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**COMMUNITY**

## Weed whacker

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By Katherine Kerlin

Triplicate staff writer

Listening to Andrea Williams talk about invasive weeds is like listening to a doctor talking about a disease.

Williams, a biological science technician for Redwoods National and State Parks and a member of the California Native Plant Society, says prevention, early detection and rapid response are the most effective means to control the invidious, invasive intruders.

Non-native, noxious plants generally start like a cancer — small and inconspicuously. If pulled before allowed to run rampant, their ability to destroy habitat is minimized or removed.

If left to run their course, they duplicate, spreading their seeds to forests and rangelands on the heels of hikers, tires of cars, bellies of birds and animals or blown along roadways by the windy gusts of passing traffic.

Healthy lands become overrun with the unwelcome guests, weakening native plants, which are also necessary food sources for other native insects and animals.

According to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, noxious plants can transmit non-native diseases to native plants, which often have



**Andrea Williams, a biological science technician with the Redwood National and State Parks, pulls tansy ragwort at Hiouchi Flats on Tuesday.**  
The Daily Triplicate/Alyssa Wolfe



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low resistance to them.

Invasive plants also dramatically alter fire, water and nutrient cycles.

But Williams says by selectively picking weeding battles, land managers, farmers and home gardeners can significantly stifle the voracious appetites of non-native weeds and keep natural ecosystems and those who depend on them healthy.

"It's not a lost cause," said Williams. "This is not an insurmountable problem."

But it is a problem organizers of Invasive Weed Awareness Week, which runs through Sunday, hope to highlight through education and volunteer opportunities.

Once you know what invasive weeds look like, their ubiquitousness is overwhelming.

Golden stars of tansy ragwort currently peek out along Smith River and Hiouchi roadsides. This weed can cause liver damage to most livestock, especially cattle, and farmers do well to remove it.

Dairy farmer John Westbrook said he does not have many problems with weeds because he keeps his fields plowed and well maintained. But he said whole hillsides were turning yellow from tansy ragwort 40 years ago.

"Left unchecked, garsh, we would just have a real problem," he said.

Thickets of Himalayan blackberries, though tasty in the late summer and fall, are all over Del Norte County.

Groves of Scotch broom explode each spring in sunny areas of forested and grassy areas throughout the area.

English ivy winds itself along national forestlands and Redwood National and State Parks, slowly killing redwoods, spruce trees and other native plants in its path.

Deceivingly pleasant purple bottle-brush flowers of the butterfly bush dot roadsides and invade coastal forests.

European beach grass interferes with views of the ocean at Tolowa Dunes State Park. It cuts off sand flow, starving native dune plants that need moving sand to survive.

Some people purposely plant invasive weeds in their garden, either unaware they are invasive or mistakenly thinking they can contain the plant within their property. However, birds, animals and wind can scatter the seeds and berries of ornamentals like the red-berried cotoneaster shrub, English ivy, periwinkle and pampas grass.

Don't expect nurseries to tell you a plant is invasive, but be cautious when hearing phrases such as "aggressive" or "thick ground cover," said Williams.

For a consultation about how to "go native" in your garden, contact the California Native Plant Society at <http://northcoastcnps.org>.

They may advise you, for instance, to plant bush monkey flower rather than Scotch broom or wild ginger and native violets in place of periwinkle and English ivy.

To take part in community-wide combat against these pests, the North Coast F.O.R.E.S.T. Association hosts Scotch broom pulling parties throughout the year in the Smith River National Recreation Area.

"The message is just to get started working on it," said Phil Bono, recreation technician with the Smith River NRA. "Before too long, you can put a dent in it."

You can also join an Adopt-a-Forest program to care for an area within the Smith River NRA for invasive weed removal, native plant restoration and other projects.

Redwood National and State Parks also hosts invasive weed identification and pulling walks throughout the year.

Or reach in with your own educated, gloved hands and pull. Then go back and pull again.

"The alternative to not doing anything, to throwing up your hands and saying it's pointless, is not a good answer to the problem," said Williams.

She advises those who see a strange plant to find out what it is. "It might be the next huge weed."



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