

Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Impacts

THE THISTLES IN THIS PUBLICATION are exotic introduced plants that are encroaching on native plant communities. Anywhere you see thistle growing there are native plants that have been crowded out of their environment by the thistles. Space for native plants is limited since we can't create more land. Wildlife that are indigenous to our area have evolved over time on diets of native grasses and shrubs. Aggressive thistles are decreasing the natural food supply of bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer.

Recreation Impacts

SOME OF THE BEST TROUT STREAMS in Colorado are located in Northwest Colorado. Access to these fishing areas is being impacted by the spread of thistles along their stream banks. Scotch thistle is spreading along the Lower Roaring Fork River. The Upper Roaring Fork & Frying Pan Rivers are becoming infested with plumeless thistle. Many hiking trails to wilderness areas in the White River National Forest are becoming overrun with thistle which detracts from the back country experience.



*“Take care of the
land for it is not
given to you
by your parents,
but loaned to you
by your children”*

—OLD KENYAN PROVERB

Timing Is Everything

MUSK, PLUMELESS AND SCOTCH THISTLES are biennial plants meaning they have a two year life cycle. Biennial plants must be managed prior to the “flower” stage of growth. After the plants have flowered, control methods are ineffective. Canada thistle is a perennial plant and is much more difficult to control than the biennial thistles. Successful weed management depends on three simple concepts: early detection, followed by timely treatment, with a dose of persistence thrown in. Know what the plants look like in their early growth stages. Manage them at the proper time. Follow up your efforts every year.

Stop The Spread, You Can Help

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED IN PROTECTING our natural resources from the impacts of these alien noxious weeds.

1. Catch it Early - small populations of thistles can explode in just a few years. Controlling the plants earlier is much easier and less expensive.
2. Control the weeds on your own property. *Good neighbors control their weeds.* Call your local weed management professional to learn how.
3. Inform your local weed control officials of new sightings of these weeds.



This publication was produced by:

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- ◆ Colorado Weed Management Association
- ◆ Inside photos courtesy of Wyoming Weed & Pest Council

THISTLES: THE SILENT INVASION



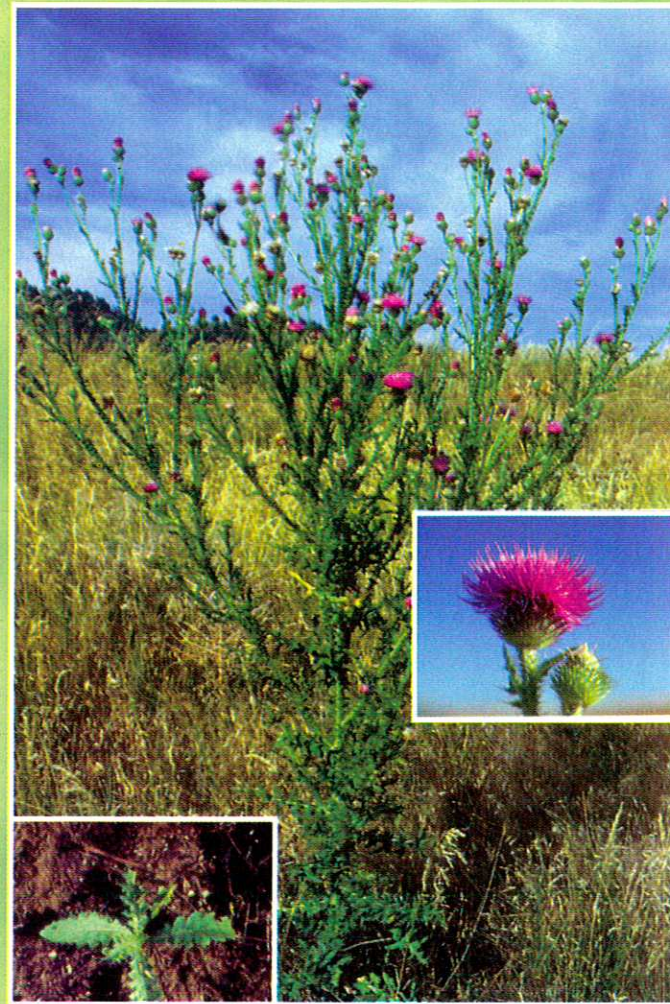


Musk Thistle

Carduus nutans



- ◆ Biennial plant, reproduces by seed only.
- ◆ Plants can reach heights of over 7 feet.
- ◆ Can produce up to 20,000 seeds per plant
- ◆ Flowers are large, 1½" to 3" in diameter and deep rose to purple in color.
- ◆ Stopping seed production should be the primary management goal.

