



# Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, January, 2001

## WEED WARS

It's the dead of winter and everyone is looking forward to next summer and planning their vacations. But at the Dishman Hills we are planning an attack on one of our most deadliest enemies, weeds. These noxious plants invade our gardens and lawns, and thrive without all the special attention received by the plants we favour. In a natural setting the delicate balance of a native ecology can be dramatically disrupted by this invasion. The native plant community which is the heart of the Dishman Hills ecology is under siege from an army of weeds, alien plants that have recently moved into the neighbourhood, and are very tough competitors. The battle plan is first reconnaissance, then developing strategies, then attack.

Last summer a weed mapping project was completed in the Dishman Hills as part of The Nature Conservancy's grant work in Washington State. A four person crew spent 150 hours weed mapping, first by following trails which are major vectors for weed dispersal, then by walking routes overland. The report from this reconnaissance outlines the type and density of weed populations, and estimates the time necessary to eradicate the problem.

To no ones surprise, some of the densest weed patches are the spotted knapweed infestations around Camp Caro on the north side of the Natural Area. One cluster of knapweed was estimated to contain over 10,000 individuals! A previously unknown weed, rush skeleton, was found scattered along ridge tops where there was poor soil development. Canada thistle was caught invading a burn site in small patches. Reed canary grass was growing on the edge of the East and West ponds. Dalmatian toadflax was everywhere throughout the Natural Area, but did not prefer full shade. This weed likes open areas such as burns and trails. Common St. John's wort is also widespread in areas that have been disturbed.

There are a number of strategies for the eradication of these weedy enemies. Our most effective weapon is the technically simple method called "hand pulling". For this we need lots of hands. In past years we have used battalions of prison labour from one of our local institutions. Pulling parties of helpful citizens also work. Another tool is herbicide, but chemical warfare in the Natural Area has a bad taste to it. Biological control agents are another possibility, such as using the *Chrysolina* beetle to control St. John's wart.

Whatever we do, battles can be won by applying the right tools to the right situations. But the war will go on and the weed assault on the native plant community will continue. In this case, victory over the weed invasion will be more like containment rather than total elimination. Can the natural ecosystem handle this problem or does this call for more and more human intervention? It is very important that any attack on weeds is timely and aggressive, solving little problems

## CHECK THIS OUT

For the second year, we're using the back of the January newsletter to get some business done. So, flip it over and take look. If there was a donation accounting list and a brief note of thanks you are amongst a group of supporters that are the real drivers of all that we have been able to accomplish. If there is a note referring to the lack of communication between you and us it means that we have not had dues or donations from you in the last four years, and we are not sure if you are even there or not. Look out, this could be your last newsletter. If there is nothing, don't panic, while you are not a donor, you are important to keep in contact with.

## ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We have a monthly meeting the third Tuesday of the month at Opportunity Elementary School, in the teacher's lounge, S. 1109 Wilbur, 7pm.

The following are our December donors that have consented to be listed: David Anderson, James Bertis, Robin Bishop, Eric Calkins, Virginia Danke, Carol Ellis, Bruce Falconer, Walter Fernau, Don Griffiths, Scott Grimmett, Bart Haggin, Michael Henneberry, Leroy Hook, Johnson-Fix Foundation, Karol Kaye, Glen Kivett, Rebecca Knapp, Camille Kovarik, William Kuhlman, Patrick Lettermaier, Helen Lininger, Hannah Lovik, Ian Napier, John O'Brien, Ellen Pickens, Jane Rogers, Trudy Rogers, Luella Rowberg, Iris Scheel, Spokane Area Retired Teachers, Ruth Stickney, Jan Strobeck, Patricia Sweeney, Beth Tietjen, James Troske, William Vogt, Mary Waters, Barney Wilson, Harold Wimpy, and Lawrence Wright. Thank you and many others for making a wonderful year for the Dishman Hills.

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