

Getting a Weed Biocontrol Project Started: Some Successful Grassroot Efforts

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Most of our worst weeds are exotics that were introduced into the United States without the natural enemies that kept them under control in their native lands. Classical biological control is a field of science which reunites a target weed with carefully selected natural enemies from its native range. This research is usually carried out by USDA scientists at overseas laboratories and specialized quarantine facilities in the United States. Classical biological control has repeatedly proven to be an effective and environmentally responsible approach for controlling exotic pest plants, and the demand for new weed biocontrol agents is increasing. Unfortunately, developing these safe agents is a lengthy and costly process, and with the downturn in federal spending, few new weeds are being targeted by USDA for classical biological control research. I discuss how biological control research can be initiated and funded, and provide several first-hand examples of USDA projects which resulted from effective grass-root campaigns by user groups.