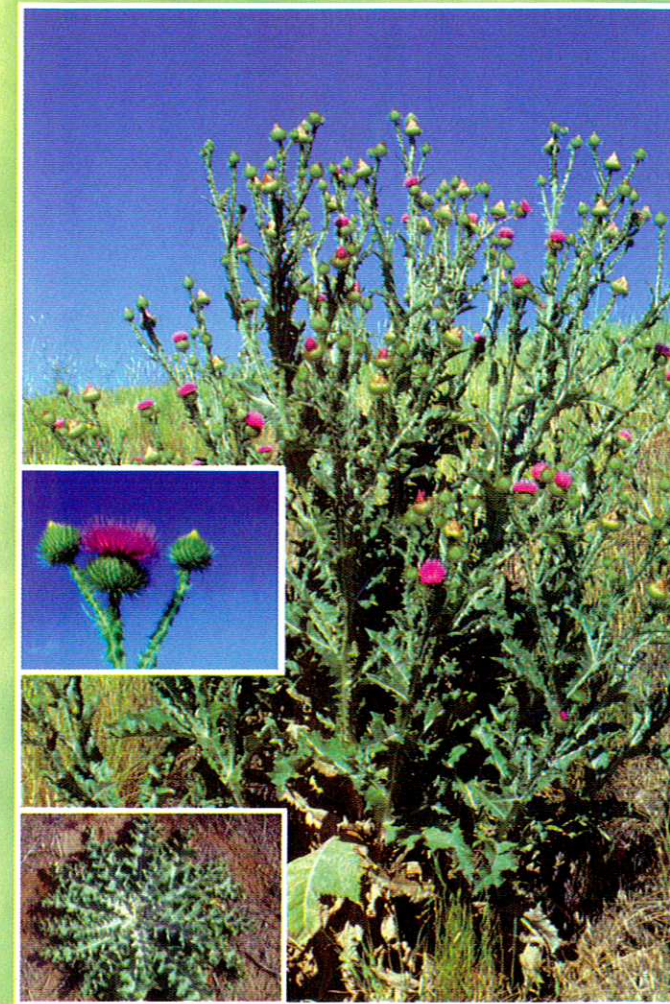


Plumeless Thistle

Carduus acanthoides



- ◆ Biennial plant, reproduces by seed only.
- ◆ Plants can reach heights of over 7 feet.
- ◆ Extremely prolific seed producer.
- ◆ Flowers are reddish purple, ½" to 1" in diameter. Musk thistle flowers are about three times the size of plumeless.
- ◆ This plant must be controlled before it flowers. Cutting it is generally not effective after it flowers because the plant will reflower at the point of the cut. Spraying is also not effective when the plant has flowered, it should be done prior to flowering.



Scotch Thistle

Onopordum acanthium



- ◆ Biennial plant, reproduces by seed only.
- ◆ Plants can reach heights of over 8 feet.
- ◆ Flowers are violet to reddish colored.
- ◆ This thistle has dense hairs and has more of a silver gray appearance than the other thistles.
- ◆ Mowing repeatedly and digging are effective. Spraying should be done in the plants early growth stages.



Canada Thistle

Cirsium arvense



- ◆ Perennial plant, reproduces both from seed and from creeping root stocks.
- ◆ Plants grow from 1 to 4 feet in height.
- ◆ Flowers are small ½" to ¾" in diameter and are lavender to purple in color.
- ◆ Very difficult to control due to extensive root system containing vast stored nutrients.
- ◆ Persistence in control efforts is imperative.