is the responsibility of the Division of Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services’ Integrated Pest Control Branch to protect rangelands, crops, waterways, and urban areas from noxious weeds through various weed survey and detection, control and eradication (including biological control), and weed education programs (FAC Sections 403, 5321, 6048, 6049). The Integrated Pest Control Branch also supports the Weed Management Areas in their noxious weed control efforts (FAC Sections 7270 to 7274).