Cowlitz County Noxious Weed Control Board
207 Fourth Avenue North, Kelso, WA 98626
(360) 577-3117

Email: noxiousweeds@co.cowlitz.wa.us
Website: www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/noxiousweeds

Cirsium vulgare

WA – Class C Noxious Weed

OR – Class B Noxious Weed

Bull Thistle

Common Thistle, Spear Thistle

Family: Asteraceae

Origins: Native to Europe, Asia, and North Africa, Bull Thistle is thought to have been introduced to the United States in the late 1800s.

Range: Found throughout all 50 states and in Canada.

Habitat: Commonly found in disturbed areas, fields, pastures, meadows, roadsides, and railway embankments. Prefers pastures that have been improved by fertilizers, thriving in nitrogen-rich soils. Will not survive in cultivated fields.

(Rosette)

Impact: Bull Thistle can invade many habitats by forming dense thickets that outcompete native plants and discourage desirable wildlife.

Bull Thistle is a prolific seeder, producing, on average, 4,000 seeds per plant, which can remain viable in the soil for up to 3 years. A circle of plume-like white hairs, called pappus, tops each Bull Thistle seed, readily dispersing the seeds by wind over long distances.

Description: As a biennial plant, it typically grows as a rosette the first year and blooms during the summer of the second year, but may accomplish its life cycle in one year depending on the weather. Bull Thistle grows 2 to 7 feet tall, with greenish-brown spines and hairs on the branches. Leaves are dark green, pinnately lobed, hairy, prickly on the upper side, and cottony underneath. Flowers are dark purple, 1½ to 2 inches wide, clustered at the ends of branches. The flower head bases are bulbous and covered in spine-tipped bracts.

Common Look-Alikes: Canada Thistle, Milk Thistle, Scotch Thistle, Slenderflower Thistle.

**Not known to be toxic. Look-alike Milk Thistle is toxic to livestock.*

Integrated Pest Management - Control Methods

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines various methods such as mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical controls to manage pests. IPM offers the possibility of improving the efficiency of pest control while reducing its negative environmental impacts. For more information, see the Cowlitz County Noxious Weed's IPM Resources & Strategy Guide or contact your local Noxious Weed Control Board to develop a customized IPM plan.

Non-Herbicide Control

Mechanical (pulling, cutting, digging, etc.)	Digging or cutting plants to prevent flowering or seed spread can be effective. Rosette stage is the best time to control in this method. Mowing plants will control plant reproduction if done before plant bolts and flowers. Repeat mowing throughout the season is required to be effective.

Continued…

Cultural	Bull Thistle does not tolerate shade; planting tall grasses or other plants that shade out the seedlings may discourage Bull Thistle growth.
Biological	The Seedhead Gall Fly, *Urophors stylata*, native to Europe, can destroy 100% of each flower head attacked. The galls formed by the larvae divert the resources from the rest of the plant and reduce overall seed production. Grazing infested areas when stems are bolting may be beneficial; however, it should not occur once plants are seeding.

Herbicide Control: Foliar Broadcast Treatment

2,4-D (Many Trade Names)	**Timing:** Fall to control rosettes; spring before flower stalk elongates. **Remarks:** Annual treatments needed to control seedlings; pasture legumes may be injured at rates necessary for this herbicide; avoid drift to sensitive crops; do not apply near water.
Aminopyralid (Milestone)	**Timing:** Spring or early summer to rosettes or bolting plants; fall to seedlings and rosettes. **Remarks:** Many desirable plants can be seriously injured or killed; using a non-ionic surfactant will help enhance control under adverse conditions; do not apply near the root zone of desirable trees; do not compost plant material that has been sprayed by this product; do not use manure from fields that have been sprayed with this product; do not apply near water.
Triclopyr +2,4-D (Crossbow, Crossroad)	**Timing:** Fall to control rosettes; spring before flower stalk elongates. **Remarks:** Annual treatments needed to control seedlings; avoid drift to sensitive crops; do not apply near water.
Dicamba + 2,4-D (Weedmaster, Range Star)	**Timing:** Spring for seedling control; summer before flower stalk lengthens on established plants; fall to control rosettes. **Remarks:** Repeat applications for several years to control new seedlings; grass tolerates dicamba; do not apply near water.
Chlorsulfuron (Telar)	**Timing:** Apply to young, actively growing weeds. **Remarks:** Do not apply to the frozen ground; maintain constant agitation while mixing the product with water; avoid contact with sensitive crops; do not treat powdery, dry soils and light, sandy soils if rain is not likely after treatment; refer to the label for use in aquatic areas.
Clopyralid + 2,4-D amine (Curtail)	**Timing:** Apply to actively growing thistle after basal leaves emerge, but before bud stage. **Remarks:** For best results, wait at least 20 days after application before disturbing treated areas (cultivation, mowing, fertilization with shank-type applicators) to allow thorough translocation; may damage crops; do not apply near water.
Other listed Chemicals	aminocyclopyrachlor + chlorsulfuron, clopyralid, dicamba, diflufenzopyr + dicamba, glyphosate + 2,4-D, metsulfuron, picloram, triclopyr + clopyralid

* Cowlitz County Noxious Weed Control Board does not endorse any product or brand name. Brand names are listed as an example only. Other commercial products may contain the listed active chemical for herbicide control. Always read and follow the safety protocols and rate recommendations on the herbicide label. **The Label is The Law.**

This control sheet includes excerpts from the Written Findings of the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board (WSNWCB), nwcb.wa.gov. Herbicide information from the PNW Weed Management Handbook (ISBN 978-1-931979-22-1) and product labels.